COUNTRY STUDY 2014

A review of gender related challenges affecting Local Government and MSMES in BELIZE
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Executive Summary

“There is a need to look at the special needs of women and youth in developing responses to unemployment (Castillo 2006)”

Belize has the second highest per capita income in Central America; the average income masks a huge income disparity between rich and poor. A key government objective is the reduction of poverty and inequality. However, even as Belize strives to achieve economic growth, it is faced with the challenge of high-income inequality, low labour productivity and poor infrastructure. The National Gender Policy (NGP) speaks of a society in which men, women, boys and girls coexist, fully participating in development and afforded all rights as citizens. A key priority area for direct policy intervention is wealth and employment creation.

This report is an exploration of the role gender inequities and inequalities have played on local economic development in Belize. Stakeholders at all levels of local economic development were selected from the two regions within the Caribbean Local Economic Development (CARILED) project area – the Belize District and the Cayo District. A gender analysis of the interventions supported by the CARILED indicate how key stakeholders interact, experience development and participate in either strengthening or hindering the process of micro, small and medium sized business development. An analysis of what is really happening and what changes need to be effected is challenging due to the lack of gendered information.

The desk research, focus group sessions and interviews stressed some common challenges to local economic development (LED) that are particularly exacerbated by the gender disparities entrenched within the system. The stumbling blocks include systemic inequality perpetuated by a lack of disaggregated information, inequalities in the labour market and low levels of political will both on the part of elected officials and the citizenry.

Although LED is encouraged as a means of enabling women and the rural poor to participate in socio-economic development, the inaccessibility of financial and technical services are deterrents to meaningful involvement in the sector. The conditions that must exist to make possible local economic development from a gendered perspective require a blend of technical, political, economic and social aspects of development. To determine the status of LED and the influence of gender, the experiences of women, men, male and female youth who are stakeholders in MSME development were gathered. The study revealed very little gender consideration in the design and implementation of MSME projects, credit and financial services or business training. When asked about gender issues or the challenges males and females encounter because of their gender, most interviewees who offer business services or financing simply said “we don’t discriminate against
women” or “women are the most of our clients”; some claimed to be gender-neutral. These responses speak to a need for gender sensitization training on all levels – government, financial agencies, business owners, and business services.

Areas that needed special attention so as to create a successful and equitable local economic environment include a strengthening of the non-traditional sector offering credit and financial services. Improving women’s access to credit would involve lowering or restructuring the criteria for collateral. Local government officials could improve gender equity by ensuring laws were implemented and social safety nets were fully functioning; hence, allowing for equitable labour force participation and employment. However, local government does not have fair representation of elected women. As of 2012, one woman (of ten) sat on the Belize City Council and in the Belmopan City Council there were two women (of seven) elected.

Non-governmental organizations and community based organizations could be utilised to provide alternative skills training programs that were affordable and accessible. The process of identifying and analyzing how men and women involved in MSMEs experience gender is made so as to ascertain specific, enforceable activities that will decrease the lived experiences of gender imbalances within local economic development.
1.0 Purpose of Study and Research Methodology

CARILED recognizes the importance of gender sensitive programming as integral to the success of its activities in the seven participating Caribbean countries. Consequently CARILED has taken measures to improve its ability to serve its stakeholders by analysing the effects of gender on local economic development. The focus of this report is to identify the gender issues that impede an enabling environment for MSME development.

The development of this Gender Assessment Report adopted an integrated approach using a mix of methods that included discussions with key persons, focus group meetings with MSME stakeholders, and relevant literature review. The research was conducted over a three-month process.

Several relevant documents were reviewed to develop an economic, social and demographic profile of MSMEs within the target areas. Legal and policy documents that have a direct bearing on the project and the aims of the assessment were also reviewed.

The participants of the interviews and focus groups were:
- MSMEs within the CARILED project
- MSMEs outside the project
- Credit and financial agencies that offer services to MSMEs
- Local government/authorities
- Business development community & organizations

2.0 Gender in Context

The Situation Analysis of Gender in Belize suggests that although the percentage levels of male-headed households in poverty are higher than female-headed households (25.5 percent to 21.8 percent); the figures are not an accurate indication since women experience poverty differently than men do. The impact of poverty with its multidimensional issues disproportionately affects women’s social, economic, spiritual and psychological lives. The psychological aspects include low self-esteem, depression, hopelessness, cynicism and dependency. While the social aspects are linked to issues of crime and violence, absentee fathers, lack of education, lack of good governance, teenage pregnancy and increased discrimination against vulnerable populations.

The 2013 Report on Belize’s MDG progress highlights achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and empowering women. The Working Group found that “The achievement of women in the educational sphere has not translated to

Diverse educational options such as careers in arts, sports and vocations that can be “stimulating and relevant to economic need” (Lewis, p.138) are limited. Educators note that young men prefer shorter term courses that provide them with skills they can use to generate income immediately. In the Situation Analysis of Gender and Politics in Belize the idea of “male marginalization” is introduced where the theory suggests a displacement of values of the traditional patriarchal society. Debra Lewis (2012) explains “recognizing that men and boys experience particular problems does not mean that the system of gender inequality has suddenly been turned on its head and that men are no longer dominant in that system. In fact, gender analysis reveals that many of the problems experienced by men and boys result from a gender identity based on relations of dominance and how that translates into expectations about what it means to ‘be a man.’” Consequently, male identity is challenged by expectations evident in the education system.

