

SUPPORTING RECOVERY AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN BELIZE

Enabling rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic

AT A GLANCE

Country: Belize

Hazards: Hurricanes, flooding, coastal erosion, sea-level rise, coral bleaching and droughts

GFDRR Areas of Engagement: Deepening engagements in resilience to climate change

SUMMARY

Belize is exceptionally vulnerable to natural hazards, climate change and economic shocks. For this reason, planning and engaging with development partners on gender-informed, climate-resilient preparedness, recovery, and public financial management practices have been central to Belizean policy making. In this respect, as part of the country’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canada Caribbean Resilience Facility (CRF) has helped the Government of Belize to advance the design and implementation of several important initiatives including the World Bank’s Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC) financing instrument, as well as an emergency cash transfer program that is expected to benefit more than 13,000 households

CONTEXT

Belize is greatly exposed to hurricanes, flooding, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, coral bleaching, and droughts with impacts likely to intensify given expected increases in weather volatility and sea temperature shocks. Despite meeting the population criterion for small nation states—having a population less than 1.5 million—Belize has a relatively large landmass compared to other Caribbean countries, and ranks fourth after Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti. Its extensive forest, mangrove swamps, and agricultural area provide intriguing prospects for climate change mitigation. However, its low-lying topography makes it extremely vulnerable to rises in sea level: the capital city, Belize City, was moved inland to Belmopan after its inundation during hurricane Hattie in 1961. For these reasons, planning and engaging with development partners on gender-informed, climate-resilient preparedness, recovery, and public financial management practices have been central to Belizean policy making for many years, long before Belize submitted its nationally determined contribution (NDC) to the Paris Accord in 2015.



San Pedro, Montana, Belize. Photo: ZUMA Press, Inc./ Alamy. Stock Photo

TACKLING DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY GAPS

The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank established the Canada-Caribbean Resilience Facility (CRF), a bank-executed, single donor trust fund with support from Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The Trust Fund is valued at CAD 20 million—estimated USD 14.4 million—and implemented over a five-year period (FY19–FY23). The CRF was established to achieve more effective and coordinated gender-informed, climate-resilient preparedness, recovery, and public financial management practices in nine Caribbean countries. In Belize, the CRF provides support for activities that address Belize’s capacity gaps regarding technical knowledge, familiarity with the World Bank environmental and social management framework (ESMF) as well as experience with the contingent emergency response component (CERC) implementation instrument. CERC-implementing agencies have been trained on environmental and social due diligence for emergency response activities. Such measures ensure that activities implemented under CERCs are compliant with the World Bank environmental and social standards.



Photo: Caye Caulker, Belize. Source: Ian Bottle. Alamy Stock Photo.

FLEXIBLY SUPPORTING BELIZE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need to strengthen regional and national systems further for emergency and disaster response. The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted education, social protection, food, security and economic sectors, mirroring the experience faced during extreme weather events and hurricanes. It has also heightened the natural disaster risks for the Caribbean, increasing vulnerability as most of the coping mechanisms to respond to emergencies have already been fully tapped to respond to COVID-19. Overall social vulnerability has significantly increased as the poor and the most vulnerable groups have been the most seriously affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Amid the unforeseen unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic the Government of Belize requested support to activate CERC of the Climate Resilience Infrastructure Project (CRIP). In response to this request, the CRF assisted Belize with the necessary documentation for CERC activation, including the ESMF that ensures emergency response activities funded through CERC comply with environmental and social safeguards.

The CRF also initiated and supported the training of government stakeholders on environmental and social due diligence for emergency response activities. The training comprised activities geared to support farmers affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This is only the first step, as other assistance such as additional capacity building is still required to expedite the CERC activation, and the implementation of socially and environmentally compliant response activities in the agriculture sector.

ACTIVITIES

Technical assistance and implementation support for recovery and resilience-building programs:

- The CRF enabled emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic through support for the activation of CRIP's contingent emergency response component. CRIP's not-yet committed funds of USD 20.5 million was allocated to response activities, including cash transfers to poor households and support to affected farmers in Belize.
- CRIP continued the activities of CERC, including national capacity building:
 - Activities which implemented environmental and social safeguard policies mainstreaming climate resilience and gender into the public financial management cycle.
 - Technical assistance which strengthened the legal and regulatory framework for managing disaster risk financing in Belize.
 - Technical assistance which enhanced public procurement.
 - Technical assistance which improved financial management control.

RESULTS

- The COVID-19 outbreak in Belize activated USD 20.5 million from CERC under CRIP to respond to the pandemic. This program targets households screened through a poverty assessment tool, and factors households with pregnant women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. In total, more than 13,000 households in need are expected to receive cash transfers through this emergency response.
- The Building Opportunities for the Transformation Initiative was expanded. This initiative is a cash transfer program that provides small cash assistance to poor households in Belize.
- The Government of Belize conducted a post disaster public financial management review.
- The Government of Belize developed a detailed reform action plan for post disaster public financial management with CRF's support.