



# UNDP Belize

*Support to the National Response and recovery to Contain the Impact of COVID-19*



## 1. Government Response

As of June 5th, there are 18 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 1 deceased. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the Government of Belize has set in place mechanisms to prevent contagion, including a lockdown and partial curfew as well as closure of borders to address the immediate health response and the unfolding socio-economic consequences. With no new cases confirmed since mid April, the government has gradually eased the restrictions imposed during the period of March to April.

Belize, with a small open economy, is highly vulnerable against the backdrop of tempered economic growth and high debt to GDP levels. The key drivers of economic activity include agriculture, fisheries, tourism, energy and other extractive industries. The tourism industry plays a significant role in the economy as a large employer and source for foreign exchange, contributing an average of 64.2% of GDP (2008-2019).

Although the extent of the long-term economic impacts of COVID 19 are still unknown, losses to the Tourism industry and allied sectors, which underpins the national economy, are already being described as being catastrophic as the country has already as much as 80% losses in tourism related jobs and associated livelihoods. The tourism sector was considered an important source of gender-equal employment, as it employs more women than any other sectors (46% vs. 37% of the workforce).

Livelihoods are being widely disrupted by the effects of COVID-19 in the region, with 73% survey respondents indicating that their ability to carry out their livelihoods was affected since

mid-March. Additionally, more than 80,000 persons have applied for unemployment assistance under the country's COVID-19 Unemployment Assistance Programme by April 24th and almost 44% of these have been approved with USD \$ 1.7 million distributed to 28,500 people thus far. The online portal for economic relief has been closed to new applications as of April 24th.

Macro-economic impact assessments and sector assessments have been commissioned by the government to provide a baseline for targeted response/ relief actions, as well as to inform longer term policies and actions to minimize social and economic impacts and stimulate economic recovery. In response to the economic downturn (losses in employment and livelihoods), the Government has set in place measures to protect affected population and the national safety net programmes are being expanded.

At the center of its response are the country's BOOST and Food Pantry programmes which were initially designed to target urban populations and pockets of indigence. These programmes as per initial design targeted among their beneficiaries: single female headed households, pregnant women, toddlers and school children, as well as elderly persons not receiving a pension. The operationalization of these programmes at a national scale is critical to the suppression of a social crisis. Their programmatic design ensures that the country's most vulnerable populations are not left behind as the government advances with its COVID 19 response.

## 2. UNDP Support to Prepare, Respond and Recover

### Strengthening Health Systems

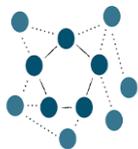


- Purchase of additional COVID-19 testing kits and swabs, supporting the scaling up of national testing efforts.
- Purchase of Gene Xpert diagnostic equipment to expand laboratory capacity by decentralizing testing. This is to mitigate the impact on the TB and HIV programs. The CO is also supporting the national health systems through the procurement of a ventilator.

### Inclusive and Multi-Sectoral Crisis

UNDP supports the expansion of existing safety net programmes to support the national authority leading the response to the COVID-19 crisis (Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation - MHDSTPA). Targeted support includes:

### Management and Response



- Increase MHDSTPA response capacity with the addition of a Social Protection Officer serving as “surge” capacity supporting the immediate restructuring and design of a comprehensive social protection response to this crisis and expanding its platforms capacity and scaling up food assistance programme.
- UNDP is also supporting a rapid mapping exercise for the identification of potential food stores and commercial partners who can provide service to Belize’s rural underserved areas. This action is also setting-up immediate stocking of district level food banks and hygiene supplies facilitating.
- In addition, UNDP is also providing support for the expansion of a national Electronic Case Management Platform (FAMCARE) which underlies National Food Assistance and BOOST programmes.
- In addition, UNDP is working with the National Women’s Commission and the Women’s Department to expand communication on availability of support services for GBV victims.

### Socio-Economic Impact and Recovery



- UNDP has commissioned a national Socio-economic assessment. This complements ongoing national macro-economic studies being undertaken by the government of Belize. It focuses on vulnerable population groups inclusive of rural populations, those participating in the informal economies, the long term unemployed, youths, female headed households etc., providing greater insight into population vulnerability, with a hop of informing greater targeted actions for response.
- Support to governmental communication campaign to develop a Socio-Economic Paper (in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI) to inform progress of government's recovery efforts.
- Small Farmers Assistance Programme: Restoration of livelihoods and securing continuity of food production systems satisfying national food security objectives.

## 3. UNDP Support to UN Country Team

The UNCT offer to Belize includes support to the stabilization of national systems, the securing basic food and income security, and the reduction of population vulnerabilities through the enhancement of population coping capacity to manage and overcome this shock.

The UNCT with the support of UNETT has set in place 3 working groups to inform and steer its response; (1) Health Systems Group, (2) Socio-economic/ Social Protection Group, (3) Communication and Education Group. The Socio- Economic/ Social Protection Group is co-chaired by UNDP and UNICEF and has the participation of both FAO and WFP. UNDP will be supporting the UBCT strategy building national capacities for the scaling up of the country's social protection systems.

## 4. Resources – COVID19 Response

Areas of Response	Reprogramming (Existing Projects) USD	New Resources USD
Strengthening Health Systems	82,000	290,000
Inclusive and Multi-Sectoral Crisis Management and Response	170,000	217,000
Socio-Economic Impact and Recovery	79,000	25,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>331,000</b>	<b>532,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>863,000</b>	

**Strengthening Health Systems:** Repurposed resources (USD 10,000) from a Global Fund project, as well as assigned USD 32,000 of UNDP resources

New Resources: USD 290,000 -UNDP is supporting the MoH in the development of a proposal to the Global Fund COVID 19 Response mechanism.

**Inclusive and Multi-Sectoral Crisis Management and Response:** Repurposed resources (USD \$100,000) from ongoing EnGenDER project, financed by the Government of Canada. Repurposed (USD \$70,000) from the Spotlight project (European Union) and USD \$200,000 from the Rapid Response Facility. RRF new resources approved USD 217,000

**Socio-Economic Impact and Recovery:** Expedited delivery of USD \$79,000 farmer assistance programme funded through the EnGenDER Project (Government of Canada/ DFID) to secure continued on-farm production and avoiding potential food security crisis. Also, UNDP committed 25,000 USD TRAC resources to conduct a national Socio-economic assessment.