Dr. Gayle found that 86 percent of youth (participating in his research) were exposed to gang violence. Southside Belize City (92 percent) showed the highest numbers followed by Cayo (90 percent). The youth deemed it safer to join the gangs than to face violence on their own. The females participating in the study shared that women and girls suffer when they lose their men and boys to violence. Other studies have also shared that females who live in high gang activity areas are forced to participate in gang life where they are raped and sexually exploited. The majority (73 percent) of Dr. Gayle’s research participants also admitted to having experienced domestic violence. Domestic violence and gang violence inhibit an individual’s ability to successfully participate in the labour market.

2.1 Geography and demographic features

Belize is an independent county located on the Caribbean coast of northern Central America. The country spans approximately 8,867 square miles, bordered on the east by the Caribbean Sea, on the north and north-west by Mexico, and on the west and south by Guatemala. The official language of the country is English and the two main ethnic groups are the Mestizo (52.9 percent) and the Creole (26 percent). Although English is the official language of the country, Spanish is widely spoken, as is English Creole. It’s geography and historical background defines it as both a Central American and Caribbean country.

The 2010 population census lists the population at 356,944 (161,226 Females). The 2013 Human Development Report reveals Belize’s Human Development Index
(HDI) value at 0.702 placing it in the medium human development category with a ranking of 96 out of 187 countries. The HDI values reflect life expectancy at 73.7 percent; the literacy rate at 79.7 percent. The Gender Inequality Index is 0.435 with a ranking of 79 out of 148 countries. In Belize 13.3 percent of women hold parliamentary seats, 35.2 percent of adult women have achieved secondary (or higher) education compared to 32.8 percent of males. The 2013 Labour Force Survey shows the female participation in the labour market is 39.5 percent compared to 64.6 percent for males.

The Multidimensional poverty index is estimated at 0.024, the breakdown shows: 5.6 percent in multidimensional poverty, 7.6 percent vulnerable to multiple deprivations and the intensity of deprivation experienced by those living in multidimensional poverty is 42.6 percent. The GDP growth rate is estimated at -0.4 percent. The per capita income is listed at $5,812 (Statistical Institute of Belize 2014). At the national level, the country’s health profile is a reflection of the trends seen in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. It is undergoing the transition from communicable diseases (CD) to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) as the main causes of death and illness. In general, health indicators show improved life expectancy and survival, but improvements in quality of life decreases with deaths and illnesses occurring mainly from preventable causes which remain major health challenges. Meanwhile, HIV and AIDS continue to pose major challenges to Belize. Belize has the highest sero-prevalence in Central America and the third highest in the Caribbean. From 1986 – 2009, there were 5,045 reported cases of HIV and 963 deaths.

2.2 Macroeconomic Context

At the national level, Belize’s GDP per capita, which is low relative to peers in the region, grew at about 1 percent in real terms on average yearly since 2008. This along with increasing poverty is reflected in high unemployment, widening income disparity, lagging educational attainment and rising crime. The national unemployment rate was at 16% in September 2012, affecting the youth (30%) and women (22.4%) more severely. The tertiary sector provides almost two-thirds of jobs in Belize and the retail sector alone provides one-fifth of all jobs. For women, the tertiary jobs make up almost 80% of all female employment (23% of women’s employment is in retail and 15% in tourism). The primary construction sectors are a much more important source of jobs for men than for women: 26% of working men work in the agricultural sector and another 12% work in construction. Tzannatos stresses that by redressing inequalities in the labour market; women’s wages would rise by 50 percent and national output by 5 percent.
The Country Poverty Assessment (CPA) 2010 shows that 43% of the national population falls below the official poverty line, of which 16% are considered indigent. Agricultural workers and people with unskilled jobs are more likely to be poor or indigent. Overall, the agricultural sector has not changed since 2002 and continues to have higher poverty rates than any other sector.

A UNDP review categorized Belize as small, private enterprise economy based on agriculture, agro-based industry and merchandising with tourism and construction recently assuming greater importance. In 2006, the exploitation of a newly discovered crude oil field near the town of Spanish Lookout, has presented new prospects and problems for this developing nation. Sugar, the chief crop, accounts for nearly half of exports, while the banana industry is the country's largest employer.

Tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner followed by marine, citrus, cane sugar, bananas and garment exports. Growth slipped to 0 percent in 2009, resulting from the global economic slowdown, natural disasters and a temporary drop in oil prices. In 2013, growth increased to 2.5 percent and government announced it had a deal with its creditors to restructure its $544 million commercial external debt which represents half of the country’s public debt.

2.3 **Local Government**

Belize has two levels of government: a state government and a single-tier local government. Over the last five years, local councils have been formally established and the trend has been towards greater decentralization and autonomy. The six (6) administrative districts are: Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo. There are four (4) forms of local government: city councils, town boards, village councils, and the alcalde system. The alcalde system is only operational in the Stann Creek and Toledo districts, and hence is not applicable to this series of local economic profiles.

