



# Ministry of Rural Transformation

Community Development, Labour and Local Government

## **ANNUAL TECHNICAL REPORT**

**2023 - 2024**

**MINISTRY OF RURAL TRANSFORMATION,  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, LABOUR, AND  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

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## Message from the Minister



**Hon. Oscar Requena**

This is our third year in office, and we continue to make bold steps in meeting the mandate of our Ministry. We are exerting tremendous efforts in transforming rural communities, making meaningful reforms to the labour market, and building capacity of our municipalities. The overarching twin goals of poverty reduction and economic growth of our government's Medium Term Development Strategy remains on the forefront of our mind. We continue to implement our Ministry's strategic plan while engaging all partners in government, civil society, and private sector. Working together, we can realize our common goal of national development and prosperity.

Our Ministry continues to maintain a streamlined approach to our work guided by clear goals and objectives. Annually, our departments develop clear work programmes which we check regularly for implementation. This is now the third annual report of our administration, and we are proud to showcase the meaningful changes we have undertaken through our Ministry. Our Labour Department continues to undertake major and significant initiatives that will have deep and lasting impact on our society and economy. One of our biggest achievements this year was the enactment of the \$5 minimum wage as we promised in #planBelize. We continue to improve the efficiencies of our services. The next fiscal year will see more work on enhancing the labour market by addressing the challenges associated with labour force participation especially for youth and women. In the local government sector, we continue to focus on building the capacities of our municipalities while advancing infrastructure works and climate resilience.

In the rural sector, we have made major advances to promote rural economic development, expansion, and increased efficiency of water services. For the first time the Rural Department has a Rural Water Services Manager who is charged with managing all water boards and services as a singular unit. The financial sustainability of water boards and consistency of service is of paramount importance to long term growth. We continue to complement the work of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing with our village roads and streets programmes. Given the expanse of the country, there is obviously much more work to be done. The trade license reform we are currently undertaking, which will see additional resources directed to rural communities through trade license fees as almost complete as it is now in the Senate. We continue to work with all our partners, stakeholders, and internal team to advance the work of our Ministry and as such I want to thank each and everyone who has contributed in some way to our success. Together, we continue to build a Belize that works for everyone.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ATIPS	Anti-Trafficking in Persons
BZD	Belize dollar
BWSL	Belize Water Services Limited
BWSU	Belize Water Services Union
5Cs	Caribbean Community Climate Change Center
CABEI	Central American Bank for Economic Integration
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CGA	Citrus Growers Association
CSCPA	Corozal Sugar Cane Producers Association
CWU	Christian Worker's Union
DAVCO	District Association of Village Councils
DWCP	Decent Work Country Program
GCF	Green Climate Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization
KRA	Key Result Areas
LGO	Local Government Officer
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
MTDS	Medium-Term Development Strategy
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRTCDLLG	Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government
NAVCO	National Association of Village Councils
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PES	Public Employment Service Unit
PSCPA	Progressive Sugar Cane Producers Association
RWSSU	Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Unit
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSB	Social Security Board
TEP	Temporary Employment Permit
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry has successfully concluded a year marked by extensive operational engagements across its core departments: the Department of Local Government, the Labour Department, and the Rural Transformation Department. The Ministry's key priorities are as follows: a) Policy and Legislative Reform, b) a Digitization Program, c) Financial Sustainability of Village Councils of Water Boards, e) Strategic Rural Development, and f) Reorganization and Strengthening of Technical Capacity.

These efforts are strategically guided by the Ministry's overarching Strategic Plan, which is in alignment with the national agenda outlined in the Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS), derived from the government's #planBelize Manifesto. The Ministry's mandate encompasses enhancing service delivery in urban and rural areas, alongside advancing worker incomes, and safeguarding their legal rights.

The Ministry has demonstrated remarkable progress in its collaborative efforts with international organizations, local partners, and Government Ministries to enhance governance and administration within Belize's municipalities. Spearheaded by the Department of Local Government, the ministry has identified key result areas to drive progress over the next three years. Notably, initiatives to bolster climate resilience in municipalities have been advanced through partnerships with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (5Cs), with concept notes submitted for funding consideration. Financial management across municipalities has seen notable improvements, evidenced by enhanced revenue collection rates and property tax collection. Capacity building efforts, including training initiatives in climate financing and soft skills development, have aimed to empower stakeholders and foster collaborative efforts for socio-economic development. Substantial progress has been made in promoting local governance reforms, exemplified by advancements in Trade License Reform and Municipal Boundaries Re-Delineation. Moreover, strides in digitalization efforts, such as partnerships with the E-Governance Unit and the adoption of digital tools like QuickBooks, underscore a commitment to modernizing municipal operations for improved service delivery and operational efficiency.

Under the Labour Department, the Ministry has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to fostering a labour market environment that prioritizes the safety, security, and productivity of workers and employers while safeguarding their rights. Over the fiscal period, significant strides have been made across various key areas. In the area of Industrial and Employment Relations, the Department conducted rigorous monitoring activities, including labour inspections, and addressing labour complaints, resulting in the resolution of numerous cases and the collection of \$64,283.28 on behalf of workers. Efforts to promote Safe and Healthy workplaces were evident through extensive labour education sessions, reviewing employment policies and contracts, and facilitating the signing of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) benefitting hundreds of workers.

In its efforts to eradicate Child Labour, the Department spearheaded various initiatives including the signing memorandums of understanding with key industry associations. Likewise, the Department made significant strides in Legal Reform and Policy Development, including implementing the minimum wage increase, advancing the Decent Work Country Programme, and reintroducing the Occupational Safety and Health Bill, all aimed at creating a more equitable, inclusive, and compliant labour environment aligned with international standards. The

Labour Department's multifaceted approach underscores its dedication to promoting fairness, safety, and prosperity within Belize's labour landscape, positioning the nation for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The Rural Transformation Department is comprised of the Rural Development Department and the Rural Water Sanitation and Supply Unit (RWSSU). This Department has been instrumental in fostering comprehensive development across Belize's rural landscape, focusing on village governance, economic empowerment, and water supply management. Collaborating closely with the Department of Local Government, local government bodies and village councils, the department has facilitated impactful initiatives, fostering a conducive environment for holistic growth.

As it relates to village governance, efforts were directed towards enhancing financial accountability and capacity building. Noteworthy is the disbursement of liquor license revenues to village councils, with substantial increases witnessed in certain districts, reflecting localized economic activities. Promoting economic development in rural sectors has been a cornerstone of the department's endeavours, evident in the substantial investments made towards community infrastructure. Addressing water supply challenges remains a priority, with oversight of water boards and collaborative efforts towards system upgrades and expansions. Notable achievements include increased revenue collection by water boards, attributed partly to advocacy for metering initiatives. Rehabilitation projects, funded by various stakeholders have significantly enhanced water accessibility and quality in underserved communities.

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Unit's (RWSSU) proactive approach, exemplified by preventive maintenance activities and strategic investments in equipment and infrastructure, underscores a commitment to ensuring sustainable water access for all. The Department's multifaceted approach to rural development, encompassing governance reform, economic empowerment and water management has yielded tangible benefits for Belize's rural populace. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement, and proactive interventions, the department continues to be at the forefront of fostering positive change, thereby contributing significantly to Belize's sustainable development goals.

Throughout the year, numerous insights were gained, and lessons learnt, shaping the Ministry's ambitious agenda for the future. This includes considering that legislation must reflect current realities, that strong leadership is critical in driving a national development agenda at the local level, and the ongoing drive to enhance digital services ministry-wide.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour, and Local Government is one of the many executive arms of the Government of Belize. The Ministry is headed by a Minister, a Minister of State, and the Chief Executive Officer. The Ministry has had various configurations in the past, but for the most part, rural development, local government, and labour have all remained under the same parent Ministry.

The focus of our programs is shaped by the Ministry's Strategic Plan, which is aligned with the national strategy, the MTDS, derived from the government's #planBelize Manifesto. The Ministry's mandate entails enhancing service quality in both urban and rural areas, elevating worker income, and safeguarding their legal rights as mandated by law. Despite progress, poverty remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural regions and certain urban areas. Consequently, addressing socio-economic hurdles in these areas is of paramount importance. We maintain active engagement with new and existing partners and donors, while also seeking collaboration from other ministries to effectively address the needs of rural and urban communities.

This report offers an overview of our significant activities and highlights accomplishments across the Ministry's main programs over the last fiscal year. It also reflects on lessons learned and identifies key changes to be implemented within the departments and the Ministry to enhance public service delivery and improve the quality of life for citizens. Moreover, it outlines future priorities and plans, which will be further developed and implemented in the upcoming fiscal year.

## 2 MISSION STATEMENT AND PRIORITIES OF THE MINISTRY

The Mission of the Ministry is as follows:

*The Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour, and Local Government is committed to building sustainable and resilient communities in Belize through improved local governance, labour administration, and community development.*

The Key Priorities of the Ministry include the following:

1. **Policy and Legislative Reform** – The Ministry is working to address major aspects in local governance, labour, and rural development both in policy and legislation. In all three departments, the Ministry is working to amend, revise, and update legislation to provide clearer provisions and requirements, empower citizens, strengthen sanctions, and strengthen oversight capacity.

