

for Belize

Part One: Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

The Government of Belize is committed to the advancement of women in achieving equality, equity and justice. To honor its commitment made at the 1994

Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Government of Belize has undertaken a

multi-sectoral approach including Government and Non-Government establishment of strategies, policies, legislation, and programs has

priority areas. The Beijing activities highlights gender mainstreaming, women and the economy (including violence against women, women's political participation and leadership, and women's sexual and reproductive health as the five areas for action.

Equity and Equality
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To address the priority area of gender mainstreaming a national Strategic Plan has been developed. This national plan envisions a society able to realize his or her potential and participate in active, meaningful Belize, and enjoy all benefits thereof. The mission is to create an environment that allows women and men to empower themselves economically, socially and politically. The Equity and Equality Strategic Plan proposes to achieve its mission through the implementation of a National Gender Management System, the

the "Integrated Model of Care for Family Violence: State and Civil Society Response 1998-2001."

The plan involves multi-sectorial coordination and participation of agencies including the Police,

Women's Department, Women's Commission and NGOs committed to eradicating domestic violence. The Women's Department also holds an annual Zero Tolerance Campaign on Domestic Violence in commemoration of International Day to End Violence Against Women.

The role of women in political parties and leadership, the fourth priority area, has changed very little over the years. Women make up approximately fifty percent of the country's population of 236,973 people, yet there is only one elected, female Minister in the Cabinet and two elected women (including the Cabinet Minister) in the House of Representatives. Women are grossly under-represented in Central Government just as they are in other leadership positions in public administration, civil service, appointed boards and private enterprise.

The General Elections of August 1998 also saw 5 out of 59 elected members of Parliament

and a candidate won the largest percentage

seen an increase in women participation

is now 100% of the 22 candidates elected

contest the Central Government

women have also contested and won seats at the Town Board and

South of Belize, Garifuna women (Indigenous Women) have the

highest rate of election success for women in Belize. Many have served as Mayors. Many

other women from other ethnic groups have also served as Chairpersons of their villages.

women - a meager 8.6%. Of that small number 6

of votes in that election. Local government elect

more. 100% of the 22 candidates elected

win in their side the highest percentage of women

women won seats also

Village Council levels

highest rate of election

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Similarly, the appointment of women to other semi-political bodies, statutory bodies and Boards has increased, yet it is still not representative of the country's demographic distribution. Currently women serve as the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives. More women have been appointed Senators and Chairpersons of Boards, but these positions still hold less power than seats in the Cabinet.

The Government's decision to include more women in its list of important political appointments came out of a "Women's Agenda" that was tabled by the political party that was successful in the 1998 General Elections. The women's wing of that party lobbied for a 30% minimal women leadership representation in key positions. The appointments did not meet the minimal target, but they are a step toward increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions in Belize. The National Women's Commission is currently conducting a study to assess opportunities

Health Sector Reform Project. BFLA has broadened its scope of delivery and has moved away from direct family planning to sexual and reproductive health services and education. With the

