

**QUITO CONSENSUS**  
**COUNTRY REPORT- BELIZE**

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## **Capacity Building in Decision-Making, Legislative Reform, Policy Development and Access to Justice**

### **STRENGTHENING TECHNICAL CAPACITY OF GOVERNMENT MECHANISM FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

The Government in its commitment to advance women's issues in Belize has commenced strengthening of the National Women's Commission, an advisory body to government that is responsible for monitoring CEDAW. For the first time since its 26 years of existence, the National Women's Commission is staffed with a full-time technical Executive Director. The Commission is presently drafting the instrument that will legally establish it as a statutory body.

In recognition of the need to increase rural women's access to programmes and services, Government has established the post of Rural Women Development Officer. This officer within the Women's Department is charged with the responsibility to plan, coordinate, and implement projects, activities, and programmes to ensure rural women's full participation in the development process.

### **NATIONAL GENDER POLICY AND NATIONAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PLAN OF ACTION**

The production of the *National Gender Policy* represents the culmination not only of a progressive body of work in Belize over the past decade and more, but also of a global evolution in the conceptualization of gender relations and its central place in the pursuit of human rights and human development. It refers to developments in Belize, alongside the transition in global understanding which has led to current initiatives in gender mainstreaming in the following priority areas: Health, Violence-Producing Conditions, Sexual abuse provisions, Access to justice, Domestic violence and child abuse registration system, Domestic violence framework, Victims and survivors of abuse, Perpetrators of abuse, Sexual harassment, Child abandonment and neglect and Commercial sex work.

Belize's first National Gender Policy was developed in 2002. A review of this policy commenced in March 2009. It is expected that the complete revision of the National Gender Policy will be completed by the end of August 2010 by the National Women's Commission and its partners.

A plan of action to address the issue of gender-based violence (which is an integral component of the National Gender Policy) has been developed. *National Gender-Based Violence Plan 2007-2009* is a contribution to the realization of the mission and goals of the Gender-Based Violence Committee which was revitalized in 2005. It makes reference to international commitments made by the government combined with other regional and international instruments, which are being used to mount a national vigorous effort to halt gender-based violence in all its forms in Belize. It is designed to also serve as a basis for advocacy work, and as a tool to assist policy and decision makers to contribute to the achievement of the national and international goals. Belize is signatory to a number of international commitments in regards to the elimination of gender-based violence. This plan has been developed with these commitments in mind. The aim is to ensure that over the next five years, Belize moves towards the goals and objectives of the leading documents in these areas, namely the *Millennium Development Goals*, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*, the *Beijing Platform for Action*, the *Outcomes Document*, the *Commonwealth Plan of Action* and the *CARICOM Regional Plan of Action*. It is a tool whose aim is to outline the problem of gender-based violence, elaborate its linkages to poverty, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and discuss its impact on the nation's development by complementing the policies addressed in key National documents such as: *The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in Belize 2004-2015*, *Belize's National Gender Policy 2002*, the *Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy* and the *National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan and Policy*. It is widely acknowledged that in order to effectively tackle gender-based violence in Belize, a coordinated and cross-sectional integrated approach is required to address the cultural, social and economic obstacles to achieving lives free from violence. This National Plan for 2007-2009 looks to create a fully comprehensive strategy, encompassing law enforcement, health, justice administration, housing, community advocacy and education. The discussion on the issue of gender-based violence is one of development priority.

In 2009, the Women's Department through the UNIFEM regional project, "Strengthening State Accountability and Community Action for Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean," project commence a consultation process to develop a National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action for 2010-2013. This Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2010 and is presently being printed for dissemination to the public.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT**

The October of 2008, the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 came into force. This Act repealed the Domestic Violence Act, Chapter 178 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000.

The Domestic Violence Act of 2007 empowers the Courts when dealing with domestic violence cases, to increase protection to the applicants.

The scope of Protection Orders has been increased so that an Order may now: be put in place for up to 3 years; include a requirement to pay child maintenance if there is no existing order for maintenance; and include a requirement to take any weapons used in domestic violence to the Police.

The Act provides more severe penalties in respect of Breach of any Orders: On a first conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$9000 or to imprisonment for a period of 12 months or to both; On a second conviction to a fine not exceeding \$15,000 and not less than \$12000 or to imprisonment for a period of 24 months or both; and On any subsequent conviction to a period of imprisonment for 5 years.