2. **Digitization Program** – The Ministry has a strong program to digitize processes and procedures to improve the efficiency and quality of services provided to the public at all levels in the labour, rural and municipal governance sectors.
3. **Financial Sustainability** – The Ministry deems the financial sustainability of water boards village councils, towns, and city councils to be critical. There are several interventions underway to address this issue directly.
4. **Strategic Rural Development** – The Ministry will begin work on developing a roadmap that clearly articulates the development needs of rural areas based on sound research, from which specific and pragmatic interventions will be carried out under a clear collaborative mechanism to ensure maximum impact, resulting in sustainable growth and poverty reduction.
5. **Reorganization and Strengthening of Technical Capacity** – The structures in place at all departments within the Ministry have not kept up with the demands placed on the Ministry, but also due to a lack of strategic planning by previous administration to improve the services provided by the Ministry. There is a need to realign administrative structures, recruit new staff, and improve the overall organizational structure.

### **3 MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS**

Throughout this year, the MRTCDLLG continued working with numerous international organizations, local civil society partners, and Ministries within the Government of Belize to achieve the following outcomes.

#### **3.1 Local Government**

The Department of Local Government is responsible for overseeing the governance and administration of all Town and City Councils in Belize. The Department is mandated to provide support, monitoring, guidance, and capacity-building initiatives for the Town and City Councils of Belize. This entails improving adherence to reporting requirements, legal obligations, administrative efficiency, and management efficacy. The overarching objective is to enhance service delivery and ensure the sustainable development of municipalities across Belize.

Over the last three fiscal periods, the Department has been working and improving its efforts to enhance its internal capabilities to support municipal governments with sustainable municipal financing and the bolstering of urban climate resilience. The governance of the nine Town City Councils is guided by the municipal legislations, supported by various regulations, such as the Belize City Council Act, the Belmopan City Council Act, and the Town Council Act for the seven towns all part of the Revised Edition of the Laws of Belize, 2020.

The following Key Result Areas (KRA) are the primary drivers of the Department's work over the next three years:



- a) Climate Resiliency for the Urban Sector
- b) Sustainable Municipal Financing
- c) Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening
- d) Legal and Policy Reform
- e) Digitalization of Municipal Operations

### **A.) Climate Resiliency for the Urban Sector**

**Municipal Climate Resiliency Project** – In collaboration with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (5Cs), the Department developed a concept note for the advancement of Municipal Climate Resiliency Initiative to support climate resiliency for municipalities which was submitted to the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) under the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF is to consider funding for the development of a full-scale project proposal development. Consultations were carried out and in the second quarter of the fiscal year the MED also submitted the Concept Note to the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) who is to consider providing funding for the development of feasibility studies for the proposed projects that are outlined in the Concept Note. Once approved, the project is expected to directly benefit four out of the nine municipalities. Its primary focus will be on constructing climate-resilient infrastructure, enhancing institutional capacity, and facilitating policy development and planning to alleviate the effects of climate change. This includes consolidating and improving existing planning frameworks.

### **B.) Sustainable Municipal Financing**

**Municipal Financial Management** - The Department continues working closely with municipalities to tackle financial challenges by overseeing their operational surplus/deficit and overall financial performance. For the year 2023, the highest revenue Councils were the Belize City Council and San Pedro Town Council. Meanwhile the councils with the lowest revenue were the Punta Gorda Town Council and Benque Viejo Town Council.

According to the performance indicators (as shown in the below table) monitored by the Department, which include Revenue Collection Rate (budget vs. actual), the San Pedro Town Council outperforms all councils with an average rate of 118%. The Benque Viejo Town Council and the Orange Walk Town Council have shown significant improvement with a rate of 107%. For the property tax collection rate (budget vs. actual), the San Pedro Town Council similarly outperforms all other councils whilst Benque Viejo Town Council is the second best performing with an outstanding rate of 120%.

Table 1. Performance Indicators for Revenue Collection during 2018-19 and 2022-23 Period

Performance Indicators - Averages for last 5 Fiscal Years (2018-19 to 2022-23)											
	Bze City	Belmopan	Corozal	Orange Walk	San Ignacio	Benque	Dangriga	Punta Gorda	San Pedro	Overall Average	
Ratios on key areas of:											
Revenue											
1	Overall Revenue Collection Rate (Budg. Vs. Actual)	92%	72%	99%	107%	84%	107%	91%	74%	118%	91%
2	Revenue Collection Rate - Property Tax	83%	57%	73%	62%	67%	120%	73%	50%	172%	73%
3	Revenue Collection - Traffic	91%	99%	96%	123%	92%	116%	119%	89%	112%	103%
4	Revenue Collection - Licenses	93%	81%	118%	106%	89%	98%	96%	88%	121%	96%
Expenditure											
5	Emoluments to Revenue	36%	64%	49%	49%	51%	55%	54%	69%	42%	53%
6	Maintenance Cost to Revenue	9%	10%	8%	9%	16%	7%	8%	11%	14%	10%
7	Operational Cost to Revenue	6%	7%	12%	7%	9%	12%	9%	9%	9%	9%
8	Administrative Cost to Revenue	7%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	3%	5%	4%	5%

### C.) Capacity Building & Institutional Strengthening of Municipalities

The Department’s staff participated in several capacity building and institutional strengthening initiatives during this fiscal year. These sessions included capacity building in climate financing and the project development process and proposal writing. Staff also participated in soft skills development training including training in Microsoft Office 365 and City Planning. In January 2024, the Department conducted a series of joint training workshops for all newly appointed trade and liquor licensing boards, supporting agencies and members of local government and rural development staff. Sessions were held in all 9 municipalities and in Caye Caulker Village Council. The sessions for this year were supported by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIPS) Council. The training focused on the key provisions of the Trade and Liquor Licensing Acts and the roles and functions of the supporting agencies: Police, Fire, Public Health, and the Environment departments. In addition, the stakeholders heard presentation from the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council. The purpose of the training was to build awareness and sensitization amongst stakeholders with the aim of strengthening collaborative efforts for enhanced citizen security and an enabling socio-economic environment.

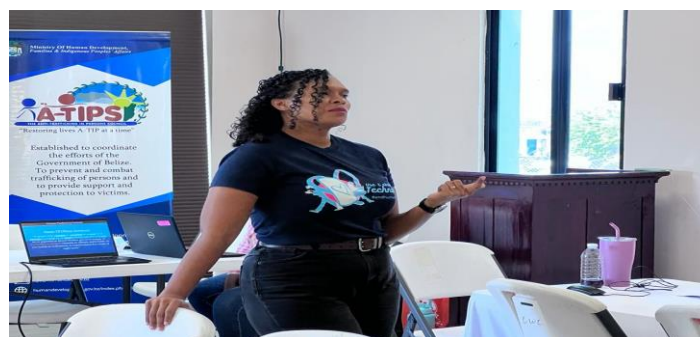


Fig. 1. Training for Trade & Liquor Licensing Boards

In March, staff along with members appointed for the Annual Board of Survey participated in a refresher training on the processes, procedures and reporting format for the Board of Surveys that are conducted on the first working day of April in the new fiscal year. The online training was hosted by the Asset and Utilities Unit of the Ministry of Finance and the Audit Department with the support from the Department. Over thirty (30) participants took part in the training.

At the municipal level, the Department completed several in-service training sessions with the Councils. Particularly, local government staff worked very closely with the staff of the Caye Caulker Village Council, Punta Gorda Town Council, San Pedro Town Council, Dangriga Town Council and Benque Viejo Town Council. Members of these councils benefitted from capacity building in QuickBooks usage and in accounts management. As a result of these sessions, the Department is now receiving monthly financial reports on a timelier basis and the municipal authorities are now able to receive real-time and up-to-date financial reports for improved decision making.

#### **D.) Legal and Policy Reform**

The Department continues its endeavours to collaborate closely with town and city councils throughout all municipalities to promote substantial reforms in local governance. The primary initiatives pursued this fiscal year are the following:

**Trade License Reform** – After an intensive year of work, the Trade License Bill, 2024 is now at the House of Senate in the National Assembly for consideration for final reading. Simultaneously, the Department is currently working with the Office of the Solicitor General for the drafting of the Regulations to support the new Trade Licensing legislation. Once passed in the House of Senate the new legislation becomes effective for enactment on January 1, 2025.

**Municipal Boundaries Re-Delineation Exercise** – In 2021, the Department received approval from the Cabinet to move forward with the Municipal Boundaries Delineation Exercise. Throughout 2022/23, consultation sessions were conducted with all seven participating municipalities and the relevant Village Councils that border these towns. Over the past fiscal period the Land Information Center in the Ministry of Natural Resources supported the Department to develop and finalize the proposed maps and technical descriptions.

In March of 2024 Cabinet approved the proposed expanded town boundaries. These proposals will now be taken for public sensitization in the first quarter of the new fiscal year. It is anticipated that the Statutory Instrument will be signed for the establishment of new municipal boundaries before the end of the second quarter in fiscal year 2024–2025.

