

What is the Belize Gender Info?

One of the main purposes for developing the *Belize Gender Info*, a national gender-related database, is for it to serve as the primary monitoring tool that tracks the progress on the implementation of The National Gender Policy. The Policy, which aims to advance the achievement of *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality and equity in Belize, contains five priority areas: *Health, Education, Wealth & Employment Creation, Violence-Producing Conditions and Power & Decision-Making*. Of these five priority areas, two have been chosen to serve as initial building blocks for populating the database with data by the end of January 2012. These two initial building blocks are Education and Power & Decision-Making.

These priority areas were chosen because of the data that already existed. For example, there is recent (2010-2011) data for several indicators under the area of Education such as dropout rate, female to male ratio and gross enrolment rate. For the area of Power & Decision-Making, all of the data pertinent to indicators relevant to the *Women in Politics* Project (WIPProject) is available at the National Women's Commission. These indicators include the number of women who applied for the WIPProject, the number of women who were accepted, and the number of women who graduated.

The National Women's Commission also partnered with the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) to gather much needed data during the *2010 Population and Housing Census*, on the Role of Women in Belize-asking respondents three specific questions:

- Should women occupy leadership positions?
- What choice of leadership position should women occupy, e.g Prime Minister, Minister, Chief Executive Officer, Senator?
- What type of support is needed for women to occupy these positions, e.g financial, party, family?

The template for the *Belize Gender Info*, which includes a list of indicators, units, and subgroups (also known as the disaggregation), has already been developed. Within the template, all Education indicators are grouped under the sector called "Education." These indicators are linked to the *Millennium Development Goal*

(MDG) 2 (Achieve universal primary education), the special area of attention, called Education, in *The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in Belize (NPA) 2004-2015* and the *National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan (NPESAP) 2009-2013*.

In the *Belize Gender Info* template, the indicators for Power & Decision-Making are grouped under the sector called “Women.” These indicators are linked to MDG 3 (Gender Equality and Women Empowerment). Gender equality is also one of the six overall principles of The NPA as well as the NPESAP. As such, the indicators contained in the database cut across Belize’s national and international commitments.

By the end of January 2012, the database will be functional, containing data for the two priority areas of Education and Power & Decision-Making. However, since the *Belize Gender Info* is designed to easily enter new data, the database will continue to expand in size and scope.

This Belize Gender Info project is a two-year initiative. This year, the (NWC) will be producing bi-annual status reports on women and girls in Belize as it relates to quality of life, education, health, gender equality etc.

Funded by UNICEF, Belize, the Belize Gender Info is designed not only to have the proper data in its desired form, but more importantly, to develop a culture of evidence-based planning among decision-makers and policy makers that would guide and shape national development plans at the macro level.

It is also crucial for technical people when designing strategic and operational plans to seek out the relevant data at the local level in order to design relevant programs and projects that will not only have strategic links at the macro level, but will improve quality of life of communities. In the design and implementation of these interventions, we must be ever mindful of keeping gender on the development agenda; not merely as an add on, but as an integral part of any activity that is targeted to improve the lives and circumstances of Belizeans, especially women and girls; since girls grow up to become women.

Key social sector ministries supporting this crucial process are Education and Health with the Statistical Institute of Belize being a key partner.

UNIFEMs Progress of the World's Women 2008-2009, reminds us that “services matter to women and perhaps the most obvious way in which services matter is that they support women’s rights to health, education and a decent life.” Without the presence of strong evidence-based information, little can be done to demonstrate the differential impacts on women and men to close the gaps.