Belmopan and Belize City are the only two (2) cities in Belize and both have City Council status. Prior to 1999, the Reconstruction and Development Corporation administered the Capital, but in 1999, the Belmopan City Council Act was approved, establishing the Belmopan City Council with effect from March 2000. City councillors are elected every three (3) years and similar to town councils, six (6) councillors and a mayor are elected to serve, and each councillor represents Belmopan City as a whole. The regulations that govern Town Councils and City Councils, including Belmopan allow for the direct election of Mayors and elections are held in March of the third year. The Minister of Local Government is responsible for local government legislation and regulations on all matters with
respect to local government, including the administration of the Acts relating to city and town councils.

Councils have a statutory duty to provide ‘rules and good governance’ for their municipality and to provide certain basic services. Village councils encourage and assist cooperation on economic and social development and general welfare. Although policies, laws and acts define the duties of members including responsibilities for economic development; implementation is hindered by a lack of political will and limited resources. The village councils find that the practical application of their duties is curtailed because of the difficulty of navigating the space between local and central government. For instance, economic development is dependent on land use rights, which are to be jointly decided on by the village council and the Ministry of Natural Resources. However there is often confusion on what constitutes consultation leaving the councils believing that they are not well positioned to stimulate local economic development.

Nationally 21.7 percent of town board candidates have been women and 18.4 percent of elected representatives were women. Although mandated to promote local economic development, local government itself is far from gender-balanced. If the GOB has not put measures in place to facilitate fair and equal representation, how then can these councils and town boards properly address gender issues? The Belize City Council has a councilor whose role is to lead the discussion on economic development and tourism at the policy level. There is also a valuations manager who evaluates taxation on business and property tax to ensure taxes are being fairly and practically levied. The City’s participation in CARILED has been the “parket project” the physical reconstruction of a local park with the inclusion of food and craft vendors as an avenue to promote business tourism. The infrastructural project itself involved the hiring of small contractors to stimulate growth in the building sector. The City’s policies to enable business include the provision of business training, best practices and services.

The City Council promotes business by softening trade-licensing fees (flat rates for trade licenses), advocating for the revision of legislation and taxation policies that are not equitable. Existing taxes discourage vendors from starting up and ensure the failure of some who do attempt to become involved. The City’s infrastructural project included the hiring of small contractors as a way to stimulate growth in the building sector. The project implemented in partnership with CARILED involved the redesigning of a park as a hub for business tourism by offering micro business owners the opportunity to manage stalls that offer food, crafts and services. In partnership with business development services, the City offered participants training in best practices, standards and services and bookkeeping. The Council reported that the infrastructural development venture was a success. Vendors were reportedly satisfied with their business space, the training opportunities and the
sales they were making were sufficient. They were encouraged to organize
themselves into an association and walked through the process.

A focus group discussion with vendors participating in the “parket” project revealed
that while they were grateful for the opportunity, the parcelling out of the kiosks
had not happened in full accordance with the stated guidelines. The vendors were
informed the park zone was a non-alcoholic zone and denied liquor licenses,
however a city councilor was given the largest, most prominent kiosk, which was
then opened as a bar. Furthermore family members of other councilors had also
received kiosks. The vendors were also not satisfied with the size of their kiosks,
they were unaware of avenues to access credit and financial services and they were
unsatisfied with the level of sales. While the majority of the vendors granted kiosks
were women, they spoke of safety and security issues, health concerns and the
stress of navigating their triple roles. The safety issues included insufficient
security patrolling the area at night, late work nights with unreliable
transportation system and expensive taxi fares. The health concerns were voiced
because bathrooms were locked at 9 p.m., however to make money they needed to
remain until at least 2:00 a.m. Zero access to bathroom facilities meant customers
made use of dark corners alongside the kiosks and for the female vendors the
increased risk of urinary tract infections. Some also spoke of needing to support
their children, but not having access to childcare facilities so they could attend
training opportunities or work in their kiosks. Vendors also reported the City
Council was not receptive to developing solutions to their concerns, and had
threatened to terminate their leases if they complained further.

The City Council defines itself as gender-neutral equal opportunity employer. Most
of the leadership positions are held by women – City Administrator, Human
Resources, Finance Manager, Court Director, Internal Auditor, City Planner,
general supervisors. Although women are a significant number in the leadership
positions; as actual decision makers they number one of ten on the Council itself.

There seems to be a disconnect between local government, service providers and
potential (and existing) entrepreneurs. Local government representatives were
often seen as either corrupt or unproductive; hence, many of their attempts at
promoting economic development were not as effective. Women, especially rural
women, did not trust officials or that the system would work in their favour.
Additionally women felt they bore a high economic and social start-up cost because
they were forced to navigate their child-care responsibilities, resistance from male
partners alongside inefficient public offices, corrupt public officers and inaccessible
locations. Local government representatives stated they were “pro-women and
gender neutral”, further showcasing their ignorance of the entrenched gender
inequities within their operations.
2.4 Gender and the Legal Framework for LEDs

The main challenge facing Belize, over the medium to long term, is to accelerate economic growth and improve income distribution to significantly reduce poverty and improve social conditions. The NGP calls for the mainstreaming of gender into the planning, implementation and monitoring of all policies that impact poverty, economic development and natural disasters. Belize joined the International Labour Organization and is state party to international and regional treaties and conventions central to achieving gender equity.