**Parking Meters** - With the concurrence of the Ministry of Transport, all Town and City Councils received the greenlight to conduct pilot exercises in consideration of the application of parking meters within city and town limits. To date only the Belize City Council and San Pedro Town Councils have implemented the pilot project and continue to apply this service in the

respective communities. The Department of Transport has been tasked to develop and establish supporting legislation and regulations to support the establishment and operations of parking meters for municipalities. These regulations have not yet been developed.

**Transport at Border Points Regulations (Axle Fees)** - The Corozal Town Council and the Benque Viejo Town Council raised concerns to the MRTCDLLG and the Department of Transport regarding the current situation surrounding axle fee collection at the Northern and Western borders, respectively. Under the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, truckers entering Belize are required to pay axle fees to these municipalities. Principally, the councils have lamented the loss of revenue due to many international truckers now obtaining Belizean license plates for their vehicles. This development is viewed unfavourably by the councils as it results in revenue loss while the trucks continue to inflict significant damage on municipal infrastructure and create disturbances while passing through these towns. MRTCDLLG is working together with the Department of Transport to address this issue.

**Municipal Building Units** – In accordance with the Building Act, Town and City Councils have the authority to establish a Municipal Building Unit. However, the Central Building Authority (CBA), responsible for administering the Building Act, is tasked with vetting these units to assess their eligibility and capacity to manage local building permitting processes. Since 2021, several councils have expressed concerns regarding the CBA's management of the vetting process and the subsequent disqualification of multiple Municipal Building Units. This issue has led to dissatisfaction among the town and city councils, as they have lost this functionality and the associated revenue. Consequently, the councils have sought the MRTCDLLG's assistance in resolving this impasse with the CBA and/or the Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing.

### **E.) Digitalization of Municipal Operations**

As a key result area of the Department's strategic plan, efforts continue to be made to enhance the Department's digital capacity. In this regard, the Department has enhanced its partnership and collaboration with the E-Governance Unit. During this fiscal year the unit has worked diligently to advance the Data Protection Act and Digital Government Act. These two pieces of enabling legislation is intended to support Government's plan to enhance the use of innovation and technology to provide better services and improve the administration and management of the public service. To this end, the E-Governance Unit is currently implementing a project entitled, '*E-Governance Business On-line Portal*'. The project intends to make twenty (20) services provided by Government be available using online portals. Trade Licensing has been identified as one of those services that is to benefit from this project. This year, the Minister and the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry attended the Zero-City Summit that was held in the Republic of China, Taiwan. The Minister participated in a panel discussion that focused on zero-carbon emissions. The presentation provided a snapshot of Belize's efforts to support to advance zero-carbon emissions and our current cities in advancing these initiatives. In addition, the Minister presented on the Government's broader Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in its mitigation and adaptation efforts to combat climate change. At the municipal level, the Department worked diligently to continue advocate for the increased use of technology. In this

fiscal period, support was particularly provided to the Punta Gorda Town Council to enhance their usage of QuickBooks. However, efforts remain pending to improve the inter-operability of the technology currently being used by the councils.

### 3.2 Labour

The primary mandate of the Labour Department is to establish a labour market environment that prioritizes the safety, security, and productivity of workers and employers while safeguarding their rights. During this fiscal period, the Department enforced labour laws and regulations, advocated for workplace safety and wellness, delivered employment assistance, and facilitated constructive dialogue between workers and employers.

The following are the KRAs that will guide the work for the department for the next three years:

- Industrial and Employment Relations
- Promoting safe and healthy workplaces
- Complying with International Labour Standards to eradicate Child Labour
- Providing employment services
- Legal Reform and Policy Development

#### A.) Industrial and Employment Relations

During this fiscal period, the Labour Department carried out numerous monitoring activities. These included inspecting workplaces to ensure adherence to labour laws and regulations, addressing labour complaints lodged in the Labor Complaints Management System to resolve cases of wrongful termination, and processing temporary employment permits. Additionally, the department conducted educational sessions on labour laws and regulations and enforced these laws by monitoring employment practices, reviewing collective agreements, and handling grievances.

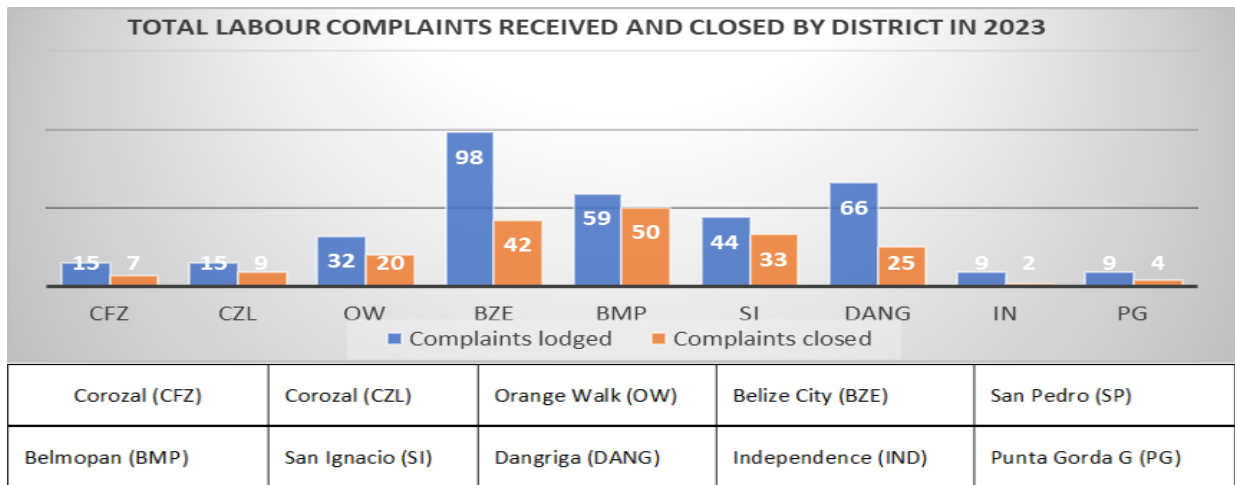


Fig. 2 : Total Inspections conducted by District – Year 2023

**Labour Inspections** – In accordance with Section 8 of the Labour Act, Chapter 297 of the laws of Belize Revised Edition 2020 and Article 3 of the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), a total of 1,078 inspections were conducted across the country for this fiscal period. The Department remained vigilant in safeguarding the well-being of workers and ensuring

compliance with safety standards and labour laws. The graph below illustrates the number of inspections conducted by districts throughout the country for the year 2023.

**Labour Complaints** – A total of 350 complaints were received and investigated this fiscal period. A total of 192 cases were settled and a total of \$64,283.28 were collected on behalf of workers. The Department provided and continues to provide a vital platform for addressing grievances and seeking redress.



**Fig. 3 Total Labour Complaints received and addressed by district in 2023.**

**Labour Complaints Tribunal** - Throughout the year 2023, the Labour Complaints Tribunal managed a total of 103 complaints, closed 75 cases, and continued to work on the remaining 28 cases lodged for wrongful termination and unfair dismissal. It also issued 135 orders, it had several pre-hearings and hearings to facilitate dialogue and resolve disputes fairly. The Labour Complaints Tribunal serves as a mechanism for impartially resolving complaints related to unfair dismissal or wrongful termination.

**Labour Advice** – The Department served and continues to serve as support to the workforce, offering advice on a labour-related issues. From clarifying workplace rights and responsibilities to navigating employment regulations, ensuring stakeholders were well-informed and equipped to uphold fair and just practices. In 2023, the Department provided essential guidance to employers, workers, and the public, providing a total of 6,796 advice services. These efforts aimed to enhance understanding, compliance, and empowerment regarding labour laws and regulations in Belize. By addressing concerns promptly and proactively, the department plays an important role in preventing disputes and fostering harmonious work environments.

**B.) Promotion of Safe and Healthy Workplaces**

**Labour Education** – The Department conducted 261 educational sessions, providing invaluable insights into labour laws and best practices, reaching over 6,877 persons. These sessions served as platforms for knowledge dissemination, empowering workers with the information needed to

safeguard their rights and interests effectively. By facilitating dialogue and sharing expertise, the department strengthened the foundation of labour awareness and advocacy, fostering a culture of compliance and mutual respect in workplaces.



**Fig. 4 Labour education session with Caye Chapel workers**

**Employment Contract and Employment Policy** - In the pursuit of fostering harmonious and fair workplaces, the Department engaged in reviewing employment policies and contracts to promote mutual benefit and for all stakeholders.

- **Employment Policy:** In 2023, the Labour Department diligently worked on reviewing employment policies aimed at promoting fair employment practices. A total of 32 policies were reviewed countrywide, focusing on principles that uphold workers' rights, and ensure the well-being of all workers.
- **Employment Contracts:** Recognizing the pivotal role of employment contracts in defining the terms and conditions of work, the Department dedicated efforts to review and attest 46 contracts countrywide.

**Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)** – The Department plays a vital role in the signing of CBAs to ensure compliance with the Trade Unions and Employers’ Organizations (Registration, Recognition and Status), Chapter 304, Revised Edition 2020 and promoting industrial peace and harmony. In 2023, the Department signed the following CBAs:

1. Belize Water Services Limited (BWSL) and the Belize Water Services Workers Union (BWSU) in August 2023 for 309 permanent workers.
2. The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) and the Public Service Union of Belize (PSU) for 114 workers.
3. Belize Social Security Board (SSB) and the Christian Workers Union (CWU) in December 2023 for 170 permanent workers.

