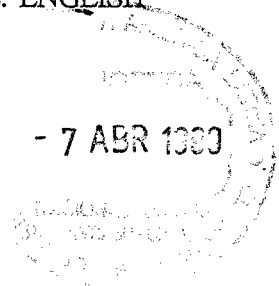


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- Antigua and Barbuda
- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Br. Virgin Islands
- Cuba
- Dominica
- Dominican Republic
- Grenada
- Guyana
- Haiti
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- Montserrat
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- Puerto Rico
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- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
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- Trinidad and Tobago
- U.S. Virgin Islands



GENERAL
 LC/CAR/G.555
 21 December 1998
 ORIGINAL: ENGLISH



**REPORT ON THE
 MEETING OF DECISION MAKERS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
 PLAN OF ACTION TOWARDS ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN BELIZE
 San Ignacio, Belize, 21-22 October 1998**



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
 Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean
CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION COMMITTEE



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Opening ceremony

The meeting was officially opened by Ms. Nancy Namis, Senior Planner, Ministry of Economic Development, who welcomed all present.

Attendance¹

Participants consisted of top technical officers such as Heads of Ministries and Departments, Permanent Secretaries and other government sectoral experts.

The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), sponsor of the event and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (ECLAC/CDCC), facilitator, were represented at the meeting.

Proceedings

Welcome address by Mrs. Yvonne Hyde, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development

Mrs. Hyde welcomed the gathering and stressed the importance of a framework for interaction among stakeholders in order to address more adequately the eradication of poverty through ongoing programmes. She mentioned that the United Kingdom had endorsed the Poverty Assessment undertaken in Belize. This approval, she said, opened the way for assistance to develop projects concerning poverty within the framework of debt forgiveness. In principle, the Poverty Assessment will now take place every two years. The next assessment is scheduled for 1999.

In her welcome address Mrs. Hyde expressed her appreciation of the work done by the CDB and UN-ECLAC to facilitate the exercises on poverty and stressed that this two-day meeting was important to further the objective of eradication.

The CDB on poverty reduction

Mr. McDonald Thomas, a CDB representative, expressed the pleasure of his organization to be associated with this activity, following the Poverty Assessment which started in 1994/1995. Mr. Thomas reported that since then, continuing identification of poverty reduction areas, especially in the context of social development, had taken place.

¹See Annex II

He furthermore informed the meeting that funds had been allocated by the Bank for environmental and institutional strengthening to individual countries and for the Caribbean subregion as a whole.

The CDB hoped that the meeting would make recommendations and suggest priority actions that could guide the development and implementation of an overall strategy. It was also expected that opportunities for financing would be identified and that every investment project would indeed address poverty. At the same time the CDB endeavored to improve on its partner role concerning the eradication of poverty and policy-making.

The National Human Development Advisory Committee (NHDAC) on the Belize process

Mr. Evan Dakers, Social Planner, Ministry of Human Resources, listed the mandate and the specific tasks of the Committee and the agencies present at the meeting.

Mr. Dakers informed the meeting that the process had started with assistance from the Department for International Development (DFID) (formerly ODA) of the United Kingdom towards putting together a Plan of Action which would have its origins in the ECLAC Directional Plan of Action for Poverty Eradication in the Caribbean. It was within that context that the DFID, in consultation with the CDB, started district consultations and had sectoral studies prepared by consultants on the issues of health, education, environment, natural resources, agriculture and poverty programmes.

As regards district level consultations, Mr. Dakers regretted that no special consultation was conducted for Belize City, since Belize City had been subsumed into the National Consultation.

UN-ECLAC on highlights of issues and recommended action proposed at the National Consultation on the Eradication of Poverty in Belize

Mrs. Sonia Cuales, representing the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, welcomed the participants and conveyed the greetings of the Director of ECLAC. She congratulated Belizeans for their dedication and persistence in the process of bringing the Plan of Action to fruition. She noted that the time had come for decision makers to produce a tight strategy Plan, complete with programmes, time-frames for implementation, costing, identification of those responsible and of relevant sources of funding. She presented an overview of issues and related actions as proposed in the Draft Plan of Action for the Eradication of Poverty in Belize on 3 July 1998.

The ECLAC presentation stimulated discussion on the matters of reliability, validity and availability of statistics. A case in point was made on school drop-outs, an issue under investigation by Mr. Sylvan Roberts, Chief Statistician, and Mrs. Barbara Elrington, Deputy Education Officer. They concluded from their investigations that the definition of drop-outs had to be refined in terms of completion and repetition. According to Mr. Roberts, reliable statistics were important in order

to decide on targeted programmes to eradicate poverty, especially for education, which he considered to be the key to poverty reduction.