The Act enlarges the categories of people who may apply for Orders against domestic violence. This includes the provision for defacto spouses or persons in visiting relationships to apply to the Court for Orders. The legislation streamlines and provides greater powers to the police in respect of their ability to intervene in domestic violence situations.

The Act increases the offences which constitute domestic violence by broadening the definition of domestic violence to include Financial Abuse. It also includes provisions for the payment of financial compensation to an applicant for any financial loss which arises as a direct result of domestic violence.

The Act specifies more provisions for the Court to issue Counseling Orders to direct the respondent, applicant, child or any other person specified in the Order to receive professional counseling or for the respondent to undergo probation in a rehabilitation programme.

In March 2008, the Women's Department offered training to Magistrates from across the country on the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act. A separate training was held for Magistrates in December 2008 and focused on legislation that protects women's rights. The Magistrate's and Family Courts continue to request that the Women's Department organize more training sessions on legislation.

On an annual basis, the Women's Department conducts training with recruits at the Police Academy on the issue of Domestic Violence. While the sessions cover the Domestic Violence Act and types of abuse, a significant portion of it focuses on "Police Officers as Batterers" and "Police Officers as Victims."

In 2009, at the request of the Police Department, the Women's Department rendered assistance by reviewing the existing Domestic Violence Protocol for Police within the context of the enactment of a new legislation. Suggestions for amendments to the Protocol were submitted to the Police Department in August 2008.

In 2009, the Department commenced the execution of an extensive public awareness campaign including television and radio ads that target men and highlights things that men can do to end violence against women.

### **LEGISLATIVE REVIEW**

In 2008, the Women's Department commenced a review of the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act of 1996. This review continued in 2009 and the focus of the consultative review was the practicality and operationalization of the piece of legislation. The initial review (2008) revealed that the Act is largely seen as ineffective. The Women's Department consulted with the Police, Judges, Magistrates, women's organizations and the University of Belize to find out the reason for these views. The outcome revealed in the 2009 consultation was: Fear of dismissal without compensation was deterring complaints; and A public awareness campaign was needed.

The consultative review revealed that the ideal solution would be to strengthen the Act and to execute a campaign to publicize it, however, it is recognized that this would take a long time to achieve. The attorney heading the review suggested that the Minister of Human Development pass regulations under the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act and the Labour Minister passes regulations under the Labour Act to obligate employers to inform the public that sexual harassment is illegal and in particular:

- To display a prescribed poster prominently in the workplace.
- To ensure their workplace is free from sexual harassment.
- To give each employee a prescribed statement against sexual harassment.
- To set up a complaints procedure, in instances where the employer has more than 5 employees.

In terms of regulations, he suggested that provisions be put in place wherein

- Any breach of the regulations will be subject to a fine of not more than \$50,000.00.
- The annual return made by each employer will include a statement that the employer has complied with these regulations.
- The Labour Officers' powers under the Labour Act are being extended to enforce compliance with the new regulations.

The review revealed that according to the Labour Department unfair dismissal laws have been prepared and their passage into law is anticipated. The Labour Commissioner was consulted throughout this process and he is reviewing the proposals to determine the most practical way forward for the drafting of amendments and/or regulations needed to strengthen the enforcement of sexual harassment as an offence.

The Women's Department continues to be concerned about women's access to divorce. Consequently, a legislative review was conducted of the Divorce Procedures in Belize.

As a part of the process, the Forms were reviewed as well as the grounds used to gain a divorce. It was determined that both the forms and the procedure need simplification.

Consultations with several parties including attorneys revealed that there is the need for:

- Greater access for poorer people
- Change to a no-fault system of irretrievable breakdown.
- Simpler divorce forms were required.

There were several suggestions from individuals from which agreement was not unanimous, these include:

- Creation of a Family Division of the Supreme Court to operate in the districts OR
- The Family Court being extended to the districts and being authorized to deal with divorce.
- Some persons thought that separation for 3 years was too long – 1 year was suggested.
- Another approach to the problem was to get attorneys to do divorces pro bono or at a reduced fee.
- Several persons were in favour of discussions with the Bar Association and/or lawyers about setting up a scheme to run this.