These agreements benefited hundreds of workers, creating a spirit of cooperation and compromise between unions and employers. By addressing workers' needs while ensuring organizational viability, CBAs promote stability, fairness, and prosperity within Belize's labour landscape.



**Fig. 5 CBA signing with BWSL and BWSU**



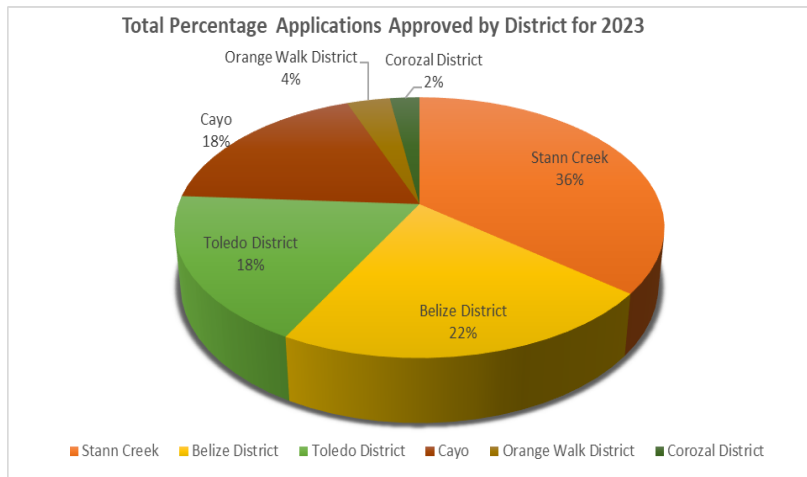
**Fig. 6 CBA signing with BAHA and PSU**



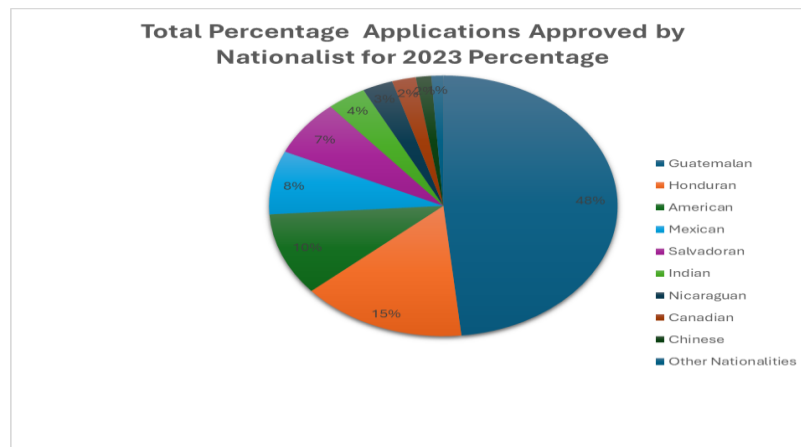
**Fig. 7 CBA signed with SSB and CWU**



**Temporary Employment Permit (TEP)** – In 2023, the Department facilitated the processing of a total of 2,524 applications, with 2,472 approvals and 52 denials, significantly contributing to employment opportunities. Noteworthy observations include the highest number of applications approved was in February 2023, totalling 285. This was followed by August 2023 and March 2023. Likewise, the largest number of permits approved was from the Stann Creek District whilst the Corozal District had the least permits approved. Among the total applications approved, the highest number, 1,091 (48%), were for Guatemalan nationals. This was followed by Honduran (15%), American (10%), Mexican (8%), Salvadoran (7%), Indian (4%), Nicaraguan (3%), Canadian (2%), whilst the Chinese, British, Cuban, Filipino, German, Colombian, Lebanese, South African, and Turkish constitute other nationalities which collectively accounted 1%. The Majority approved applications were Farmhand, which primarily consisted of Crop Farm Labourers (Banana, Citrus, etc.). Other notable occupations included Missionary, Volunteers, Building frame and related worker, Religious Professional, among others. The below charts illustrate the total percentage of applications approved by District for the year 2023 as well as the percentage of applications approved by nationality.



**Fig. 8 Total Percentage of applications approved by district.**



**Fig. 9 Total Percentage of applications approved by nationality.**

**Promoting Industrial Harmony** - In June 2023, the Essential Services Arbitration Tribunal (ESAT) was reinstated. The Department responded proactively to industrial concerns raised by the CWU regarding disputes and the Department took steps to resolve these disputes and encourage industrial harmony.

#### **Advancing Workplace Health and Inclusivity -**

- **HIV/AIDS Workplace Program Training:** The Labour Department, in collaboration with the National AIDS Commission (NAC), was pleased to relaunch the HIV/AIDS Workplace Program by hosting a certified two-day HIV Policy and Procedures training for Labour Officers, facilitated by Ms. Stephanie Jimenez, a Certified Consultant. The training also covered the fundamentals of HIV/AIDS and provided officers with policy advice for dealing with HIV/AIDS issues in the workplace. Given the significant effect of HIV/AIDS on workplaces and the economy, including absenteeism and staff turnover, the training aimed to equip Labour Officers and Employment Officers to provide guidance to organization's focal points on the development and implementation of an HIV/AIDS Workplace Program.



**Fig. 10 HIV Aids workplace program Training**

- **HIV/AIDS Policy in the Workplace Initiative:** In a collaborative endeavour, the Ministry and the National AIDS Commission made efforts to combat HIV/AIDS within the workforce through the HIV/AIDS Workplace Program held in February 2023. This program aimed to enhance the work environment's inclusivity and support, directly addressing HIV/AIDS-related challenges. The initiative included certified training seminars for representatives from 12 companies and organizations, focusing on HIV/AIDS policy, employee rights protection, and well-being. The training led to the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) by participants, marking a stance against HIV/AIDS in the workplace and aligning with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) guidelines.

#### **C.) Complying with International Labour Standards to eradicate Child Labour**

**Child Labour** - On July 18th, 2022, the Ministry launched the new Belize National Child Labour Policy and Strategy 2022-2025. The policy was funded and developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the

Government of Belize. This fiscal period, the Department carried out the following initiatives to support its effort in eradicating child labour:

**Commemoration of World Day Against Child Labour** - On June 12th, 2023, The Ministry Commemorated World Day Against Child Labour with the theme "Social Justice for All! End Child Labour!" This event, held in collaboration with stakeholders and students from Escuela Mexico High School in San Roman, Corozal District, served as a reminder of the importance of children's rights.



**Fig. 11 Commemoration ceremony for world day against child labour**

- **Regional Initiative Latin America & the Caribbean Free of Child Labour** - On May 24, 2023, Belize became the 31st country to join “The Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour”. The Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour brings together countries, workers, and employers to combat child labour. The initiative's commitment remains strong, with 31 countries working together to ensure children and teenagers are not subjected to harmful work. This collaborative effort aims to create a promising future for the youth of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Child Labour Awareness Campaign** - To reinforce its commitment, the Department spearheaded a "Child Labour Awareness and Education Campaign". The ILO Office provided the Labour Department with technical and financial support for promoting the “child labour awareness and education campaign” and “social justice for all to end child labour”. A total of 19 high schools and 1750 students were provided with child labour education sessions. As part of this awareness campaign, the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with the students at the Alvin L. Young Nazarene High School produced an animated video describing the cause of the issue of child labour and the worst form of child labour. Similarly, a student posters competition provided a dynamic platform for student engagement and advocacy. On November 6, 2024, Students were tasked with creating posters advocating for an end to child labour, with the first-place entry displayed on billboards across Belize, amplifying public awareness of this critical issue. The first prize was won by Valentino Vernon Jr., a student from Toledo Community High School,

the second prize by Cristy Isabella Avilez of Sacred Heart High School and the third prize by James Mena from Ladyville High School.

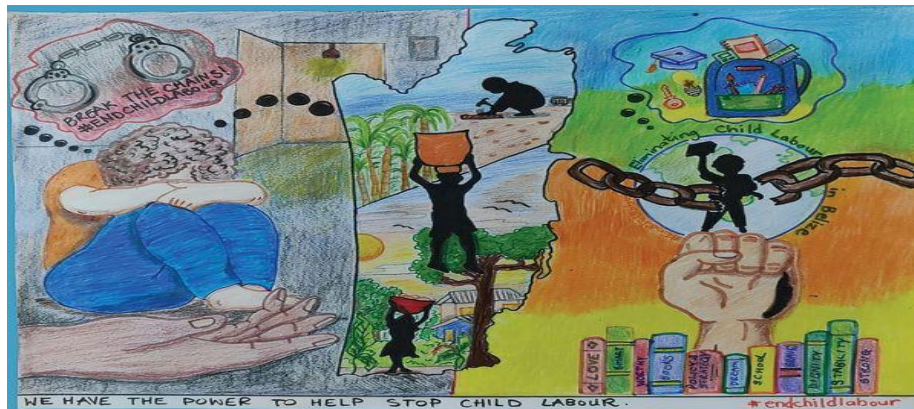


Fig. 12 First prize winner, Valentino Vernon Jr., a student from Toledo Community High School

➤ **Child Labour Awareness Education and Sensitization –**

In 2023, Labour Department in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for Families and Children, conducted extensive education and sensitization sessions across rural communities and high schools countrywide. Sessions were held in various locations including Chunox, Copper Bank, Sarteneja, Progreso Village, Santa Clara, San Roman, San Narciso, Louisville, Concepcion Village, Muffles Junior College, Independence Village, and communities in the Dangriga District. These sessions took place on specific dates throughout the year, such as February 15th, March 13th, March 18th, March 30th, and March 31st. Topics covered included the definition of child labour, hazardous work, light work, and relevant national and international laws protecting children's rights. Additionally, the International Labour Organization (ILO) provided technical and financial support for campaigns promoting child labour awareness and advocating for social justice.