increase in the number of women and teens who are

transmitted diseases. Government and NGOs like BFLA

health care to include counseling and education. Cu

primary health care, HIV and post-natal care, public

abortion, STDs

Violence and child pregnancy that are critical to women's

Line goals of gender equality and the advancement of women are being pursued

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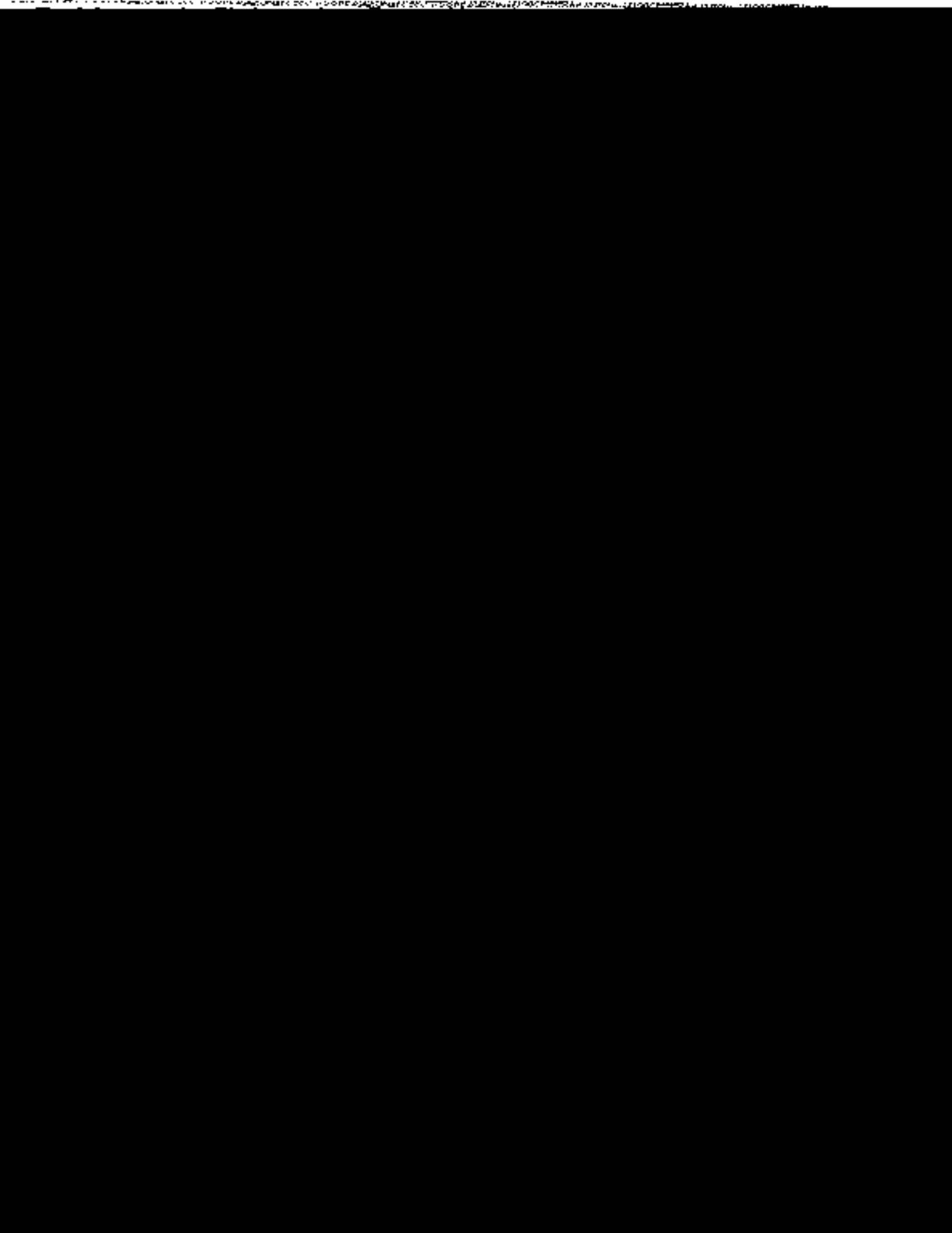
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**PART THREE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF
CONCERN OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, Belize's National Taskforce on Gender Equity and Equality identified five critical areas of the Beijing Platform for

Education, Violence

Action that it considered priorities for the country: Poverty,

Health, Reproductive

against Women, and Women in Power and Decision Making

Improvements in these five areas were expected to continue into the new millennium. The Government of Belize has established a goal of the year 2003 for certain of these areas. In 1998 a sixth commitment to the Beijing Platform was initiated with the development of the Belize Equity and Equality Strategic Plan, the purpose of which is to facilitate the implementation of a national gender equality strategy.