The review process also resulted in the drafting of a “Do-it-Yourself” Divorce Kit that is presently being reviewed for practicality.

### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR PROSECUTION & TRAINING AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ACTIONS**

As a part of the “*Strengthening State Accountability and Community Action for Ending Gender-based Violence in the Caribbean*”, being executed in Belize by the Women’s Department, a “*National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women*” and a “*Needs Assessment for Policing and Prosecuting sexual offences.*” were contracted. The findings were publicly presented as a part of activities for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence 2009. These reports revealed that there is dire need for the strengthening of legislation with respect to sexual offences. It has been proposed both locally and regionally by several parties that the introduction of Sexual Offences legislation is needed.

The consultative review indicated that: In relation to sexual offences, the Criminal Code is out of date in its language, its range of offences and its penalties; An amended version of the Code, updating sexual offences was prepared for N.C.F.C. in 2005; and a new report has been written comparing the Code with CARICOM and with the 2003 Sexual Offences Act from the U.K.

It was determined that deficiencies or discrepancies with the Code included: Mental disorder not being properly defined and Parents being unwilling to testify in cases of child abuse and mothers who facilitated sexual access to their children go unpunished.

During consultations, there was agreement that: Marital rape should be abolished (as the provisions are restricted and do not meet the initial intentions of the concept of the legislation); the definition of Rape should be wider to cover spouses; Many felt that more training was needed for the police, the judges and the lawyers involved in policing and prosecuting sexual crimes; Many said that the public needed guidance on a women's right to say "No". Posters and advertisements were needed; All Belizeans must be clear that father-daughter incest is always wrong; All agreed that counseling for the victim was necessary and most thought that mandatory counseling for the perpetrator was also sensible.

The findings of the overall review were presented to the National Gender-based Violence Committee. The Women's Department, with the guidance of the Ministry of Human Development, continues to move forward in addressing these issues.

Additionally, the Women's Department drafted a Sexual Harassment Policy for the Ministry. The policy includes the following: Definition of Sexual Harassment, Duties to protect staff members from sexual harassment; Resolutions of Complaints and Court Actions. The Women's Department is hoping to use this Policy as a model policy for the entire public service sector in Belize.

### **FREE LEGAL CLINICS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FAMILY ISSUES**

The Women's Department recognizes that legal fees are not always affordable to many women and men and consequently affects their access to justice. As part of the activities for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence 2009, the Women's Department scheduled a free

Legal Clinic on family and gender-based violence issues including divorce, property rights, legal separation, child maintenance, domestic violence and sexual harassment. With the support of several local attorneys, the Women's Department was able to offer those in need of legal advice, free access to this service on Wednesday November 25, 2009. A total of eleven attorneys willingly participated in this clinic and encouraged the Women's Department to hold the clinic more frequently.

In response to this suggestion, as a part of activities for Women's Month in March 2010, the Women's Department organized a Legal Clinic on Family Issues and Gender-based Violence in the southernmost district town of the country which is considered the poorest district and which is home to the indigenous group, the Maya. Two local attorneys, namely a Former Minister of Human Development with responsibility for women's affairs and a Human Rights activist who at the time was the attorney for the Maya Leaders Alliance with a pending Supreme Case on Maya Customary Land Tenure Rights, offered their services at this clinic. The response to the clinic was overwhelming and saw women from urban and rural communities visiting the clinic for legal guidance on various issues.

### **GENDER FOCAL POINTS**

In 2006, the Women's Department identified Gender Focal Points in key government agencies. Gender Focal Points are persons who have been designated within a specific government ministry, non-governmental organization, community-based organization, school or business to monitor and stimulate greater consideration of gender equality issues in daily operation of their institutions. They form the Gender Focal Points Committee responsible for the implementation of the Gender Integration Action Plan. In 2007, a Gender Focal Points Handbook was developed to guide Gender Focal Points working in partnership with the Women's Department of Belize, Gender Integration Programme. The Handbook was intended to provide advice, inspiration and guidance as well as provide ideas and suggestions that can help enhance the impact of Gender Focal Points work within their different ministries, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, schools and businesses.