➤ **Training and Capacity Building on Child Labour-** On March 16th, 2023, the Labour Department conducted a workshop/ training on child labour Capacity Building for Frontline Workers from various Ministries/departments such as the Immigration Department, the Department of Human Services, the Education Department, Anti-Trafficking in Person Council, Social Security Board, Belize Tourism Board, Belize Agriculture Health Authority, Police Department, Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, National Trade Union Congress of Belize, Labour Department and International Organizations. A total of 60 persons received the training.



**Fig. 13 Child Labour training workshop for frontline workers from various ministries and institutions**

- **Child Labour Inspections** - In 2023, the Labour Department conducted a total of 95 inspections specifically targeted child labour practices. Among the 95 child labour inspections, the Child Labour Secretariat monitored and coordinated two special joint child labour inspections at the beans field in the northern region with different strategic partners such as the Immigration Department, the Police Department, the Ministry of Education, The Department of Human Services, Social Security Board, and the Labour Department.
  
- **Signing of Memorandums of Understanding on Child Labour** - A key achievement this year, the Ministry of Labour signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with key associations in the Sugar and Citrus Industries. These agreements entail collaborative efforts aimed at addressing the issue of child labour and achieving its elimination from both the Sugar and Citrus Industries. MOUs were signed with the following Associations:
  - Sugar Industry:***
    - Progressive Sugar Cane Producers Association (PSCPA): MOU signed on June 12th, 2023.
    - Corozal Sugar Cane Producers Association (CSCPA): MOU signed on November 23rd, 2023.
  
  - Citrus Industry:***
    - Citrus Grower Association (CGA): MOU signed on November 23rd, 2023.



**Fig. 14 MOU signed with PSCPA**

**D.) Providing Employment Services** - In the ever-evolving job market, the Public Employment Services (PES) Unit remains a critical bridge connecting job seekers with potential employers. The impact of PES's efforts is evident this year given the following key achievements, which have empowered job seekers and facilitated employment opportunities:

- *Job Preparedness Training*: Held 88 sessions dedicated to strengthening job seekers' skills.
- *Job Seeker Registration*: A total of 353 job seekers were successfully registered.
- *Outreach to Job Seekers*: Reached out to 1,201 job seekers, offering them necessary support, guidance, and assistance in their job search.
- *Employer Engagement*: Connected with 158 employers to advertise job openings and streamline the recruitment process.
- *Job Vacancies*: Managed to gather 422 job vacancies from various sectors.
- *Job Placement*: placed 283 candidates.
- *Employer Registration*: Added 51 new employers to the PES manual database, widening the scope for job seekers.
- *Educational Outreach*: Delivered 102 presentations in schools to inform students about job preparedness.

The PES has also participated in initiatives aimed at addressing specific employment needs and empowering job seekers:

- *BPO Interview Simulation Event*: this event was held on November 16, 2023, designed to prepare job seekers for opportunities within the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) sector. This initiative saw enthusiastic participation from students and job seekers and gained participation from the BPO industry.
- *Positive Moves Initiative*: In collaboration with The Community Rehabilitation Department under the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, launched "Positive Moves" an initiative aimed at supporting out-of-

school and unemployed youth aged 16-21. Running from October 16 to November 10, 2023. A total of 14 participants competed this initiative. The program included eligibility assessments, employability training, and apprenticeship placements. Training sessions covered crucial areas like skills identification, resume writing, customer service, work ethics, time management, mock interviews, and labour education.

## **E.) Legal and Policy Reform**

The Department continues its work and focus on revising and developing policies and legislation to create a more equitable and inclusive labour environment. The Department is committed to modernizing existing laws and introducing new regulations to address evolving challenges and align with international labour standards. Through collaborative partnerships and extensive consultations with key stakeholders, including government agencies, employers, and workers' organizations, the Department is shaping a legislative framework that promotes fairness, safety, and inclusivity in the workplace. The below outlines initiatives and developments in this regard:

- **Implementation of the Minimum wage increase to \$5.00:** In 2023, the Department took an active role in overseeing the implementation of the minimum wage increase to \$5.00, effective from January 1st. This involved monitoring and enforcing compliance across different sectors. Collaborating closely with employers, the department disseminated information and tackled issues that arose. Additionally, the Ministry helped businesses in adapting their payroll, conducted routine inspections, and enforced corrective measures against any instances of non-compliance.
- **Advancing the Decent Work Country Programme:** In November 2023, the Ministry collaborated with the ILO to host a three-day workshop in Belize City, focusing on advancing the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP). This workshop set the stage for developing a DWCP tailored to Belize's needs. In December 2023, the finalization of the Diagnostic report offered valuable insights and recommendations. The DWCP development process adheres to both national plans and ILO standards, emphasizing participation from government, employers, and workers' organizations. By fostering collaboration and engaging key stakeholders, the DWCP aims to streamline coordination among development partners and planning frameworks, thus contributing significantly to Belize's progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Modernization of the Labour Act, Chapter 297:** The Labour Act in Belize, established in 1960, is undergoing a comprehensive review and modernization to address evolving labour dynamics and the impact of COVID-19. This review seeks to modernize the Act to address contemporary issues such as labour migration and technological advancements, enhance clarity, and promote better understanding and compliance among employers and employees. In 2023, the Ministry engaged a local consultancy firm Reyes Retreage LLP to guide the review process, with additional pro bono support from global law firm DLA Piper UK LLP. Supported by the ILO, Belize is expected to achieve a modernized and inclusive Labour Act aligned with global standards in 2024.

➤ **Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations Act (amalgamation of 300 and 304):**

The Tripartite Body, comprising representatives from Government, employers, and workers, embarked on a review of the Amalgamation Act 300 and 304 in 2023. This initiative aims to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the existing legislation governing trade unions and employers' organizations in Belize. This review process involves extensive consultations with key stakeholders to ensure that the amended Act reflects the current needs and dynamics of the labour landscape. Upon completion, the revised Act will be presented to the Labour Advisory Board for consideration and endorsement, making a significant step towards strengthening industrial relations and promoting the rights and interests of both workers and employers.

➤ **Reintroducing the Occupational Safety and Health Bill:** During the months October to December 2023, the Labour Department initiated efforts to reintroduce the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Bill. This involved forming an OSH Working Group, conducting stakeholder consultations, and hosting town hall meetings countrywide. Recommendations to strengthen the OSH Bill were formulated through extensive engagement with stakeholders, aiming to create safer workplaces. Town Hall Meetings during this period raised awareness and garnered support for the bill, providing platforms for stakeholders to discuss safety standards. As a result, recommendations were drafted and submitted to Cabinet in January 2024, which received approval. Currently, the Bill is under review by the Attorney General's Ministry before reintroduction to the House. The ILO is also providing support to ensure alignment with global standards.

### **3.3 Rural Transformation**

The Rural Transformation Department's portfolio includes the Rural Development Department and the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSSU) Unit. Although the portfolio includes those two areas, the Department works closely with the Local Government Department in fulfilling its mandate as it relates to local governance at the village level. The department works with village councils, water boards, nationally, and this also includes the Alcaldes in the Toledo District.

There are 194 villages and communities that the Department works with daily. Although we work with 194, official elections by Elections and Boundaries Department for village councils are held in 190 of them. Village councils are elected local government bodies that are charged with the good governance and overall community development of villages throughout the country. There are 108 water boards providing water to 126 villages or 32,780 households. Water Boards are responsible for the management and operations of water systems to ensure the consistent supply of potable water to residents. They collect user fees, carry out connections/disconnections, keep proper records, undertake expansions and all other operations for the supply of water.

The Ministry pays the stipends for all village council chairpersons and Alcaldes. There are 78 Alcaldes (39 Alcaldes and 39 deputy Alcaldes) who are appointed by the Attorney General in accordance with the Inferior Courts Act.



