



Building Resilience & Ending Vulnerabilities in SIDS

Joint Programme 2022 Annual Progress Report

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UNCT/MCO: Belize

Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 December 2022

JP title: Building a resilient Belize through universal, adaptive and sustainable social protection

Stakeholder partner: National Government; Civil Society Organizations; Private sector; Bilateral aid organizations;

Thematic SDG Areas: Decent jobs & universal social protection; Digital transformation;

PUNOs: UNICEF, ILO, WFP

Total estimated expenditures: US\$ 108,492.0

Total estimated commitments (including expenditures): US\$ 290,571.0

Gender Marker: Gender-responsive (for example, the JP aimed to respond to specific gender needs, such as linking social assistance with GBV response services or maternal health support)

Resident Coordinator: Gerstenberg, Birgit

Resident Coordinator Email: erika.gerstenberg@un.org

Executive Summary

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the more recent food and energy crisis, children and families have been further affected and the necessity to accelerate results towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has never been so great. In its first year of implementation, the SDG Joint Programme (JP) “Resilient Belize” has demonstrated major progress and achievements in three main areas, including building capacities, developing partnerships, and strengthening policy and financing in social protection and economic development. The JP contributes to two key national goals, as stated in the Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS 2022-26), namely Poverty Reduction and Economic Transformation.

Notably, this first year has been marked by the partnerships and synergies generated by the JP, between the UN system and the Government of Belize (GoB), including key ministries (Human Development, Economic Development, Rural Transformation, Office of Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs) and agencies (Belize Social Security Board, Belize Trade and Investment Development Service - BELTRAIDE), which have been critical to accelerate progress of the SDGs for inclusive and resilient Belize. This collaborative environment has facilitated the recruitment of key personnel and the implementation of two trainings in the areas of Social Protection, Shock-Responsive Social Protection and Public Finance. Significant progress has also been made in strengthening policy and systems through bilateral consultations with key stakeholders to discuss the social protection landscape and engage in the definition of the Social Protection Floor (SPF) in Belize, to be embedded in a national social protection strategy. As part of building shock-responsiveness, the GoB signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) to introduce an additional financing resource for direct cash transfers to families affected by natural disaster.

Through its catalytic approach, the JP has also facilitated the mobilization of complementary resources and partnerships (line

ministries, private sector, CSOs) to further strengthen the social protection system and contribute to the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF 2022 – 2026), such as improving people’s standards of living and well-being, resilient economic growth, ensuring to leaving no one behind; and access to universal, quality, and shock-responsive, social protection, education, health, and care services. The JP has allowed the GoB to leverage other initiatives and complementary funding (SDG Development Emergency Modality, Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility-CCRIF). These synergies will support the expansion of spaces for citizen participation and representation in social policy and social protection formulation and implementation.

The JP is anchored in the objectives and principles of the MSDCF 2022 – 2026. The JP provides funding and technical assistance in the creation of decent jobs and the development of the National Social Protection Strategy, including the Social Protection Floor, and shock-responsiveness. Overall, it contributes to increase the overall efficiency of the United Nations system by applying integrated approaches to limit silos, avoiding duplications, and optimizing complementarities. To this end, the combination of three agencies is a unique set of expertise contributing towards better access to essential service delivery, human development, and economic development.

Annual Progress

Overall JP self-assessment of 2022 progress:

Satisfactory (majority of annual expected results achieved; 1 to 3 months delay in implementation)

Overall progress against 3 key results

Result 1 – Social Protection (Strategy / SPF)

Policy and system strengthening: UNICEF engaged with the GoB in a consultation process as part of the definition of the Social Protection Floor (SPF), to be embedded in a national SP strategy and contributing to the national goal of Poverty Reduction. The team engaged with key stakeholders of the Social Protection sector to reflect on the SP landscape and opportunity to establish a sustainable SPF. In the area of Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), a Memorandum of Agreement was signed between WFP and the GoB to introduce an additional financing resource for direct cash transfers to affected families, to be mobilized in the event that its sovereign Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF SPC) policy is activated by a hurricane or excessive flooding. Additionally, the GoB’s Standard Operating Procedure for Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) for 2022 has been drafted together with the Ministry of Human Development (MHD) and tested during the national response to Hurricane Lisa in November 2022. As part of the strengthening of the SP system, the JP also indirectly supported the establishment of partnerships, between UNICEF, Belize Red Cross and the financial service provider DigiWallet Limited.