The national commitments addressing wealth and employment generation include:

- The National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan (2009-2013), Strategic Thrust 1, 4 and 5
- Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act 1996
- The National Medium Term Macroeconomic Strategy (2010-2013)
- The National Poverty Elimination Strategies and Action Plan
- The National Social Security Strategy
- The National Export Strategy
- The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents: Investing in our Children 2004-2015 (Family Chapter)
- The National Occupation Health and Safety (OSH) Act
- Imagine the Possibilities: Social Sector Investment and Good Governance, Law and Order (2008-2013)
- The National Disaster Preparedness Response Plan
- The Belize Decent Work Country Programme
- Horizon 2030
- Belize Medium Term Development Strategy
- The Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Policy and Strategy

3.0 Findings

The 2007 CEDAW concluding remarks expresses the Committee’s concerns over women’s participation in the productive sector. Women bear the brunt of poverty in Belize, they are subject to increasing rates of gender-based violence, and often unable to participate in development because existing polices, laws and programmes do not adequately address the institutionalized and cultural gender inequities. As a gendered response to poverty, unlike large corporations that often perpetuate gender inequities and inequalities, MSMEs are a key source of employment for women, youth and the poor.
Regionally MSMEs:

1. Account for nearly 50% of all jobs created.
2. Account, in agriculture, for over 70% of main export crops and an even higher proportion of domestic food crops.
3. Play a leading role in the production and marketing of agricultural produce.
4. Provide transportation and other tour guide services for tourists.
5. Lead in some manufacturing sub-sectors such as wood products, garments and sewn goods and handicraft items.
6. Play a lead role in construction, equipment repairs and maintenance, technical services, food and in the retail trade.

3.1 The Environment for MSMEs: Programs, Services and Practices

Based on the submissions at the MSME consultations, existing definitional frameworks in Belize, regional and international benchmarks and a study of the existing literature, the adoption of the basic formula of the CARICOM harmonised standard entitled “Good Management Practices for MSMEs” (CRS 14 2010) is recommended.

MSMEs are defined as (in Belize Dollars):

1. Micro-sized enterprise owner managed with fewer than 5 full-time employees or less than $50,000 investment in equipment; and less than $100,000 in annual sales.

2. Small-sized enterprise owner managed with fewer than 20 full-time employees or less than 371.612 m2 (4004 sq ft) of manufacturing area; and less than $150,000 investment in equipment or less than $500,000 in annual sales.

3. Medium-sized enterprise owner managed with 20 to 50 full-time employees or 371.612 m2 to 557.418 m2 (5995 sq ft) of manufacturing area; and $150,000 to $500,000 investment in equipment or $500,000 to $1.5 million in annual sales.

It is further recommended as follows:

1. For farming, the following parameters for acreage is used to replace manufacturing area:
   a) Grazing animals: small: 6–30 acres; medium: 31—60 acres.
   b) Poultry: small: 0.5 acres; medium: 1 acre.
   c) Vegetables: small: 2 acres; medium: 3 acres.
The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Gender-Based Rural Sustainable Livelihoods Project seeks to expand economic opportunities through entrepreneurship and marketing development, to reduce poverty by improving the way of life for marginalized rural women and young people, so they become more productive, earn more income and create employment by developing their own enterprises. The YWCA’s day care centre and preschool offers affordable care for children ages 3 months to 6 years. The Centre opens early and closes late to cater to parents with extended work hours.

The Youth Apprenticeship Program located within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports focuses on ages 16 – 29 who have dropped out of school and/or single mothers, have had contact with the law (crime and violence) or about to become involved in crime and violence, are not employed, or are trying to leave their gangs. Currently the apprenticeship programme is being revamped (a paper will be submitted to Cabinet) to assist their graduates to start a small business at the end of their apprenticeship period since not all of the participants are employed at the end of their apprenticeship period. They will be provided with business mentors.

A challenge has been childcare – hence the programme will also train participants to be caretakers. One of the challenges young black males face is the high prevalence of gangs, guns and violence in the City. They are often unable to access training or job opportunities because they cannot leave their communities since it would mean having to travel through rival gang neighbourhoods. The Coordinator of the program meets with gang leaders, identifies the young men who have enrolled in the program and requests that the gangs release them (and that rival gangs leave them alone). Gang leaders often respect her request and allow the young men to participate in the program, in turn she reminds the young men not to abandon their neighbourhoods but to show the young one that there are options to the gang life. Since its inception in 2010 there has been 1 gang related murder.

The 274 youth involved in Dr. Gayle’s study on male social participation and violence expressed that they had been abandoned by the system which allowed a space for the gangs to step in. They “express how much the social structures have failed them; left unsupervised, unplanned for and without a sense of direction.” Men face challenges linked to their ethnicity and geographical location. The increase of gang violence has led to a popular belief among this group that they will not live beyond age 25.