The following Key Result Areas form the Department’s work over the next three years:

- a) Village Governance and Reform
- b) Promoting economic development in the rural sector
- c) Rural water supply services and management
- d) Technology adaption and capacity building

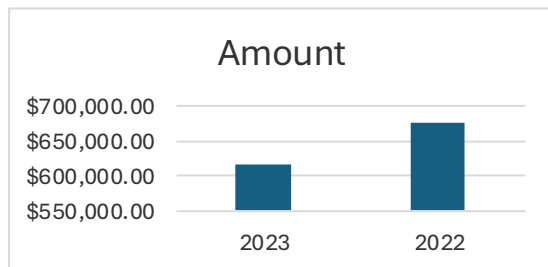
**A.) Village Governance and Reform**

**District Association of Village Councils (DAVCO) Elections** – The election for DAVCO was held between October 2022 and January 2023 and elections for the National Association of Village Councils (NAVCO) was held in February 2023. The Department assisted with these elections. In June 15, 2023, Local Government Officers from the Local Government Department along with Rural Community Development Officers, conducted a training on financial reporting template for members of the NAVCO and DAVCO. The aim of is for village councils to utilize this upgraded, standardized, and detailed template to generate effective and efficient monthly revenue and expenditure reports.



**Fig. 15 DAVCO training in financial reporting**

**Liquor License Fees Disbursement** – In 2023 the department disbursed a total of \$615,008.85 to village councils. The Department disbursed a total of BZD \$675,300.00 in 2022, a difference of \$60,300.00 as shown in the below graph.



**Fig. 16 Disbursement difference for year 2022 and 2023**

**Table 2: Revenue table for liquor license for 2023**

District	2023 Liquor license revenues
Corozal	\$65,090.00
Orange Walk	\$86,562.50
Belize	\$75,690.85
Cayo	\$129,325.00
Stann Creek	\$248,040.50
Toledo	\$10,300.00
Totals	\$615,008.85

This year, the Stann Creek and Cayo Districts collected the most revenue from liquor license fees. These being a being a combined 40% and 21% of disbursement respectively, for a combined total of 61%. As shown in the table above, the Toledo District is the district with the lowest collection of liquor license revenue for this year.

### **B.) Promoting Economic Development in the Rural Sector**

**Improved community spaces** – The Department assisted with the construction of culverts, building and upgrades of roads in several villages. Over half a million dollars was invested in 2023. Some of the projects carried out include upgrade of public infrastructure (roads, drains, beaches).



**Fig. 17 Installation of culvert in Los Tambos**



**Fig. 18 Upgrade of street in Billy White**

The department also supported the improvement of community spaces in several communities by donating equipment to village councils throughout the country to assist them in the maintenance of public spaces. Notably, the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) was instrumental in providing funds to villages on the coast to maintain the beaches. Village councils such as Independence, San Narciso, Caye Caulker, August Pine Ridge, and Pomona invested significantly in the beautification of their village. The councils used these funds to complete works on playgrounds, community centers, sporting facilities, public restrooms, and other transformative projects that improves the aesthetic of the villages.



**Fig. 19 Beautification of Caye Caulker Village Park**



**Fig. 20: Donation of Weed Eaters to Village Council**



**Fig. 21 Improvements to San Narciso Village Bleachers**

**Solar Electrification of villages** - The Department also partnered with the Ministry of Public Utilities to develop rural electrification projects in Jalacte, San Vicente, San Benito Poite, Indian Church and San Carlos in Orange Walk. The Ministry has been instrumental in ensuring the Free, Prior and Informed Consent Protocol for indigenous communities were completed. The projects are now in the design phase and are expected to be implemented in the next fiscal year.

The latest data from the 2023 Census, alongside the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reports of 2021 and 2023, reveal both progress and persistent challenges that require focused attention. To address some of these challenges, the Ministry has and continues to actively invest in promoting economic development within Belize's rural sector, recognizing its critical role in the country's overall growth and prosperity. Investments in 2023 have been directed towards

improving community spaces, including road upgrades, public infrastructure, and the beautification of villages. Additionally, the Ministry is working closely with partners to advance rural electrification projects in remote villages.

Rural areas have seen incremental improvements in housing quality and access to utilities (electricity, clean water, sanitation). However, many rural households still lack adequate infrastructure, particularly in remote villages. Looking ahead, the Ministry will continue contributing to the socio-economic development of rural Belize by intensifying its efforts in key areas which will empower rural populations, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to building a more inclusive and resilient national economy, aligning with the goals of #planBelize. By focusing on these priorities, the Ministry can contribute to a more inclusive and resilient rural sector, driving national growth and ensuring that the benefits of development are equitably shared across all of Belize.

### C.) Rural Water Supply Services and Management

**Overseeing Operations of Water Boards** - The Department continued to ensure that the villages have access to improved and consistent potable water by providing direct support and oversight of rural water boards. There are 108 rudimentary water systems (RWS) serving 126 villages. The BWSL serves 43 villages and there are 23 villages with hand pumps and other water sources. This does not include the Mennonite communities who operate their independent systems. There are 171 villages that have piped running water provided either by a rural water system or the BWSL.

**Rural Water Systems Financial Performance** – In 2023 the Water Boards collected \$5,470,061.56 in comparing the income of 2023 and 2022, the boards recorded an increase of \$1,183,521.26 in collection within a year. This can perhaps be attributed to the Ministry’s lead initiative in advocating for the metering of water systems. The data from the regions indicates that the collection rate is higher in the Northern region, recording a high of 83% and 55% in the Southern region. The Water Boards incurred \$5,062,402.84 in expenses to operate their water systems. However, the water boards have ended this year with a surplus for the second consecutive year. While this is an important achievement, there are still many systems that are not financially stable.

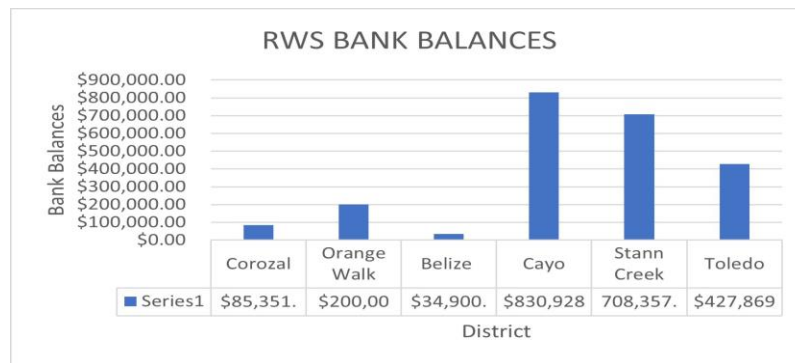


Fig. 22 RWS Bank Balances for 2023 by district

At the end of 2023 the collective bank balance for all RWS was \$2.3M. The Department has made improvement in enforcing regulation which prohibits the board from having a cash on hand and further encourage them to deposit at the bank regularly. The below table provides information on the annual income and expenses generated by the RWS by districts for the year 2023.

**Table 3: Annual Income and Expenses of water boards by district**

Annual Income and Expenses		
District	Income	Expense
Corozal	\$ 411,000.00	\$ 380,000.00
Orange Walk	\$ 640,000.00	\$ 565,000.00
Belize	\$ 174,000.00	\$ 162,000.00
Cayo	\$ 1,328,952.00	\$ 1,227,360.00
Stann Creek	\$ 2,113,004.76	\$ 1,944,131.68
Toledo	\$ 803,104.80	\$ 783,911.16
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,470,061.56</b>	<b>\$ 5,062,402.84</b>

**Assistance for metering and upgrade of Water Systems** - The department was very active in 2023, assisting with several upgrades to existing water infrastructure, donations of pumps, motors, pipes, and other materials to rural water systems throughout the country. Upgrades were completed to numerous RWS systems that required investment in their water infrastructure to continue supply connected consumers to the water system. The Department remains committed to ensuring its mandate is achieved. Over 1,000 meters were donated to water boards in 2023 for upgrades to their existing system. This year, the Department also assisted several water boards with water expansion projects, upgrades, and regular maintenance of RWS systems.



**Fig. 23 Donation of meters to water boards**



**Fig. 24 Donation of pipes to water boards**

**Rehabilitation of Water Systems** - Over thirty water systems underwent some level of rehabilitation in 2023, activities were continuous throughout the year with resources from the Department and in collaboration with other stakeholders with similar interest in rural communities. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has partnered with the Ministry in funding several rehabilitation projects in the Stann Creek and Toledo District. The larger rehabilitations were completed in the northern region, considering the size of the villages. San Jose Palmar received and upgrade with meters at a value close to \$80,00.00. A similar amount was invested in Hopkins Village, fifty percent was invested in the purchase and installation of a generator.

RWS in the other districts also received materials for rehabilitation of their water systems. San Antonio Village, Conejo Creek Village, Barranco Village and San Vicente Village received materials for rehabilitation of their RWS. Conejo Creek Village is now privileged to power their water system through solar energy. Two other notable rehabilitations that were completed this year, were in Guinea Grass Village and Mahogany Heights Village. Additionally, San Narciso RWS conducted water expansion. In partnership with IOM and EU-GCCA+ water systems in the Cayo District were rehabilitated. In particular, the Santa Familia Village RWS expanded its coverage within the village, their transmission lines were upgraded, filtration tanks upgraded, installation of new chlorinator, construction of new gallery and the procurement of a backup pump.



**Fig. 25 Santa Familia RWS rehabilitated water gallery**

Another major rehabilitation project took place in Libertad Village, Corozal. A total of \$1.4M Belize dollars was spent in rehabilitating the Libertad/Concepcion Rudimentary Water System.