Analytics: Preparatory work for the costing of the SPF has been initiated, with the development of an inception report. In addition, there has been advancements in the development of the cost assessment of the unemployment insurance, conducted with the Social Security Board.

Human Resources: In 2022, WFP’s and ILO’s technical staff established a presence in-country. In addition, the JP has facilitated the recruitment of the Social Protection Officer based within MHD, as well as the Public Financial Management Specialist to lead the of costing the SPF.

Evidence building: synergies have also been established with the SDG Development Emergency Modality JP under which analyses on the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis following the Ukraine-Russia conflict are conducted. The reports delve into how specific vulnerable groups were affected by the crisis in terms of food security, nutrition, and livelihood, present concrete recommendations on ways forward, and explore some of the implications in terms of social protection.

Capacity building: WFP implemented its training programme on “Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) in the Caribbean” which started in May 2022 with the e-learning course. It was followed by a face-to-face training in Belize in August 2022. In parallel, the blended training programme “Financing SP and key social sectors that matter for children in the post-COVID era” organized by UNICEF-ILO started in May 2022 online, followed by a face-to-face learning session in October 2022 (reports are attached). In addition, WFP’s technical support was extended to MHD in the response to Hurricane Lisa to assist in expediting household data collection for immediate relief assistance, as well as in the design, implementation, and monitoring of a fully mobile cash assistance programme to the most affected and vulnerable households using a local financial service provider (DigiWallet Limited) as a delivery payment mechanism.

Result 2 – Local Economic Development (MSMEs)

Human Resources/ Capacity building: A National Project Coordinator was engaged in October 2022 and will lead the coordination of result 2. After establishing a working group with key focal points, the recruitment of a consultant to conduct a study to identify high potential sectors to support Medium and Small Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) to recover and to grow is being finalized.

Analytics: The selection study to identify 2 strategic value chains for economic growth and employment creation is ongoing.

SDG Acceleration progress towards the SDGs, focusing on the main SDG targets

In the first year of implementation, Resilient Belize has demonstrated progress towards:

The JP engaged in developing an enabling environment for a more robust social protection system through the development of a SP strategy, defining the national SPF, including strengthening shock responsiveness. Through direct technical and financial assistance (MHD and MOF) the JP addresses policy, institutional and financial bottlenecks and expands SP coverage towards universality building the GoB's capacity to respond more effectively and timely in the event of disasters to support those who are most vulnerable and at-risk of falling deeper into poverty due to recurring shocks (SDG target 1.3).

The joint programme is also supporting the establishment of an enabling environment for job creation so that enterprises can easier scale and expand their businesses, using a systematic approach to value chain development to facilitate business operations (SDG target 8.3).

Operational and technical support in developing information systems, digital tools and payment systems, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, directly contribute to strengthening the GoB's existing operations and better equip it with preparedness measures to mitigate the impact of future shocks. The pilots that are being tested through this JP – for disaster risk financing, use of digital payment systems, digital data collection, SOPs for DRF, grievance redress, and outreach – mold the building blocks of an effective and responsive social protection system in Belize and contribute to strengthening institutional capacities within the GoB's ministries and departments that will serve beyond the life of this JP in order to better assist those who are most vulnerable and most at-risk of falling (deeper) into poverty (SDG target 13.1).

Constraints that were encountered and any adjustments that were made to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the JP and the coherence and coordination of UN system support.