In order for these acquired skills to be converted into sustainable employment, the Government of Belize has recognized that it is imperative for women to have access to affordable credit, an opportunity which is often hampered by women's lack of capital or property as collateral. In 1996 the Social Investment Fund (SIF) was created as a poverty alleviation programme focusing on community development projects. In an extension of

SIF is about to embark on a micro-credit venture in conjunction with the Belize Institute for Sustainable Technology (B.I.S.T.) targeting women and youth.

Last year, the Small Farmers and Business Bank established a special window for women interested in obtaining loans. During a four month period

(28 October 1997 to 28 February 1998), 189 women applied for and were granted a total of \$1,058,195.00 BZE, amounting to 29% of the overall funds disbursed. All of

these loans were granted for the establishment of small businesses. This effort on behalf

of the Small Farmers and Business Bank reflects the commitment made by the People's United Party in its 1998 electoral Manifesto to increase women's access to affordable credit.

The introduction of a sustainable Human Development Programme has also aided in the economic empowerment of women in Belize. This programme operates from the

point of view that effective economic development can only be achieved when it is integrated with social development. This holistic approach focuses on building the

capacities of community

especially women, through workshops and leadership

programmes. The 1998 annual report from the Women's Department show that

approximately seven thousand women benefited from these programs. In an effort to

increase women's participation in leadership positions and the labour force, the

Government of Belize with the guidance of the National Committee for Families and

has been engaged in health sector reform, the diagnostic phase of which has recently

issues, have been

to the International

to a move towards more

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"concluded." Strategic options for gender mainstreaming, a

identified and a loan application is being developed for a

Development Bank and other funding institutions. The

strengthened health care services is being

Belize recognizes that both formal and informal educations are essential to the empowerment of its women. Thus in addition to primary, secondary, and tertiary school programmes, many skills training programmes are available, as discussed in the earlier section regarding Poverty and Unemployment. In formal education, the participation rates

of female children are equal to or better than their male counterparts at the primary level. However, this trend obviously applies only to opportunity to attend school. Some children, especially girls, are not in school due to financial reasons, being unable to meet school costs such as uniforms, books, etc. These costs seem to increase with the level of education.

Violence against Women

One of the most prominent issues of concern for Belizean women in the past decade has been domestic violence. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, studies were conducted in the Belize and Orange Walk districts to assess the effectiveness of the 1992 Domestic Violence Act. Data indicated that there was a need to develop a national plan of action to address family violence. Consultations were held at district and national levels, but as of yet a comprehensive plan has not been developed. The Women's Department conducts training sessions on domestic violence cases acted upon by the Family Court. Since 1996 the Family Court

in 1999. The court has prosecuted 50% of the reported cases. There

why the other cases have not been concluded by the court, including withdrawal of

charges, reconciliation between couples, requests for counseling, and failure to appear in

members of Belize's past legislation protecting persons from

er which the Women's Department embarked on an extensive

in. As a result of this campaign the Department has been saddled

ount of sexual harassment cases, however the law does not provide

or reporting these matters. In conjunction with several Women's

sexual harass

sensitization

with an incre

an effective

issues NGO's, the Women's Department also conducts the annual Zero Tolerance Campaign on Domestic Violence in commemoration of International Day to End Violence against Women. This is another example of Belize's efforts to raise public awareness about awareness about against women, a subject that has long been considered taboo in Belizean culture.

awareness about
in Belizean culture

Gender Mainstr

Conference, the relationship between women and development a Women In Development (WID) approach, which focused on and development process, for gender and ment and civil society. As such, in 1998 the

Since the
in Belize has shift

led by a taskforce of both

Development (GAT) approach wh
planning in the overall structure o

programmes. The date of implementation for this plan has not yet been determined.

women's groups in Belize over the past
involved in politics and leadership positions.

Women in Power and Decision-M
Although there have been ma
two decades, there are still very few

ional Women's Commission recently

in both the public and private sector

conducted a survey of two thousand women age eighteen and older from selected households to assess the political participation of women in Belize. The results

from this survey is currently being analyzed. However, feedback has been claimed to

in response to this dearth of involvement, an advocacy campaign promote the appointment of more wom

ectoral Manifesto the People's United Party promised to include more women in

der ship positions within the public service, the initial target being thirty percent of

appointments going to women. As of August 1998, Belize had achieved a 100% increase in women's representation in the House of Representatives, and for the first time the

well.

