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**ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITIES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF LATIN AMERICA AND  
THE CARIBBEAN**

**Response of the Government of Belize**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. GENERAL ASPECTS .....	1
II. SECTORAL GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS .....	2
III. FINANCING .....	5
IV. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	6
V. PARTICIPATION .....	7

## I. GENERAL ASPECTS

Before attempting to describe the conditions of the poor in Belize and the anti-poverty programmes and policies, it is necessary to identify who the "poor" are and the general living conditions associated with poverty. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of Belize, persons with wage levels lower than BZ \$8,640 per annum are considered to be poor. In 1991, over 50% of the working population earned under BZ \$8,640 p.a. 1/ Although there is no integrated quantitative and qualitative criteria of who qualifies as poor, there are very general guidelines for identifying poor people. The general living conditions of the poor include substandard housing arrangements, poor diets, lack of proper water and sanitation systems, job insecurity and limited access to education and basic health services. Groups most often associated with poverty are the elderly, urban youths, and rural women.

The Government of Belize (GOB) assigns high priority to assisting those it considers to be needy. As stated in the National Development Plan for 1990-1994, the GOB's overriding goal for its citizens is to improve the standard of living of all Belizeans; this goal can also be translated to mean the reduction of poverty. 2/ Within this context, the major objectives to improve the quality of Belizean life include human resources development; balanced rural-urban employment creation and the reduction of underemployment; and a broader base of participation in the development process. To finance such efforts, the GOB is shifting to allocation of resources to the social sector, through increased local capital expenditures and renewed emphasis of public sector investment programmes.

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1/ 1991 Population Census, Major Findings.

2/ Government of Belize 1990-1994 Development Plan, Making Belizeans First.

## II. SECTORAL GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### 1.0 Health

- 1.1 With respect to child nutrition, the goals the GOB has set to date include breastfeeding promotion (in collaboration with CHW and NGO); the establishment of a Nutrition Unit with trained personnel by the end of 1994 and a National Nutrition Plan, based on the results of a national malnutrition survey; and the establishment of a food and nutrition surveillance system in health clinics. Preliminary surveys conducted from January to March 1992 indicate that 59.2% of Belizean children under five were normal while only 1.3% were severely malnourished. Also, 14.4% of the children were at some risk of obesity and 1.0 were obese.
- 1.2 The GOB plans to reduce the infant mortality rate through increased immunization rates in children under five years and the reduction of anaemia in pregnant women. Existing studies of the infant mortality rate for years previous to the 1990 - 1992 period show that the infant mortality rate has declined from 63 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the late 1970's to 43 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the late 1980's. <sup>3/</sup> During both periods, under five infant mortality rate decreased from 86 deaths per 1,000 live births to 53 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively. In 1990, the infant mortality rate was 22.5 per 1,000 live births.
- 1.3 The goal the GOB has set to combat neonatal tetanus is to increase tetanus coverage for all female of childbearing ages, 15 years and up. In 1991, 83.8% of the women had been vaccinated against tetanus. For 1991, only one case of neonatal tetanus was recorded by the Medical Department of Belize. <sup>4/</sup>
- 1.4 National child immunization coverage programmes consists of providing vaccinations against tuberculosis (BCG), poliomyelitis, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DPT) and measles to all children under five. In 1991, the percentage of children vaccinated against tuberculosis was 89.9%, against Polio 82.1%, against DPT 81.4%, and Measles 82.0%.
- 1.5 The primary objective of the GOB for the Health Sector is to provide Primary Health Care Services to the entire population. Priority in the provision of services will be given to high risk groups such as mothers and children, low income groups, the elderly, and those living in less serviced areas. To achieve this objective, the GOB plans to put the necessary infrastructure in place, including work with District Health Teams, District Coordinators, Village Health Committees, and Community Health Workers (CHW), NGOs, PVOs and

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<sup>3/</sup> 1991 Belize Family Health Survey, Final Report, May 1992.

<sup>4/</sup> Information received from the Belize Medical Statistics Department.

church groups. The GOB has been successful in providing primary health care services to the rural areas.

The GOB also expects to construct a modern Belize City Hospital. Construction of this new hospital is expected to commence shortly.

## 2.0 Education

- 2.1 The GOB's strategy for increasing the adult literacy is to develop literacy programmes using the mass media as effective tools for reaching a wider audience. Adult education and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are carried out in Belize. The literacy rate for 1991 was in the upper 70% to the lower 80 percent. This figure is actually lower. First, surveys do not account for the constant influx of economic migrants from neighbouring Central American countries. A problem of greater dimension is the method used in calculating the literacy rate. Literacy is determined according to United Nations standard; anyone who has attended the Fifth standard in primary school is considered literate. A Literacy Survey will be carried out to determine a more realistic literacy rate, using a more sophisticated criteria.
- 2.2 The goals of the GOB with respect to primary education programmes are to construct and equip new schools and to upgrade existing schools; to increase local textbook production; to increase the number and competence of teachers; to reform the Belize National Selection Examination and to develop a more vocation-oriented curriculum. These objectives are embodied in the new Primary Education Development (PED) Project funded by the World Bank. The PED project has only recently gotten on-stream. Tenders for the construction of and renovation of several schools buildings in Belize City and in the districts have been received and construction will commence by the end of October.
- 2.3 For preschool education, the objectives of the COB are to increase the number of government and community pre-schools, especially in the rural areas, and to increase teacher training programmes. Good progress has been made in trying to achieve these objectives. In 1989/90, Belize had 73 preschools for children ages three to five years. In 1991/92, this number increased to 81 preschools. Enrollment for 1991/92 was 2,700 or 23% of school children of preschool age. <sup>5/</sup> For 1992/93, the number of preschools is expected to increase by four. Furthermore, the Pre-School Unit (PSU) of the Ministry of Education provides informal training programmes, including bi-annual workshops, in-service training, and pre-service training (for those interested in opening preschool centers). The PSU will expand its training programmes by conducting workshops on a monthly basis and by increasing the number of in-service training.