The Belize Youth Business Trust (BYBT), which offered business mentoring, access to financing and business training services for women and youth closed in 2014 because of funding issues. Many MSMEs were failing and unable to repay their small loans; hence, the BYBT was unable to extend loans to other MSMEs or to attract funding to continue its services.
3.1.1 Gender and Knowledge of Programmes and Services

Some female business owners believe that any discrimination they face is because they have to work harder, not complain about their conditions and not ask for special benefits. They thought that with a positive attitude and prayer they would be able to overcome any obstacles. Almost all, however, spoke of not being respected by male employees or male counterparts in business meetings. Obstacles to participating in MSME projects included lack of access to credit, inability to access business training services either because of street/gang violence or gender based violence, lack of daycare facilities for children and or elderly whose primary caregivers are women.

Several mentioned corruption in the government as an obstacle because they were unable to access information, credit or services unless they knew someone in a political position. Belize’s profile has seen drastic changes both since its independence in 1981 it has become increasingly urbanized; increases in the informal economy, high levels of immigration and emigration, the consequences of privatization, accusations of corruption and bad governance. These issues and others have all helped to create pockets of social unrest and a general lack of confidence in the ability of the GOB to serve the best interests of all Belizeans. There has been much rhetoric on poverty alleviation, pro-poor policies, sustainable development and gender mainstreaming.

Most of the MSME owners were unaware of the existence of any programmes or services to support them. Those who had some idea were participants in the CARILED project and through their training had learned of some of the services. However even they were not fully aware of how to access credit and finances, of the full services offered by the SBDC or of the Belize Rural Development Project (BRDP).

The BRDP is part of civil society’s move to enable women’s access to credit and financial services. They have disbursed more micro-credit grants to women than men. (Government of Belize n.d.) (UNDP 2012) The Belize Enterprise for Sustainable Technology (BEST) has provided 31% and 35% of the value of total loans to women. Similarly, women constituted 38% of all borrowers in 2008 and 45% of all borrowers from January to September, 2009. Based on an analysis of borrowing trends within BEST, women tend to access credit for household items and small business development while men access credit to buy equipment and transportation. BEST also reports that men tend to be in a much better position to offer land as collateral compared to women. However, women still have a higher loan repayment rate than men. (Catzim-Sanchez 2010)

Furthermore women’s child rearing role, absentee fathers, and lack of effective enforcement of child maintenance legislation places single mothers at economic
disadvantage. The labour department reported an increase in employment discrimination for pregnant women as employers either fired them or refused to pay the businesses maternity leave difference provided by the Social Security Board.

The UNDP Belize promotes supporting the development of businesses outside of the agricultural sector but beyond those that are service-oriented or focused on production. It calls for an enabling environment for MSMEs by providing to women access to startup financing including fiscal incentives to meet challenges at this stage (ABEN, 2011). Existing support mechanisms should be strengthened and mentorship programs are needed (Peebles, 2012). The study also found that women-run businesses need support in business enhancement, market access and product development.

### 3.2 Financing for MSMEs

Women who tried to access credit found they were unable to do so because of lack of collateral coupled with practices by the financial institutions, which made it difficult for women to access credit with male partners. Additionally private sector and quasi-government lending institutions had not established any special measures for targeting an increase in loan disbursement to women borrowers.

The Inter-American Development Bank’s Multilateral Investment Fund (IADB MIF) focuses on poor and low-income populations: their businesses, farms and households. The IADB has in-house gender specialists who ensure all approved projects are gender sensitive from design to implementation.

In 2005 the Women’s Issues Network of Belize (WIN-Belize) conducted a study examining budget decisions and their effect on women. Their findings were used to promote a gender budget process. The gender budget process has yet to be implemented; however, many of the issues and recommendations remain relevant to women’s lived experience. One issue was that the indicators used to calculate GDP, unemployment and inflation should be reassessed to accurately reflect the real situation. There is a lack of adequate data collection and of sex-disaggregated information to inform policy development.

Another issue was Belize’s endorsement of the MDGs could not be met with actual financial investments because the high cost of the debt servicing left few resources available. Women generally find it difficult to access credit and financial services because they do not have collateral; the demands of their triple roles (reproductive, productive, community) combined with a lack of support services decrease the likelihood of their small business flourishing.
The Belize Rural Finance Programme (BRFP) provides access to financial services (such as credit, savings, insurance, funds transfer) for the productive poor (including small farmers, crafts men and women, artisans, and entrepreneurs in other industries) and poor sectors of the rural population, including women and youth. The BRFP has a gender specialist whose role is to provide gender sensitivity training to the Belize Credit Union League and participating Credit Unions, as well as develop a gender manual to guide their service provision to their members.

The Development Finance Corporation (DFC) of Belize is a statutory body with a governing board. It is mandated by the GOB to provide development financing and related services that will promote sustained economic growth. Their micro and small enterprise program offer loans directly to entrepreneurs to start up or expand their business; and to organizations (credit unions, cooperatives) involved in small and micro-enterprise development for on-lending. Their purpose is to offer financial services especially for those who would be unable to assess finance and credit from other sources. Although oral reports document the majority of turnout for marketing programs and to access services are women; there, has been no gender analysis of DFC’s program development or implementation. Furthermore there is not arrangement to include sex disaggregated data and the staff are not trained in gender analysis.