While the Gender Focal Points were instrumental in developing a Gender Integration Action Plan, the group had been somewhat dormant over the past few years as a result of staff turn-over

and failure to identify persons with actual decision-making capacities as Gender Focal Points. Through UNFPA, the Women's Department has secured funding to revitalize the Gender Focal Points Committee, identify new focal points who must have decision making capacities and in revising the Gender Focal Points Handbook.

### **WOMEN IN POLITICS PROJECT**

The Women in Politics Project is an initiative of the National Women's Commission through UNIFEM. The first cycle of the project commenced in October 2009 and targeted women particularly young and indigenous women who were either already involved in politics at the local and national level or who had aspiration of a political career. The objectives of the project were: Participants would familiarize themselves with the findings of the "Women in Politics publication" and be able to articulate some of today's challenges regarding women's leadership e.g. political, community etc; they would receive training, education and awareness to address the inequalities between men and women in political leadership and decision-making in Belize; they would have a working knowledge of gender and gender roles and they would participate in training programmes for women in both theory and practical. The training sessions included Parliamentary Procedures, How to run a campaign, Campaign financing, Politics & the Media, How to craft your political message, Gender awareness. The training would also include practical session in Introduction to Computers, Interviews, Sessions with women politicians and Observing Conventions & Campaigns.

Cycle 1 of the Women in Politics Project concluded with commencement exercises for 52 women on March 25 as a part of activities for Women's Month in Belize.

Although, the first cycle of the project had intended to include a bi-partisan brainstorming session with the leaders of the two main political parties to examine the findings and the advocating for formal adoption of proposed strategies and monitor the implementation of selected strategies , these components have not been realized but related activities will commence shortly.

In June 2010, seven women from Belize were successful in being selected to be a part of the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership “ Advancing Transformational Leadership for Gender Justice in the Caribbean training programme, and participate in a 15-day course includes five (5) days ‘virtual’ training followed by 10 days residential training during the month of July. Leading lecturers, and experts from Government, civil society and the United Nations, are scheduled to facilitate the highly interactive and participatory training. Two of the seven women selected had previously completed the Women in Politics Project.

### **GENDER AWARENESS SAFE SCHOOL PROGRAMME**

The Gender Awareness Safe School Programme is an initiative of the Women’s Department to work with schools in Belize to set standards that will provide a foundation for more equitable relations between girls and boys in our society. The programme started in 2005 and primarily focuses on enhancing their development so that they can enjoy responsible and healthy lives that promote positive experiences. In addition, the programme aims to provide a participatory and interactive tool to teach children and adolescents about the importance of Gender and related issues. Specific thematic areas that are highlighted are Gender, Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse, HIV and AIDS and Self-Esteem among others.

Sessions are conducted in one primary and one secondary school per school year in each district. In 2008, the Gender Awareness Safe School Programme was implemented in 18 primary and secondary schools nationwide, while in 2009, 19 schools participated. A total of 3263 in-school boys and girls have participated in this programme over the past two years.

### **BATTERERS INTERVENTION PROGRAMME**

The Women’s Department recognizes that the approach to respond and prevent violence against women must be a holistic one. Consequently, through the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Women’s Department has introduced a Batterers Intervention Programme to Belize.

This Programme is a sixteen (16) week violence prevention, psycho-educational programme for men who are abusive to women. The programme is court-connected and receives its referrals from both the criminal and civil jurisdiction of the court. The Programme model is based on a

psycho-educational approach which accepts that violence is a choice and that abusive behaviours are used to maintain control.

It has nine (9) goals: To help participants stop violence in their lives; To help participants understand that violence is a choice; To help participants accept responsibility for their behavior and to choose new behaviours that are free of violence; To help participants understand the cost of violence to themselves, their partners, their children, and society in general; To teach participants skills for addressing conflict and responding to stress; To establish and model an atmosphere of respect within the group and to challenge disrespectful behavior; To empower participants to take steps towards improving their lives and their relationships; To encourage participants' examination of where their violent behavior began; and To create a network of men who will advocate for non-violent relationships.

In April 2010, cycle 1 of the program, titled Partners in Peace (PIPE) commenced. The first cycle of the rehabilitation program, started with eight men who were referred to the program by both the Family and Magistrates Courts. To date, only one man has been terminated from the program due to non-compliance with program rules. The first cycle of the program will be completed on August 7, 2010. The second cycle will commence shortly thereafter.

