

BELIZE CITY & CLIMATE CHANGE: PLANNING BRIEFS

HEALTH & WELLNESS

**Unstable family environments are contributing to high rates of domestic and gang violence in Belize City.**

Belize City is known as the epicenter of violence in Belize, specifically, Southside Belize is considered an extremely dangerous place to raise young children. The gang violence in Southside Belize and throughout the city has been increasing steadily over the past 2 two decades. While there is no single documented cause of the increased violence, studies have shown that volatile family dynamics and absentee fathers contribute to gang related violence in boys. A study of violence in Belize City showed that 70% of children who could not account for the occupations of their fathers lack emotional stability, increased aggression, and violence, particularly in male adolescents. Domestic violence and child abuse has also been associated with volatile family dynamics, a problem often made worse when the country experiences environmental shocks. The violence can influence child development and cause unhealthy behaviors to be perpetuated. These violent home environments may be contributing to the high level of gang related violence among young males, which extends to city's streets making it unsafe for residents and visitors.

Schools lack reliable access to potable water and sanitation supplies that are vital for childhood development and hygiene.

According to UNICEF, 35% of Belize's schools reported they do not provide toilet paper and do not have any soap for children to use while washing hands. Girls particularly are at a disadvantage due to the lack of sanitary supplies in schools. Children are extremely vulnerable to diseases and illness that result from a lack of access to clean, safe water, and proper sanitation. Children are at high risk for both physical and cognitive damage to development, or even deadly illnesses, from untreated and contaminated water. Without access to clean water, children are prevented from washing their hands properly or as often as they should to prevent disease transmission. Schools in Southside Belize City have reported untreated water for their students and staff and an unreliable potable water supply that runs periodically, if at all. Schools are unable to implement proper hygiene and children are less likely to make long commutes to school because there is improper sanitation. Unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene have even been linked to dropout rates and poor academic performance.

Climate impacts will further disrupt potable water access.

Belize City is extremely vulnerable to hurricanes, storms, and other impacts of climate change due to the country's coastal location. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and tropical storms, may contaminate and damage the water supply pollutants from the ground, infrastructure, homes, and cars can end up in the water supply, increasing exposure to minerals, metals, and other toxins, and potentially making the water unsafe for consumption. As a result, families and schools do not have access to potable water after storm events.

Belize City is particularly vulnerable to health-related complications due to inadequate healthy food access, healthy lifestyle education and exercise.

Obesity has increased in Belize and across Latin America and the Caribbean. This is attributed to unhealthy eating habits due to the lack of access to healthier foods and exercise. In Belize, foods high in sugar and salt are more accessible and more affordable than healthier foods. Often, food packages do not include a complete list of ingredients, which inhibits understanding of nutrition. The highest percentage of children under five suffering from obesity are found in Belize City. Unhealthy eating habits as a child may contribute to long-term health implications into adulthood, such as obesity, gastrointestinal problems, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes. Culturally, health is associated with a larger body frame, especially in children, but this may result in negative long-term health implications in cases of obesity. While exercise can help address these potential health problems, access to space for exercise can be difficult. In Belize City parks and open space tend to be concentrated in specific areas and not accessible by all populations. There is also inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks and street crossings, which can make walking unsafe and disincentivize people to exercise.

ECONOMY IN BELIZE

PLANNING GUIDANCE

Partnerships with organizations for resources and to education for children and families on hygiene.

Bringing awareness and resources through partnerships can help promote and educate communities on healthier hygienic practices. Partnerships can lead to funding to maintain hygienic supplies, including sanitary supplies, soap, and toilets, in schools and in communities of need. Providing these resources in homes and at school will increase children's knowledge of good hygiene and facilitate good hygiene practices. This will also improve equity across gender as girls' and women's hygienic needs are not satisfied due to the lack of supplies.

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Inc Increase prevalence of educational community gardens as a strategy to promote healthy lifestyles through access to healthy food options.

Open spaces like parks can be redesigned to accommodate sustainable community gardens and places to exercise to increase availability of healthy food and healthy lifestyle choices. Designs that encourage healthy lifestyle choices create social, educational and nutritional benefits across the communities, especially those that incorporate education components into the community gardens. Through these spaces, access to healthy food is increased, as well as awareness on the proper diet and nutrition that people can adopt in their everyday life. Educational community gardens could also be created in schools allowing children to participate in expanding access to nutritious foods in their diets. Extended to the home, home vegetable gardens equip families and particularly women, with the skills and tools to provide healthy food options for their families. This can also serve as a source of income as women are able to sell the vegetables and fruits they produce. Partnering with organizations that work to provide resources to improve the quality of food in delivery services across schools, could be a way to increase access to healthy food across Belize.

ABOUT BELIZE ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS

Belize Association of Planners is a proactive professional planning organization committed to assuring social justice and promoting sustainability in the natural and built environment. We work to address relevant planning and development issues in Belize by working in partnership with the public and private sector and civil society organizations, and the people of Belize through research, education, advocacy and action. For more information, visit belizeplanners.org.

These planning briefs were made in partnership with students from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service.

Preventing gang violence through implementation of programs and support services for children and parents.

Research has linked gang violence and aggression to home environments. Providing parents with training and support programs can help them improve their parental skills especially for those managing challenging family dynamics such as single parent households. Implementing after school and community programs for children can help them stay engaged and escape their volatile home environment which can benefit their development. Identifying the most at risk youth, boys & juveniles especially, to provide them with skills to increase employment opportunities so they can provide for their families and support to manage their aggression can help to address violence which is heavily linked to poverty. Lastly, improving infrastructure of housing, schools, parks, etc. in high risk communities will help youth to enjoy their communities view their communities more positively.