A significant challenge in the implementation of the JP was the absence of the coordinator. While engaging JP coordinator was key to contribute to a smooth, timely and effective process flow to accomplish the outcomes; the two recruited candidates successively withdrew from the recruitment process. Mitigation measures have been identified by the lead agency, with the support of the PUNOs. In order to ensure the continuity of the JP, technical assistance from the PUNOs was provided to temporarily bridge the gap; UNICEF, as lead agency, also reorganized the team structure to prioritize the JP, with the support of the lead Ministry.

In November, Hurricane Lisa, a category 1 storm made landfall in Belize, which resulted in the postponement of activities, in order to prioritize the response. In particular, the lead ministry had to reprioritize its time and resources to the national Hurricane Lisa response and recovery efforts. Similarly, PUNOs under the JP had to reorganize activities to support the government's efforts. In particular, the annual social protection conference, along with a thematic training have been postponed to April 2023.

Next steps, scaling and sustainability [up to half a page]

Result 1 - The social protection policy framework and institutional capacities are strengthened, through the development of the National SP Strategy, inclusive of the SPF, to support the Government of Belize's commitment to the SDGs through universal, responsive, adequate and sustainable social protection.

- The Cost Assessment for the Implementation of the Unemployment Insurance is in progress and will be submitted to the Belize Social Security Board early 2023 (Q1).
- The Social Protection Strategy, which will establish the foundations for more integrated and coherent SP programmes, and leading to improved social protection coverage; will be finalized and costed (Q1-Q4)
- Two social protection events will be held in April and November 2023, and two capacity building exercises will be organized (Q2 and Q3);
- A coordination mechanism for the SP sector will be established;

- Lessons from the pilots through this JP will be continuously tested and enhanced to guide the design of future programs and strategies for shock-responsive social protection (Q1-Q4); and a digital payment ecosystem assessment will be done upon completion of the cash assistance program (Q1).
- Recruitment of the JP coordinator (Q1-Q2).

Result 2 - Male and female entrepreneurs whose incomes and livelihoods were further devastated by COVID-19 will have access to a strengthened environment for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), to enable their growth and to reduce their vulnerability to shocks.

- Recruitment of the consultant within a VCD approach (in Q1 and Q2 2023);
- Capacity and processes of targeted municipalities, representatives of youth and women and other key LED actors, will be strengthened: it will be ensured that i/ 30 persons of which 30% women and youth members of LED actors/structures receive training on entrepreneurship, formalization, or value chain development, ii/ one LED actors/structures conducted capacity needs assessments on institutional formalization support; and iii/ two LED structures are strengthened to improve administration and follow up of decisions and programmes;
- To facilitate the implementation of Result 2, the dedicated technical working group will strengthen synergies with key line ministries and NGOs who are engaging in the value chain area.

Programmatic Survey

Total number of people benefited from the JP in 2022: 7343

Percentage (%) of women benefited among the total number:

Percentage (%) of children & youth (0-24 years of age) benefited among the total number:

Percentage (%) of older persons (age 60 and above) benefited among the total number:

Percentage (%) of persons with disabilities benefited among the total number:

Explain how people benefited from the joint programme.

Beneficiaries include both officers at institutional level, and cash transfers beneficiaries. The support was provided through trainings, direct technical/operational assistance, and direct cash assistance programmes.

Capacity building support through trainings (WFP, UNICEF, ILO) and direct operational assistance = 43 (30F;13M)

Direct beneficiaries = 1,600 households or an estimated 6,400 individuals affected by Hurricane Lisa (gender, age, and disability disaggregation to follow after post-distribution monitoring); 331 Households (900 children) from migrant families.

Given that the JP aims at strengthening national systems to respond to persons living in situations of vulnerability, indirect beneficiaries of the programme are estimated at 153,000. This number represents persons living in poverty and who can benefit from enhanced service delivery by the government.