With regard to health statistics, Mr. Roberts noted with concern that there was a dearth of reliable health statistics in Belize. Other discussants voiced similar preoccupation. Mr. John Harrison of the CDB, illustrated validity problems of health statistics concerning HIV/AIDS with an example of the Regional Aids Committee, which had even questioned the validity of the AIDS tests. Mrs. Valerie Jenkins referred to the quality and quantity of statistical measurements, especially when it came to proper use of codes. She voiced her concern about the doubling of AIDS cases, when in fact, the possibility existed that the same person might have undergone more than one test, while all were counted as separate tests.

With regard to curriculum, the meeting was of the opinion that it was necessary to first chart a plan for national development in order to be able to address issues like curriculum reform.

Since the distinguished members of the Working Groups were inclined to change and replace statements in the Draft Plan of Action, Mrs. Cuales reminded them that the issues and actions in the Plan of Action had been included by Belizeans who had participated in the participatory process to identify issues and propose actions. Although these persons were not necessarily "experts", their voices were heard and their perceptions of the reality in the Belizean society found a place in the Plan. Furthermore, the sectoral studies and macroeconomic overview of the country were intended to facilitate decision makers in their appreciation of the Plan of Action and to set priority actions. Mrs. Namis added that the district consultations allowed for input from people at the local level as to what they felt impacted on poverty in their lives, thus including more district-specific issues and actions in the Plan.

The meeting considered it important to encourage interministerial, interdepartmental and inter-agency cooperation concerning the improvement of the collection of statistics and access to data. At the same time, it was suggested that agencies should be made more aware of the importance of social indicators and statistical data in order to improve cooperation. Statistics had to be more standardized in their design, definition and collection in order to improve comparison, for example, statistics on various districts and of other countries.

Priority setting and time-frame planning to address issues and relevant action

In the context of this item, six working groups were formed, as follows:

Group 1	Social integration, employment, sustainable livelihoods
Group 2	Health
Group 3	Education
Group 4	Environment
Group 5	Management and resources for social development programmes, institutional mechanisms, governance

Group 6 Measurement and monitoring instruments and mechanisms for effective poverty eradication

The Working Groups worked steadily on the preparation of a strategy. To such end the groups discussed issues, priority action, time-frame, cost, source and responsibility. (See Plan for the Implementation Strategy for Poverty Eradication in Belize).

The second day of the meeting started with a Plenary Session, despite constraints posed by a blackout, at which problems encountered in the Assessment were discussed. All groups agreed on the needs for cross-sectoral cooperation.

Group 1 observed that they had to spend a great deal of time identifying the real issues since not only were many issues listed but some of them were not directly related to the subject. The task facing this Group was heavy, however, issues and actions were discussed and priorities for action defined. The Group indicated that there was scope for additional work on needs refinement. Cross-sections with education were identified and in this context, the question of a reasonable cross-section of people was considered. Mrs. Namis stated that efforts had been made to include government agencies, NGOs, private sector representation and district/local level response through consultations.

Group 2 observed a similar disparity between the perceptions of the "people", on the one hand, and the "technocrats" on the other hand. This Group also felt the need to reformulate priority issues and subsequent actions. Cross-sectoral linkages were identified, for example, with education and agriculture. More specifically it was felt that a Standing Committee of stakeholders should facilitate a health-related action plan towards poverty eradication.

Group 3 proposed that adequately delineated issues and actions for poverty eradication would benefit the process of implementation and should fit within a National Plan for Development.

Group 4 faced the fact that no environment experts had attended the meeting.

Group 5 reported on the difficulties with limitations in terms of costing actions and prioritizing issues which they felt were placed at the same rank in the Draft Plan of Action for the Eradication of Poverty in Belize.

Group 6. While this group was competent to deal with their part, it was felt that they should refer the "mechanism" part of their assignment to the findings of Group 5.

At the conclusion of the Working Group reports, the plenary session continued with the guidance of ECLAC and the CDB. With regard to training programmes proposed, the officials were reminded of the importance of precise goals, time-schedules and targeting. The question of whether such training programmes would have an impact on poverty eradication or reduction should be kept in mind.

Closing

Due to problems as a result of electricity blackouts it was not possible to make a draft document available to participants for ease of reference and final review at the Plenary. It was agreed that draft reports of the various subject working groups would be forwarded to ECLAC, Port-of-Spain for final revision, editing and incorporation into a Draft Strategy Plan for submission to the Government of Belize.

The ECLAC Officer commended participants for their good work in completing the assignment. The Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Hyde, thanked all the government officials who attended the meeting and the CDB and ECLAC for facilitating the process towards poverty eradication in Belize.

Annex I**GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

- Group 1:** Social Integration
Employment
Sustainable Livelihoods
- Group 2:** Health
- Group 3:** Education
- Group 4:** Environment
- Group 5:** Management and resources for social development programmes
Institutional Mechanisms
Governance
- Group 6:** Measurement and monitoring instruments and mechanisms for effective poverty eradication
- Group 7:** Overall development issues as seen through the experience of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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