3.3 Business Development Programs and Services

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is a unit of the Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE), which provides customized needs-based services to MSMEs with the aim of facilitating their competitiveness and export readiness. They do not have any internal gender policies, nor gender sensitization training for staff. However, they have observed that women’s reproductive role prevents them from attending trainings; hence, the plan is to have a child care room for the children of participants in their training workshops.

The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) was founded in 1920, the organization has been consistently championing the causes of its private sector constituency and considers among its primary objectives the social and economic development of Belize through the development of all sectors of industry and commerce. They currently have 300 members: about 90 percent Medium, 10 percent small, 5 percent a mix of micro and large businesses. They do not have any internal gender policies or gender sensitization training for staff; neither do they recognize the need or importance for gender sensitivity training.
3.4 Family and Community Dimensions of MSMEs

The Caribbean Development Bank’s Gender Analysis for Belize, 2012 points out that sociocultural perceptions limiting women’s engagement in business in the non-agricultural sector stem from widely accepted traditional gender roles. Firstly, women are expected to perform unpaid domestic work and to undertake childrearing responsibilities alone. Even working women often find themselves doing household chores as a ‘double-shift’ after returning home from their daytime income earning job. In both the informal and formal economic institutions, women are expected to participate as employees but not expected in the roles of managers or employers. Women work harder to obtain upward mobility, prove their competence, overcome gender discrimination, and establish credibility among their peers, especially in non-traditional jobs (Peebles, 2012).

WIN-Belize’s gender budget process highlighted how the corruption within the government had crossed over to NGOs and community-based organizations. The “culture of corruption” inhibited these groups from adequately advocating for change in government and society. Worldwide, bribery costs $400 billion each year. The decline of strong women’s groups like BOWAND and the Belize Rural Women’s Association has left a gap in those advocating for women’s rights.

4.0 Conclusion

The World Bank states that the over 40 nations that comprise the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region have faced many challenges to their economic development; yet they remain mostly resilient as they struggle to adapt to the changing economic environment. States of the LAC region differ in regards to the types of resources available in the country, their economic growth based on the various policies governments have adopted, and their macroeconomic stability. As the thirteenth most indebted country in the world, with a super bond that comprises 50 percent of the national debt and 40 percent of GDP, Belize needs to foster private sector development and stimulate economic growth by creating an enabling environment for local economic development. Other countries that have supported MSMEs have seen positive growth in employment, increased income, poverty reduction, and sustainable macroeconomic growth.

However, women who seek to participate in MSMEs are either deterred from entering or if they manage to; they subsequently fail due to “deficient knowledge products, management weaknesses, quality and productivity issues and poor IT infrastructure”. These issues are further compounded by a lack of access and the cost of financing, the high cost of doing business, unavailability or lack of knowledge about business support services (including financial education and technical
A national response to ending gender inequitable conditions in local economic development must include initiatives that will decrease the levels of female unemployment and underemployment. Enforcement of existing legislation, especially in the areas of labour laws regarding private sector discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace is crucial for women’s participation in economic development. Successful interventions are possible if measures to encourage and support women’s entrepreneurship are backed with adequate financial and technical resources.

4.1 Recommendations

MSMEs are crucial for socio-economic development as a route citizens use to alleviate poverty. However those who are most in need of services – women and the rural poor – are often limited because the licensing and documenting of a business is conducted in the major towns and the capital. Hence citizens endure long, arduous, frequent and unaffordable travel. Because information is not readily available or accessible oftentimes, prospective entrepreneurs arrive at their destination only to discover they need additional documentation, fees or the person responsible is not in office. WIN-Belize’s gender budget research proposed several initiatives to address systemic gender inequality that have ignored women’s economic contributions and hindered increased participation in economic development. The NGP recommends several actions that will enable wealth and employment generation. Furthermore, the Situation Analysis of Politics’ list of costed activities promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment. Those interviewed spoke of the challenges of MSMEs in a small economy like Belize, the short, medium and long term recommendations to create an enabling environment for MSMEs, one that promotes gender equity include:

1. **LEGISLATION**

1.1 The amendment of the Married Persons (Protection) Act to guarantee equity and non-discrimination in child and spousal maintenance provisions and enforce the principle of the best interest of the child in property and inheritance provisions. Consideration should be given to examining how the courts resolve applications for child support, the amount of the awards, and the capacity for enforcement across the country.

1.2 The creation of labour law regulations focusing on: Eliminating all forms of employment-related discrimination based on sex, age and ethnicity; Eliminating all forms of child labour, particularly the worst
forms of labour; Increased maternity protection for women and providing paternity leave provisions for men; Increased protection from sexual harassment in the world of work; Providing increased labour protection for women and men in the informal workforce.

1.3 Revise income tax, GST, trade licenses, duty exemptions, along with the revision a two year break for start-up MSMEs before they have to pay rents and taxes.

