

Belize's Story—A post-ICPD Report
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Belize, a 9,000 sq. mile expanse, is strategically located in the circum-Caribbean/Central American area, with proximity to the United States. It is the only English speaking country in Central America. Belize's population of 225,000 is multi-ethnic and forms a clear geographic map by ethnicity resembling a checkered regionalism. The population is a relatively young with 64% under 25 years, including 44% who are less than 15 years. Some 16.1% consist of three indigenous groups.

Belize is a country of migrants, whose demographic alteration is primarily a consequence of migration-movements into and out of the country. The 1960's saw the migration of approximately 60,000 skilled African Belizeans to North America; 1980- 1990 during the period of unrest in our neighbouring Central American countries, some 40,000 displaced persons settled in rural Belize, increasing the number of foreign born to 25%. The trend now extends to internal migration of Belizeans. They vacate their rural communities for the larger urban centers, in search of wage labour; hence leaving behind a subsistence food producing economy and embracing a marginal capitalism.

The above picture, Mr. President, paints part of the environment that influence population development projections in Belize. It demonstrates the privileges in terms of small size and population density, but also the challenges and constraints that impinge on population development. The devastating social, cultural and economic effects of migration are just now emerging. It is evident in the decline in literacy and numeracy; the overwhelming demand for housing from the *noveau* poor, following the rural to urban movement; the brain drain and leaderlessness in the sending communities; the *ethnicising* of poverty partly resulting from the regional outlook of past economic development efforts in agriculture.

Our demographic indicators such as, crude birth and fertility rates, as well as mortality and morbidity rates illustrate a steady decline. However, Belize stands out as having the highest demographic and mortality rates among countries of the English speaking, Latin American, and the Latin Caribbean subregion.

AIDS, first detected in 1986, now stands at 255 cases, HIV at 680 cases, and 235 deaths. This is attributed to the sexual behaviour of heterosexuals (75%), age ranging 18 – 45. In terms of percentage of cases, Belize ranks first in Latin America, and eleventh in the Caribbean. AIDS in Belize is characteristic of migration, as most of the cases reported, have their origins from one of the sending countries in Central America.

Mr. President, my presence here is testimony to my government's commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action. The party manifesto for this government highlighted the combating of poverty, people's participation, and the

inclusion of women in decision making through a Woman's Agenda. In regards to the latter, women are being placed in strategic positions-as Speaker of the House of Assembly, President to the Senate, and as Chairs of and Executive Officers to Statutory Boards. With regards to the former, the government has secured funding for 10,000 low income, good quality homes; and recently instituted a Small-Persons bank, which supports the development of micro enterprise.

Mr. President, I will now highlight four areas of post-ICPD Cairo activities that Belize has undertaken:

1. The Administrative Process for Population and Development:

- a) The establishment of Population and Social Indicators Units within the Ministry of Women and Human Development
- b) The establishment of a National Human Development Advisory Commission, Domestic Violence Task Force.
Membership is multi-sectoral, including partnerships with NGOs

2. Research Studies Undertaken Include

- a) Social Indicators Report, 1998
- b) National Human Development Report, 1997
- c) National Poverty Assessment, 1996
- d) Population projections to 20 15
- e) Situational Analysis of Children in Belize, 1996
- f) The Prevalence of Domestic Violence, 1999
- g) National Food and Nutrition Diagnosis, 1998
- h) School Health and Family Life Education Needs Assessment Survey, 1997
- i) International Migration, 1998

3. Gender Equality and Empowerment of women

3.1 Legislative Framework

- a) Minimum Wage Act
- b) Sexual Harrassment Act 1996
- c) Domestic Violence Act, 1992 (presently a plan for a Domestic Violence Unit within the Police Department)
- d) Families and Children Act, 1998—deals with maintenance, abuse, adoption, legitimacy, etc.
- e) Juvenile Offenders Act-authorizes the relevant minister at any time to remove a child “at risk” from-the care of any person or institution

3.2 Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health Care, etc.

The Belize Family Life Association along with Government is the primary provider of Family Education and direct service delivery to women and young persons. The Ministry of Health (MOH) implemented programmes in addition to the traditional Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programmes. Among these are:

- a) The Women Health Development (WHD) project which has a medical Health person as its Focal Point and sits in the Government's Planning Unit. She is also responsible for collaborating with women and health NGO's countrywide.
- b) A Health Tri-national Agreement with Guatemala and Mexico and coordinated by Belize has reproductive health as one of its components.
- c) Improvements to the traditional Maternal and Child Health Programme

include the use of partogram to 'detect dangers in prolonged labour as one method of improving intra natal screening; and post-par-tum cervical cancer screening, among others.

d) Domestic Violence Project launched yesterday February 10, in Belize City

4. Integration of population matters in the development process

a) A National Population Policy has been developed and is presently under review by relevant bodies

b) A national Plan of Action is being implemented

c) Sustainable Development Projects with population concerns such as:

---Social Investment Fund (SIF)-for poverty alleviation with a community development component

---ESTAP-process of empowerment of indigenous groups in the Southern region of the country with emphasis on community participation and the renewed recognition of culture as a tool for development

---The School Health Education Project was launched on February 5

Mr. President, there are constraints and challenges ahead, but it is evident that Belize has certainly forged ahead in its commitment to the Program of Action called for at ICPD 1994. Belize would like to recognize the assistance of our international donor partners, particularly UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO/PAHO in this undertaking.

THANK YOU