This included installation of new pipes to increase water pressure, installation of generator, 800 water meters, and a fully functional chlorination system.



**Fig. 26 Inaugural Ceremony of rehabilitated RWS in Libertad Village**

The management of some RWS systems by water boards was satisfactory which allowed for investment and the sustainability of the systems. RWS that can be highlighted for these accomplishments are numerous and includes San Marcos, Hopkins, Independence, Sittee River, San Antonio and Yo Creek. The department was steadfast in fulfilling its obligation to the rural communities. Communities benefited from the investments made by the Belize Social Investment Fund (BSIF), the Ministry, water boards and other partners in 2023. It demonstrates our department's commitment to improving water accessibility to rural communities and significantly contributing SDG6.



**Fig. 27 Meters donated to San Jose San Pablo Water Board**

#### **D.) Technology Adoption and Capacity Building -**

The Geo-resistivity Survey Team sharpened their skills through training and field surveys for ground water source. The team conducted surveys for Rural Resilience Belize (RRB) throughout the country of Belize, the results and subsequent successful production well after further exploration, validate that our department has grown its capacity in groundwater exploration in a cost effective and time efficient scientific technique. The team was instrumental in identifying a

location for a production well in Santa Rosa/San Roman in the Stann Creek District. Through the intervention from our department and other stakeholders two village now benefits from an improve water source which has the capacity to fill the demand based on data gathered. Farmers throughout the country have built the resiliency to drought through the RRB programme. Geo-resistivity surveys were completed for farmers in Toledo, Orange Walk and Cayo districts.

The Department undersands the importance of ensuring its technical officers are with the tools and knowledge to better perform their duties. With this in mind officers received training in the following areas:

- **Geo-resistivity training:** This training resulted in the strengthening of geo resistivity unit with a new software that will compliment their existing analytic capacity for locating groundwater for RWS. The team now has two techniques that can be used to locate groundwater.
- **Ground water drilling training:** Appreciating the use of technology to enhance our capacity to effectively carryout groundwater exploration , the department participated in ground water drilling training coordinated by the Hydrology Unit of MNR. The department officers were introduced to basic geology of Belize, groundwater basics drilling methods, well logging techniques drilling challenges & mitigations, and well design drilling safety. The department has since improved its capacity in this field and can only be strengthen with additional innovative tools.



**Fig. 28 Practical session on water drilling**

**Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Unit (RWSSU)** – The RWSSU’s main responsibility is the drilling of production wells for water systems, and the installation hand pumps. It is also responsible for the repair and maintenance of the wells, hand pumps and rudimentary water systems. Additionally, the unit supports private farmers and related enterprises and schools where water is needed to enhance production, but this is done as a secondary activity.

The RWSSU was very active this year and provided preventative well maintenance activities regularly. The unit responded to shocks in water systems that resulted in in-availability of water,



the acquisition of the water bowser in 2022 built the unit's capacity to make water available for consumers on water systems with poor water source or outgrown water systems. In cases where the challenge is poor water source, the unit explored for ground water. The unit maintains that water systems are priority and have responded with efficiency to minimize the period of interrupted water supply for consumers.

In 2023, the unit completed the following:

- Drilling of 30 farmer wells to assist in agriculture.
- Drilling of 6 wells for schools and educational institutions.
- Installation and repair of solar systems for RWS in 6 villages across Belize.
- Air lifted over 50 production wells for RWS across the country.
- Through the Ministry, the unit procured 15 new submersible pump & motors for emergency repairs to RWS across Belize varying in sizes.
- Procurement of over Seven Hundred Thousand Dollars worth of various size of pipes for the repairs & expansion of RWS across Belize
- Procurement of 2,000 Water Meters
- Assisted with the installation of a new pump house, new reservoir, new well and electrical upgrade (new system) at Midway (Toledo District), Blue Creek (Toledo District), Medina Bank (Toledo District), San Vicente (Toledo District), Santa Rosa/San Roman (Stann Creek District), and Tower Hill (Orange Walk District).

## **4 LESSONS LEARNT**

### **4.1 Local Government**

Through our efforts in the past year, the Department recognized that several of its planning and engagement initiatives have worked well. These include, but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Application of a Monitoring & Assessment Report Form
- Conducting quarterly monitoring visits to town and city councils
- Application of a Quarterly Action Plan Calendar
- Collaboration with Asset & Utility Unit and Audit Department
- Collaboration with key government partners to facilitate key actions in support of municipal development.
- Conducting webinar series conducted on key municipal legislations to reach a broader audience.
- Having strong leadership at the municipal level is critical in driving a national development agenda at the local level.

### **4.2 Labour**

- **Adaptability is Essential:** In the ever-evolving landscape of labour and employment, adaptability is paramount. Our experiences have emphasized the importance of remaining flexible and responsive to emerging challenges, technological advancements, and shifting societal norms.
- **Collaboration drives impact:** Meaningful progress is often achieved through collaboration and partnership. By engaging with stakeholders, including international organizations, industry associations, Boards and Tribunals, the Department has been able to leverage collective expertise and resources to effect positive change.
- **Digitalization enhances accessibility:** The digitalization of services has proven instrumental in enhancing accessibility and efficiency. By upgrading our digital platforms and embracing technology-driven solutions, we have been able to streamline processes, improve service delivery, and reach a wider audience.
- **Legislation must reflect current realities:** Our efforts to modernize legislation, such as the Labour Act and associated laws, have highlighted the importance of ensuring that legal frameworks remain relevant and responsive to contemporary labour market dynamics. Regular reviews and updates are crucial to safeguarding the rights and interests of all stakeholders.
- **Education and awareness are catalysts for change:** Comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives play a pivotal role in driving behavioural change and fostering compliance with labour standards. By empowering individuals with knowledge and understanding, we can effect meaningful societal transformation.
- **Enforcement is key to upholding standards:** Effective enforcement mechanisms are essential for upholding labour standards and ensuring compliance with regulations. Through proactive monitoring, enforcement, and dialogue with stakeholders, we can mitigate violations and promote a culture of accountability.
- **Investment in human capital:** Investing in the development of human capital, through training programs and skill enhancement initiatives, is critical for building a resilient and competitive workforce. By equipping individuals with the tools and knowledge they need to succeed, we can unlock their full potential and drive economic growth.

Incorporating these lessons into our ongoing efforts, we remain committed to advancing labour rights, fostering economic empowerment, and building a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

### **4.3 Rural Transformation**

- Involving local stakeholders in infrastructure planning is crucial for creating projects that truly meet the needs of the community.
- There needs to be capacity building at the village level among leaders to take charge of their community development.

- Water boards who had strong collection policies including follow through of disconnections, were in a stronger financial position than those who took a more relaxed approach to collections.
- There is a need for the development of a Rural Water Data Management System that will act as a repository/database for up-to-date data on water boards across the country.

## **5 FUTURE PRIORITIES AND PLAN**

### **5.1 Local Government**

While the Department has made major improvement in its function to support municipal growth and development and in the advancement of the local government sector, there are limitations and the need to improve in areas that can only serve to strengthen the engagement with the councils to support the national development agenda of Belize. Considering the critical role that the Department plays in facilitating municipal development and enhancement of the local government sector the Department will focus on the following:

- Enhancement of human resource capacity of the Department i.e. Secretary, Chief Valuer, Planning & Development Officer
- Institution of an Information & Technology Officer and Systems Administrator for the Ministry to support the digital and electronic data management agenda of the Department and the Ministry

### **5.2 Labour**

Looking ahead to 2024, the Department will carry forward several significant initiatives initiated in 2023:

- Comprehensive review of the Labour Act - The Ministry is conducting an in-depth analysis of the Labour Act to ensure it remains relevant and effective in addressing contemporary labour issues. This review aims to modernize and strengthen labour regulations for better worker protection.
- Establishment of a Minimum Wage formula - The Ministry is working on creating a standardized formula to establish a fair minimum wage. This approach aims to ensure equitable compensation for workers while considering economic factors and the cost of living.
- Implementation of the Belize National Child Labour Policy and Strategy 2022-2025 - The Ministry continues its efforts to put this policy and strategy into action to combat

child labour and ensure the safety and rights of young workers. The goal is to create a safer work environment and uphold international labour standards.

- Enhancement of the Employment Service System - Plans are underway to improve the Employment Service System, making it more accessible and efficient for job seekers and employers. This initiative aims to facilitate better job matching and provide comprehensive support for employment needs.
- Development and Implementation of a Decent Work Country Program - The Ministry is developing a Decent Work Country Program, aiming to promote safe, fair, and productive work environments. This program will focus on creating quality jobs and protecting workers' rights.

These initiatives reflect the Ministry's ongoing commitment to enhancing labour standards and promoting the welfare of workers in Belize.

### **5.3 Rural Transformation**

The Rural Transformation Department will focus on the following:

- Identify and adopt a digital accounting system for village councils and water boards.
- Partner with funding agencies to develop a community profile database for use by the Ministry and other stakeholders.
- Provide continuous capacity building for staff through trainings and provide the necessary tools to allow to serve all village councils and water boards efficiently.
- Begin the development of a national rural development strategy.
- Continue to improve the management and operations of Rural Water Systems for service and sustainability.
- Strengthen the capacity of Village Councils in leadership and community development.