### **STRENGTHENING BELIZE'S MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS**

The 5-year Global Fund Project, Strengthening of Belize's Multi-sectoral Response to HIV/AIDS, was concluded in October 2009. The Women's Department was one of the seven sub-recipients of the project and focused its components on reducing the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS for Women and Youth; developing information, education, and communication geared towards empowering women of reproductive age; and focusing on the link between domestic violence/gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

Initiatives under this project included: Peer Counseling Training for Women and Girls, Assertiveness and Negotiation Skills Training for Women and Girls and Executing the "Empowered" Campaign which brought awareness to the female condom and provided survivors of gender-based violence and other women with fashionable purses designed to

accommodate female condoms. Other initiatives under the project included the development of a training manual on the link between gender, violence and HIV/AIDS and a National Young Women's Summit on the Feminization of HIV/AIDS.

### **ADVISORY GROUP ON CARICOM (CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY) ADVOCATE FOR GENDER JUSTICE**

In 2009, the Director of Women's Department was appointed to serve in the CARICOM Advisory Group on Gender-based Violence. This Group was instrumental in the selection of the first ever CARICOM Advocate for Gender Justice.

The establishment of this Committee is as a result of several meetings and reports including the Twelfth Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) held in 2005 which accepted the report of the Working Group on the *CARICOM Plan of Action on Gender Mainstreaming, 2002-2005*. That Working Group recommended that “...*Gender-based Violence should be added to the core work of the CARICOM Gender Programme. It also recommended the establishment of a Regional Commission on Gender-based Violence so as to bring visibility to the issue, strengthen political will and actions on a multisectoral basis to end Gender-based Violence. The mechanism aims to provide for a high-level political advocacy to enhance legislative and institutional responses to GBV in Member States. As such, this mechanism can provide technical guidance to Member States. The project has two basic components that are mutually reinforcing for facilitating a more coordinated and integrated approach to addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the CARICOM region.*”<sup>1</sup>

Belize is privileged that the Women's Department is the only gender or women's bureau in the Caribbean presently serving on this Committee. The Department's representation on this regional committee serves as an effort to *foster* regional cooperation and to strengthen regional policies, plans and programmes aimed at eliminating violence against women. Belize will be one of the four countries in the Caribbean that will serve as a basis for CARICOM's Thematic Report on Youth, Masculinity and Violence.

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<sup>1</sup> First Meeting Advisory Group Report-CARICOM

## **STRENGTHENING STATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY ACTION FOR ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN**

The Women's Department is executing, through UNIFEM and the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP), a regional project on "Strengthening State Accountability and Community Action for Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean". This project focuses specifically on reducing violence against women, through the strategies of increasing state actor competencies and strengthening accountability. "The project is also premised on a number of considerations: The need for coordination of regional and national multi-sectoral strategies with an emphasis on the justice and security sectors as a lever for ending impunity; The need for heightened public and community commitment to securing women's and children's rights to security; and The need for men to be engaged as partners in advocacy and action on ending sexual and gender-based violence."<sup>2</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, the following components of the 2-year project were executed in Belize: *National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against, Needs Assessment for Policing and Prosecuting sexual offences; the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence 2010-2013 was developed and adopted by Cabinet; a series of Gender Sensitization sessions for youth which focuses on violence was conducted countrywide.* It is anticipated that by the expiration of the project in December 2010, the other components would have been realized, namely: Build competencies of the justice and security sectors and the non-governmental sector to respond effectively to gender-based violence; Build a monitoring framework to ensure state accountability through civil society-state partnerships; and Promotion of a gender-sensitive, youth-focused social communications strategy on gender-based violence which includes establishing a network of men who would serve as Champions of Change.

### **INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY**

#### **WOMEN'S MONTH**

In Belize, International Women's Day was traditionally observed as Women's Week and encompassed several days of activities around March 8. These activities were generally organized

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<sup>2</sup> Strengthening State Accountability Project Document-UNIFEM

by government and civil society organizations and coordinated by the Women's Department. In 2009, the Department realizing that the growing awareness and involvement of various agencies including private sector in activities commemorating International Women's Day had outgrown a week of observance. In recognition of this and of the fact that the highlighting of the achievements of women in Belize warranted more than seven days of activities, the Women's Department nationally designated the month of March as Women's Month. Besides the month of September which is designated as Celebrations Month in Belize to observe our country's national day and day of Independence, March has now become the most recognized month of observation in Belize. Over the past two years, Women's Month has seen a dramatic increase in interest by the business community which has used the month as a time to honour women as consumers; as such businesses have even developed television commercials recognizing Women's Month and offering special discounts to women during the month of March.