Priority Cross-cutting Issues

Cross-cutting results/issues

Gender equality and women empowerment/ youth: Social protection is an investment to achieve national sustainable development priorities, including in the area of reducing poverty as well as decent work and economic growth. Within the 2030 Agenda and SDGs framework, this joint work among UNICEF, WFP and ILO materialized through an inclusive and nationally driven process that guarantees equality, non-discrimination and participation and as such, it assists the GOB to address key issues of the MSMEs that includes women, youth and other vulnerable persons working to improve and strengthen national social protection mechanisms targeting those living in poor situations. Unemployment generally is expected to grow given the impact of COVID-19, and therefore, this joint work is contributing to building resilience and ending vulnerabilities.

Leaving no one behind: The UN is the guarantor of rights-based approaches and supports the GoB in adopting a systems approach focusing on a long-term vision to Leaving no one behind (LNOB). This strategic collaboration between UN agencies and the GoB through the establishment of a high-level Steering Committee (SC) ensures the right application of the LNOB principles by targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized through the JP. The SC, co-chaired by the Ministry of Human Development and UNICEF, comprises key stakeholders, including five ministries (Human Development, Economic Development, Rural Transformation, Foreign Affairs, Office of the Prime Minister), national agencies (Social Security Board, BELTRADE), and UN agencies (UNICEF, WFP, ILO, supported by the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator); the first meeting of the SC was organized in July 2022. Efforts will also include initiatives that will encompass indigenous populations in Belize.

Human rights: Social protection is a human right as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “Resilient Belize” has been developed and implemented based on the recommendations of human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies and labour conventions and standards. Within this context, it contributes to address structural drivers of exclusion, inequalities and/ or discrimination in social protection, through the development of solid social protection foundations on the path to universality. This has been materialized through the engagement with stakeholders as part of the formulation of the SPF, shock-responsiveness activities, with financing options for sustainable implementation.

How did the JP apply the Gender Marker

The JP is Gender-responsive (for example, the JP aimed to respond to specific gender needs, such as linking social assistance with GBV response services or maternal health support). Policy dialogues, advocacy (e.g. direct inputs to national policies, strategies, laws, including women’s and girls’ rights groups in coordination mechanisms);

JP address the below cross-cutting issues and principles of leaving no one behind

Human Rights	Persons with disabilities	Youth	Environmental and social standards
Yes	No	No	No

Key meetings and events organized in 2022

JP steering committee/ programme board meeting	Strategic partners/ donors event	Kick-off meeting
Yes, in 2022	No, but planned in 2023	Yes, in 2022

Explanation if you have not held any key meeting/events.

NA

Contribution to enhancing SDG Financing

Drafted a bill, strategy, and/or approved a law increasing the fiscal space for the policy focus	Produced financing, costing, diagnostic and feasibility analyses as a basis to invest or increase spending on the SDGs	Improved efficiency (cost savings) in the management of programmes/schemes	Improved effectiveness (value for money; i.e. social impact of \$1 spent) of spending	Drafted policies/regulatory frameworks or developed tools to incentivize private sector investment on the SDGs	Structured new financial instruments (public, private or blended) to leverage additional funding
Yes	No	No	No	No	No

How JP contributed to enhancing SDG financing

The JP, through the development of the national SP strategy and the definition, costing and implementation of the SPF, contributes to enhancing SDG financing.

The most relevant partnerships include key stakeholders involved in policy, planning, programming and implementing SP, including Ministry of Human Development, Ministry of Economic Development, Office of Prime Ministry, Social Security Board, National Health Insurance. All these key stakeholders will be part of the national SP coordination mechanisms being created under the JP, to oversee the national SP system.

Stakeholders are engaged in the consultation process to define and cost the national SP strategy, inclusive of the SPF. While SP , and the SPF, are directly linked to SDG 1, No Poverty, it also contributes to a wide range of SDGs, including Health, Decent Job, Education, Reduced Inequalities, Gender Equality, among others.