## 6 STAFFING AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2023-24

<b>Department</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>	<b>Financial Resources</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>	<b>2022-2023 Budget</b>
Local Government	Department has four experienced and qualified officers but very few relative to the role the department plays in the oversight provided to municipal governments.	Adequate for level of service provided however any new programs will require new financial resources to cover operations and personnel.	The Department is moving to focus on the economic development and climate resilience aspect of municipalities and will need an economist/planner to support this new approach. Similarly, the staff structure is flat and does not currently allow for a deputy director to support the director and the department overall.	\$5,678,628.00
Labour	There is an adequate level of skilled and experienced personnel, however roles are becoming more specialized, and the work program is expanding. The Department will have to consider expanding/restructuring.	With the support of regional and international partners and internal resources, the Department has been able to meet its costs of programs and operations.	There is a need to revamp the employment services unit to make it more effective in addressing workforce preparedness. There is also a need to address the demand for specialization within the department such as inspection, industrial relations, child labour, etc.	\$3,326,588.00
Rural Development	Most rural officers have appropriate level of training and experience. Training continues to be provided to build their capacity to engage with critical issues such as climate change and community development.	There is need to expand financial sustainability program for water boards. This includes purchasing and installing water meters and expansion of water systems. There is also a need to hire new personnel to manage rural water systems as a single entity.	Continue stronger oversight of water boards and village councils. The need to expand work on village streets and farmers roads, infrastructure remains. MIDH struggles to meet and respond to due to sheer scale of need around the country	\$5,838,996.00

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past year, the Ministry's Department of Local Government has exemplified effective leadership in spearheading initiatives aimed at enhancing governance and administration within Belize's municipalities. Notable achievements include advancements in climate resilience and financial management, as well as substantial progress in promoting local governance reforms. Recommendations include further investments in digitalization efforts and capacity building to drive improved service delivery and operational efficiency.

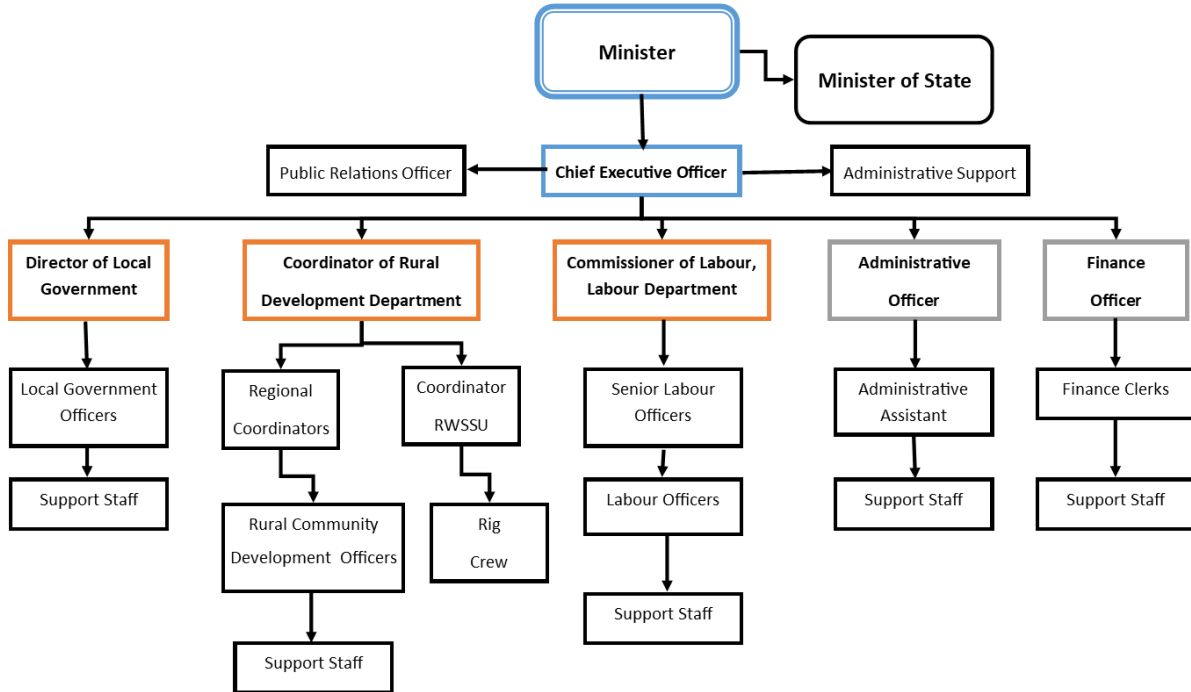
Under the Labour Department, significant strides have been made in fostering a labour market environment prioritizing safety, security, and productivity. Efforts to eradicate child labour and promote legal reform align with international standards, positioning Belize for sustainable development. Recommendations include continued emphasis on labour education and policy development to create a more equitable and compliant labour landscape.

The Rural Transformation Department has played a pivotal role in fostering comprehensive rural development, particularly in village governance, economic empowerment, and water supply management. Noteworthy achievements include increased financial accountability, investments in community infrastructure, and improvements in water accessibility. Moving forward, the Department will focus on sustaining proactive approaches to water management and strengthening partnerships to further enhance rural development outcomes.

Overall, the Ministry's collaborative efforts across its core departments reflect a commitment to advancing Belize's socio-economic landscape in alignment with national development priorities. By embracing lessons learned and prioritizing investments in capacity building, digitalization, and sustainable development, the Ministry is poised to drive positive change and contribute significantly to Belize's long-term prosperity.

## 8 ANNEXES

### Annex 1. Organizational structure of the Ministry



## Annex 2. List of professional and technical staff of the Ministry

Ministry Headquarters	
Staff Name	Position
Honourable Oscar Requena	Minister
Honourable Ramiro Ramirez	Minister of State
Mr. Valentino Shal	Chief Executive Officer
Ms Shamilee Zuniga	Administrative Officer
Ms Irma Garbutt	Finance Officer
(Vacant)	Public Relations Officer

Rural Transformation Department	
Staff Name	Position
Mr. Isidoro Galvez	Ag. Coordinator, Rural Development
Mr. Ismer Ortega	Regional Rural Coordinator (Northern Region)
Mr. Leonardo Cal	Regional Rural Coordinator (Southern Region)
Mr. Neville Wade	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Kurt Gideon	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Nemencio Acosta	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Evelio Castaneda	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Herminio Sho	Rural Community Development Officer
Ms. Dominga Shack	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Adrian Cus	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Elmer Osorio	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Germin Avila	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Jaime Jimenez	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Pedro Choc	Rural Community Development Officer
Mr. Juan Marin Jr	Rural Water Services Manager
Rural Water and Sanitation Unit	
Staff Name	Position
Mr. Ernesto Rash	Master Driller
Mr. Ronaldo Coc	Well Rig Operator
Mr. Matthew Rash	Assistant Well Rig Operator
Mr. Edward Day	Assistant Maintenance Foreman
Mr. Benito Coc	Third Hand Helper
Mr. Jaheed Sandoval	Third Hand Helper
Mr. Jamar Loague	Third Hand Helper
Mr. Gilberto Ucan	Third Hand Helper



<b>Local Government Department</b>	
<b>Staff Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Mr. Clifford King	Director, Local Government
Ms. Ashantelee Sutherland	Local Government Officer
Ms. Lauren Cayetano	Local Government Officer
Ms. Aurelia Cal	Local Government Officer

<b>Labour Department</b>	
<b>Staff Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Mrs. Rissela Dominguez Patt	Labour Commissioner
Ms. Claire Lamb	Deputy Labour Commissioner
Mrs. Aida Reyes	Senior Labour Officer
Mr. Jesus Yam	Senior Labour Officer
Ms. Gicely Cal	Labour Officer I
Mrs. Daria Bo-Mes	Labour Officer I
Mr. Franklin Martinez	Labour Officer I
Mr. Alfaro Muy	Labour Officer I
Mr. Aniki Palacio	Labour Officer I
Mr. Rudy Ake	Labour Officer I
Mrs. Sujelli Ku	Labour Officer II
Mr. Orvin Sanchez	Labour Officer II
Mr. Domingo Pau	Labour Officer II
Ms. Vernon Avila	Labour Officer II
Ms. Denise Spain	Employment Officer
Ms. Perla Coba	Employment Officer
Ms. Brenda Serrano	Employment Officer
Mr. Gabriel Ramos	Employment Officer
Ms. Tarina Moody	Employment Officer
Ms. Esperanza Mendez	Employment Officer
Ms. Christy Edwards	Employment Officer
Ms. Shemicha Cattouse	Employment Officer

## Annex 3. List of legislations

Belize National Child Labour Policy and Strategy, 2022-2025



**Belize National Child Labour Policy  
and Strategy, 2022-2025**

# Wages Regulations (Manual Workers) (Amendment) Order, 2022

## *Wages Councils*

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### **BELIZE:**

### **WAGES REGULATION (MANUAL WORKERS) (AMENDMENT) ORDER, 2022**

#### **ARRANGEMENT OF PARAGRAPHS**

1. Citation.
2. Amendment of paragraph 3.
3. Commencement.