2. **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

2.1 The creation of a robust and efficient National Employment Agency and Small Business Development Programme to assist women, men and youth job-seekers as well as employers seeking workers.

2.2 Using e-governance so that application forms are available online and can be processed online or locally rather than having to travel to the capital city, Belmopan.

2.3 Affordable utility rates for MSMEs

2.4 Affordable small business and health insurance plans

2.5 Bathroom facilities and other necessary infrastructure and also more security or police patrols

2.6 Affordable, accessible child care facilities

2.7 The expansion of programmes that increase women’s access to land and affordable credit and link this with national poverty reduction initiatives as well as with strategies for economic growth; establish clear national gender-related targets for the provision of land, credit and business support.

3. **ACCESS TO CREDIT AND FINANCIAL SERVICES**

3.1 Criteria for MSMEs to access financial services or business training should be mandatory gender sensitization training.

3.2 Institute quotas for credit institutions like the Development Finance Corporation’s (DFC) MSME line of credit. As a statutory body of the
government, they could be mandated to have a certain percentage of their clients be rural and urban women, rural and urban youth. Other credit institutions could be incentivized to also fill quotas.

3.3 Link funding opportunities for these institutions to gender sensitization components – the IADB, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) have a gender component in any project that is implemented in Belize.

4. ACCESS TO SKILLS TRAINING AND PROGRAMMES

4.1 A gender specialist who understands how to navigate the culture and the socio-political climate of the country will be better able to facilitate stakeholders’ understanding of the importance of gender sensitization and how it can help their businesses to succeed.

4.2 Institutions that deliver services to MSMEs need to develop gender policies and manuals and provide gender sensitization training, so that their employees understand its importance.

4.3 Incorporate within the education system, basic business training and gender sensitization for all students regardless of the field of study.

4.4 Child care available at training sites (or conveniently located nearby) to increase likelihood of women’s attendance and participation.
ANNEX 1: WIN-Belize Gender Budget Proposals

1. Labour market gender inequality studies show that the elimination of gender discrimination in pay and occupation would increase women’s income and the national budget.

2. Work in shifting the cultural perspective of child care as women’s work

3. A public exercise in the costs of corruption, for example assessing projects to ascertain whether contracts have been overvalued.

4. A gender budget process would also count women’s unpaid work in the household and community, as well as the informal sector, which would allow for a more encompassing view of the economy.

5. Improve public economic literacy to create a supportive base for advocacy surrounding budgetary issues

6. Identify and analyze a visible policy, tax or programme (like the GST) for its impact on men and women

7. Track the effects of the Auditor General

8. Define participation – what mechanisms exist, are they truly participatory and inclusive?

9. Develop popular material on the gender budgets, national budget process, MSMEs

10. Develop a gender aware medium term economic policy framework

11. Gender aware policy appraisals
ANNEX 2: The National Gender Policy of Belize

1. Capabilities Domain: Improvement in women’s work and life skills; Retention of boys in school, full access to reproductive health services, maintaining gains by women whilst supporting and promoting advances for men

2. Opportunities Domain: Improved access to economic empowerment, removing barriers to women employment and self-employment; Improved women’s participation in decision-making, complementing Women in Politics (WIP) achievement with strategic inputs and supporting improved inter-family relationships.

3. Security Domain: Reduce violence against women by supporting personal and social asset building to improve women voice in the home and work-life.

## ANNEX 3: FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTL Park Vendors Association</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dreams in Our Hands</td>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local vendors (not in CARILED)</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyfara Panton</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Williams</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti Garcia</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
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<tr>
<td>LaVona Cargill</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Williams</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andyvan Andrews</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>MSME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jose DePaz</td>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>MSME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhondine Petrof</td>
<td>Cayo</td>
<td>MSME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishmael Quiroz</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Espejo &amp; Troy Smith</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Belize City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar Castillo</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Small Business Development Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorshabell Cattouse</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwight Tillett</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Evangel Credit Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorne Solis</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Belize Rural Finance Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando Thompson</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Development Finance Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Finnegan</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>The Youth Apprenticeship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enid Oshon</td>
<td>Belize City</td>
<td>Belize Skills Training Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Moody</td>
<td>Belize River Valley</td>
<td>Belize Rural Farmers League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Dawson</td>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>National Association of Village Councils/District Association of Village Councils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX 4: THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The National Gender Policy 2013

The national gender policy speaks of a society in which men, women, boys and girls coexist, full participating in development and afforded all rights as citizens:

“A society in which all men and women, boys and girls are able to achieve their full potential through the enjoyment of their human rights; live together in mutual respect, dignity and harmony; and are equal partners as they participate in services and resources for realizing and sustaining their economic, social, political, and cultural development for equal enjoyment of all.” The five priority areas that need direct policy intervention focused on gender equity and equality are:

1. health
2. education
3. wealth and employment creation
4. gender based violence
5. power and decision-making

Horizon 2030

The main challenge facing Belize, over the medium to long term, is to accelerate economic growth and improve income distribution to significantly reduce poverty and improve social conditions. In an attempt to meet these challenges, a long-term development vision, referred to as Horizon 2030 was finalized in 2012. This long-term vision identifies critical sectors for long-term sustained policy actions during the next 20 years and suggests specific priorities within key sectors. Horizon 2030 also presents proposals for converting the long term vision, goals and objectives into medium term strategies for which targets can be set and implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes defined. A Results Based Management framework identifies performance targets to be monitored during the implementation process.