## 3.0 Employment: Popular Economics

- 3.1 The GOB is committed to boost employment by promoting small farm production units. It intends to promote the development of and to strengthen small-scale enterprises in the agriculture sector through public sector investment programmes. These programmes are designed to improve the physical infrastructure - to build and improve main and feeder roads

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<sup>5/</sup> Information received from the Planning Unit of the Ministry of Education.

and to upgrade telecommunications; to provide low interest credit facilities to small farmers; and, through the Ministry of Agriculture (MAF)'s Research and Extension Department, to transfer adapted technologies, both in the forms of equipment and technical training, to small farm production Units.

The MAF participates in several regional technical cooperation networks for the exchange of experiences and technology. Public sector projects include the assessment of the feasibility of both the domestic and foreign market in satisfying local production of basic crops and foodstuffs; the revitalization of lending institutions for small farmers and business, such as the Development Finance Corporation; the creation of a new Small Farmers and Business Bank; and the ongoing construction of feeder roads and the upgrading of main roads.

#### 4.0 Housing and Community Amenities

- 4.1 The major objective of the GOB is to provide low cost housing to lower income groups. Low-cost housing is provided in collaboration with local and international funding agencies. The GOB has entered agreements with Taiwan and Venezuela in the provision of low cost housing. For 1992/93, 500 single units are being constructed under the Venezuelan Housing Project; under the Taiwan Housing Project, 15 single units are being constructed; with funding from the Social Security Board, 160 single units are under construction countrywide.

Also, the GOB, under its Housing Development scheme, is providing 58 single units countrywide. For the period March 1990 to March 1992 the GOB has constructed 164 single units countrywide and fifty apartment buildings in Belize City. During the same period, under the Taiwan Housing Project a total of 195 single units have been constructed. With respect to the GOB's repairs and maintenance programme, in 1992 assistance has been given to lower income persons for the repair and maintenance of fifteen houses.

In addition to providing low-cost housing, the GOB is undertaking a 6-year programme to provide telephones to all the villages in the districts. The GOB is also investing in the provision of proper water and sanitation systems countrywide for the period 1992-97. In 1991, almost 40% of the rural areas had electricity and 27.2% of households had telephones.

### III. FINANCING

With respect to financing, the Government pattern of spending is a steady increase in the social sector. From 1990-1992, annual central government spending for Education has increased from BZD 5,835 (BZD thousands) to 12,173; for Health, the increase has been from BZD 3,075 to 16,210; for Housing and Community Amenities, including water supply, this figure has increased from BZD 15,898 to 18,264.

The participation of external financing in the social sector has also increased for the period 1990-1992. Annual overseas financing in health projects rose steadily from a figure of BZD 667,7 (BZD thousands) in 1990 to BZD 11,955.4 in 1992. For education projects, this increase has been from BZD 775 to 1,958.3. In 1990, the social sector absorbed 12.29% of total public sector investment. In 1992, this figure was 23.2 percent.

#### IV. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The GOB's approach to poverty reduction is primarily from the social/community development standpoint. The Ministry responsible for anti-poverty programmes and policies is the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). The Ministries of Health, Education, and Housing and Cooperatives also assist in preparing sectoral programmes to alleviate the living conditions of the poor. These sectoral programmes, however, are not integrated into overall anti-poverty programmes.

The MSD's anti-poverty programmes, for the most part, are short-term relief measures. The MSD provides limited material assistance to satisfy the basic needs of the poor. Such assistance comes primarily from the Official Charities Fund. <sup>6/</sup> Except for the Social Assistance component, monies from the OCF is not given out in any systematic way. In addition to the OCF, the MSD gives subventions to selected NGOs engaged in poverty relief. In order to be more effective in this approach to reducing poverty, the MSD, with assistance from the Caribbean Development Bank, has planned an assessment of poverty in Belize. The MSD plans to upgrade its institutional capacity by incorporating a planning unit within the Ministry. The functions of the new unit will be to evaluate the MSD's social policies and programmes and to formulate new social policies and programmes, including long-term anti-poverty programmes.

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<sup>6/</sup> Monies from the Official Charities Fund are also administered by the Ministries of Health, Education, and Housing and Cooperatives.



## V. PARTICIPATION

For the most part, the NGOs are independently active in poverty alleviation, through economic, financial and technical assistance for enterprise development and self-employment. NGO activities do not complement the Government's activities in addressing poverty but rather supplement those activities. Currently, there is no effective mechanism to coordinate the activities in poverty reduction of the Government and NGOs.

The GOB intends to implement such a mechanism. The problems encountered in this effort are the persistent need for institutional strengthening and capacity building at the national level and the inability to minimize political interference. So far there is no concrete proposal for effectively increasing public participation in formulating and implementing anti-poverty policies and programmes.