(B) Obstacles encountered

(5) Overall, lack of human and financial resources are the most significant constraints encountered by government and non-government agencies in Belize.

Poverty and Unemployment, many programmes and projects are limited as well as by traditional beliefs regarding the role of women in Belize. In effort to promote the expansion of these roles, the theme of Belize Women was, "Women Breaking Through Traditional Barriers." Activities for a countrywide public awareness campaign as well as an educational for traditional employment opportunities for Women. Some programmes

also suffered from a lack of available monitoring mechanisms, and cannot be evaluated and the need for modifications cannot be determined. This greatly hinders the sustainability of these efforts.

Funding difficulties on both the national and local levels

hinder programmes to ensure equal and proper care in the health sector. Lack of human resources to the extent that the health sector is unable to provide adequate, gender-sensitive services by the appropriate agencies, creating a lack of continuity in the quality and availability of health care. Belize also does not have sufficient

this issue is addressed in the health sector reform process.

The most significant concern regarding women and education in Belize is the expulsion of pregnant girls from primary and secondary schools. These policies are a result of the Church-State education system in which schools operated by religious

limits her access to the political arena. Cultural attitudes regarding women in politics reflect a belief that women only belong in certain areas of government, such as social services, but women still do not occupy key decision-making positions even in these areas. One of the reasons women in Belize have been so active in non-governmental

are adaptable to their other responsibilities as

issues that affected women direct caregivers.

the lack of implementation of national gender management system is still in draft, and it is too early to determine any obstacles which may be encountered.

(6) Some strongly discussed in the roll reports were:

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Poverty/Unemployment

In its electoral Manifesto, the People's United Party committed Social Security benefits for widows and domestic workers as well as to ensure that all economic policies are gender-sensitive in order to provide equitable access to all of Belize's resources and economic opportunities.

will occur. To expedite the implementation of such policies, Women's Issues

k-Belize, which is an umbrella organization of several women's groups and

is developing a campaign to advocate for the economic empowerment of

women in Belize. Issues in this campaign include the establishment of an equal

campaign is

domestic workers, and a review of policies regarding maternity

to establish

currently in the early stages of development. This initiative

edit

The Women's Department, as part of its Action Plan for 1998-2003,

developing a formal referral system with relevant government and non-government

ing

and employment agencies so that women who complete any of the Department

experiences, or who come to the Department for information regarding

access employment opportunities. In addition to this the Department will be expanding its training programmes in all six districts.

Health

In early 1999, the Government through the Ministries of Health; Human Development,

on Services), which advocates

Programme (School Health and Physical

equality and other much debated

concretely for the design of curricula

themes, in the primary setting.

A Breast-feeding Policy was drafted and approved by the Ministry of Health in 1998. It

units to help eliminate bottle-feeding practices in the country's major hospitals. Seven
six district hospitals are at least five of the ten steps for successful breast-feeding
practices.

Education

The Women's Department in conjunction with COMPAR will be developing a
curriculum on civic education for women. To design, develop and implement a civic
education skills training program and to increase the pool of women in Belize who know
their rights as Belizean Citizens. The development phase should be completed by July
1999, after which the curriculum will be implemented through workshops in
until November 1999. A final evaluation of the programme will be completed
following month.

Violence against Women

The Women's Department will be conducting training sessions
support group techniques in the four remaining districts (Belize, Cayo
Toledo). This effort is designed to increase the services available to women
violence. The Department
Domestic Violence hotline

Making

Women in Power and D

Government of Belize is committed through its manifesto to include more women in
position in the public service and other public bodies with an initial target
percentages being women.

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of 30%

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Equality Strategic Plan aims at implementing a National Gender

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Gender
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ing environment

Management System is a commitment by Government to create
of equity and equality for men and women.