The vision identified in Horizon 2030 is:

“Belize is a country of peace and tranquillity, where citizens live in harmony with the natural environment and enjoy a high quality of life. Belizeans are an energetic, resourceful and independent people looking after their own development in a sustainable way.”

To achieve long-term objectives for Belize, Horizon 2030 organises development into seven thematic areas within three main headings.

Two Pillars for Future Development
Democratic governance for effective public administration and sustainable development
Democratic governance as a foundation for development
Crime, citizen security and access to justice
Education for Development
Education for development - education for life
One Binding Constraint - generating resources for long term development
Build a resilient economy
Focus on key productive sectors
The Bricks and the Mortar - the Core of the Long-term Development Framework
Healthy citizens throughout the life cycle
Care for the natural environment

Medium Term Development Strategy

Belize Medium Term Development Strategy (2010-2013) is Belize’s first attempt to convert the long term vision, goals and objectives identified in Horizon 2030 into medium term strategies for which targets are set, and implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes defined. The 2010-2013 strategy identifies five focus areas for priority attention:

Enterprise Development. This objective will be realised through measures that support the continued development of traditional and emerging industries and expansion of small, medium and micro-enterprises.

International Trade Capacity and Competitiveness. This area covers measures to increase Belize’s market access through better negotiating capacity and improvements in quality management and in the national quality certification capacity.

Environment and Disaster Risk Management. Confronting economic and physical shocks requires the ability to plan adequately and to make adjustments at the individual, institutional and community level. Furthermore, ensuring that individuals have decent living conditions, sources of income and an assurance of resources for future consumption will require the sustainable use of natural resources.

Human Development. The ability of each citizen to reach his or her full development potential and to make meaningful contributions to his community requires a sound foundation. The human and social development objectives of the MTDS are to be achieved through investment in education and health delivery and in social safety net provisions. The latter will include measures aimed at specific groups, such as women, youth and the aging.

National and Citizen Security. Increasing levels of crime as well as continuing interest in securing citizens’ well-being require focus on national as well as citizen security issues. This area will therefore encompass measures leading to improved border security and reduced levels of crime.

MSME Policy and Strategy

Belize is an economy driven mostly by MSMEs, with MSMEs generating over 70 percent of private sector employment and incomes, and contribute significantly to the GDP. However, there is concern that the sector has not been able to realize its full potential; failure rate in some sectors could be as high as 80 percent of new entrants. MSMEs continue to suffer from a number of weaknesses, which limit their ability to take full advantage of economic opportunities in the local, regional and extra-regional markets.

With the above in mind, Belize prepared the BELTRAIDE launched Belize MSME Policy and Strategy Report in March 2012. The goal of the policy is “to reduce poverty by promoting wealth creation and decreasing income inequality”. The 2012 MSME Policy and Strategy have the following policy objectives:
Increase the flow of capital to MSMEs:
Enhance the business and entrepreneurial skills of MSME owners/managers;
Promote market access and competitiveness of MSMEs; and
Enable MSMEs to access the resources (human, technological, financial) needed to respond to economic opportunities.
The MSME policy and Strategy further identifies four (4) crosscutting themes to which special attention is to be given:
Building an entrepreneurial culture, particularly focusing on young people;
Information flow as it relates to markets, non-tariff barriers and regulations and rules affecting business;
Promoting ICT at each stage in the value chain;
Rationalizing the provision of business support and information services to the sector.

National Export Strategy

Belize’s National Export Strategy (NES) 2008 – 2012 was prepared to support policies and strategies aimed at diversifying Belize’s exports. The National Export Strategy vision for Belize is “sustained international competitiveness in the export performance of value-added and niche products and services, thereby contributing to the achievement of national development and poverty reduction.”

In order to achieve the vision, the NES aim to:

Provide public sector investments in transport and utilities infrastructure to allow for reductions in the cost of doing business;

Provide public sector investments in capacity building, education, and certification programs to allow for competency and skill development as demanded by the five priority sectors;

Provide financial and human capital, and technical assistance to the Bureau of Standards and the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) for quality and standards design, enforcement, and management, including strengthening and updating existing legislation;

Provide effective trade support services in particular for export competency development, trade finance, export quality and standards management, and transportation to enable Belize’s export industries to be more competitive in international markets;

Enhance the coordination of export support institutions and policies, and strengthening the capacity of intermediary institutions for effectively providing export support activities to Belize’s export sector

The five priority sectors identified in Belize’s NES are:
Agroprocessing
Aquaculture
Environmental goods such as wood furniture, culinary herbs and medicines
Information and communication Technology (ICT)
Tourism

BELTRAIDE, which coordinated the preparation, implementation of the 2008 – 2012 NES, is currently updating this strategy.
Bibliography