The popularity and success of Women's Month can now be used as a powerful advocacy tool to put the women's agenda at the forefront.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Over the past 2 years, the Department has produced several educational materials focusing on women's empowerment and women's rights, namely: Women's Rights Handbook, Women's Entrepreneurship Manual and a Training Guide on Facilitating Information Sessions on the Link between HIV and Violence Against Women. The Department continues to reproduce and disseminate its existing material in particular: Women's Handbook on Domestic Violence, Men's Handbook on Domestic Violence and Domestic Violence and its Effects on Children, some of which have been translated into Spanish.

The Development of the Entrepreneurship Manual for Women was complemented by countrywide training for women's groups in both urban and rural communities. The trainings educated one hundred and forty-two (142) women on what owning a small business entails, the positive and negative aspects of having a small business, how to think of small business ideas, and how to get a good start when embarking on a small business venture.

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

In an effort to emphasize that women's rights are human rights, the Women's Department has, through internal and external funds, executed public education campaigns focusing on Women's Rights over the past 2 years. The production of the Women's Rights Handbook was coupled with radio, newspaper and television advertisements as well as brochures and posters about property rights, child custody, child maintenance, sharing parental responsibility and sexual harassment, among others.

## **Economic Empowerment**

### **SUPPORTING SINGLE MOTHERS IN BELIZE CITY PROJECT**

Recognizing the challenges facing single mothers in identifying meaningful employment and acquiring employable skills while providing care and support for their children, the Government of Belize through the Women's Department established the Supporting Single Mothers in Belize City Project in 2008.

This project includes a skills training programme catering specifically to single mothers, namely: Child Care Services, Sewing, Housekeeping and Cosmetology. The sessions are held during the evening for four months at which time on-site child care services are provided in an effort to allow the participants to be comforted by the fact that the children are being well-cared for while they are in sessions. The project also has job placement and family support components allowing for a well-rounded approach to supporting single mothers. Fifty seven (57) women completed Cycle 1 of the programme and forty five (45) completed Cycle 2 of the programme.

### **WOMEN'S SEWING COOPERATIVE**

In September 2009, the Women's Department introduced a Women's Sewing Cooperative in Belize City. This Cooperative was open to women who had basic sewing skills and in particular, encouraged the former employees of now defunct *Williamson Industries*, to join. When the

*'Dickies' Brand Company* vacated Belize a few years ago, it resulted in loss of jobs for tons of women. The Sewing Cooperative was developed to provide women with an opportunity to generate income within the security of a group making access to credit more attainable. The programme attached to the Cooperative included intermediate level training, entrepreneurship training, computer skills and bookkeeping. Under the project, thirty sewing machines were procured as well as a wide variety of sewing material. The Cooperative was granted access to a building which was retrofitted to meet their needs. While initially, the number of women in the Cooperative was below the target of thirty, to date a dedicated core group of ten women have remained with the Cooperative and have commenced generation of income through the creation of bags, bedding, clothes and hats.

### **IT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR RURAL WOMEN**

Recognizing that rural women are often disenfranchised in terms of access of services and resources, the Women's Department through the Social Investment Fund and Caribbean Development Bank, executed an Information Technology and Entrepreneurship training for women in rural Belize District. This training provided these rural women with practical introductory training to computers and provided them with guidance on developing and managing small businesses. Through this initiative, the Department was able to secure 10 computers to facilitate the training which the Department is presently sustaining.

### **TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL SKILLS TRAINING**

The Women's Department continued to offer traditional (sewing, cake decorating, etc.) as well as non-traditional (auto-mechanics, laying of tiles, etc.) skills training programmes to women in urban and rural communities throughout the country. In 2008, five hundred and seventy- three (573) women participated in such programmes, while four hundred and fifty-three (453) participated in 2009.

