

Concept Note

UN interagency programme to support local implementation of SDGs in Toledo and Cayo districts with a focus on sustaining peace and resilience building

I. Summary

The political and development context of Belize in this current period highlights important considerations for the UN's strategic engagement in furthering development actions that localizes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on sustaining peace and resilience building in the Toledo and Cayo districts. As the UN seeks to support voter registration and education in the context of preparing for a national referendum in Belize, for the peaceful settlement of the territorial dispute between Guatemala and Belize; local implementation of the SDGs aimed at sustaining peace and building resilience for peaceful co-existence among communities in Toledo and Cayo districts would be an added-value of the UN's work in Belize. Key proposed outcomes of this interagency programme are: (i) Capacities to promote common understanding and dialogue on sustainable development, conflict prevention and resilience is improved at local and community level; and (ii) Improved trans-border networks, services and community infrastructure promotes cooperation and commitment to sustainable development, conflict prevention and resilience. Specific activities to be implemented over 2 years with an estimated budget of USD 2M. Implementing UN agencies with presence and capacities to support this joint programme are: IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP. A lead agency for this programme will be determined. Oversight of this project will be done by a project board chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the UN Resident Coordinator.

II. Background and strategic intent

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are the “defining agenda of our time” (SG Gutierrez). A pivotal aspect of Agenda 2030 is its contribution towards sustaining peace, with a strong emphasis on conflict prevention. In this context, the UN Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team in Belize are presenting this Concept Note for an interagency programme that should complement the involvement of the UN in supporting Belize on voter registration and education campaign related to the referendum, towards a peaceful settlement of the territorial claim by Guatemala.

The Government of Belize has signaled its intent to conduct a national referendum on presenting the settlement of the territorial claim by Guatemala to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in late 2018 and has sought UN assistance for this endeavor. At the request of the Resident Coordinator the USG for Political Affairs and UN Focal Point for Electoral Assistance approved recommendations of a recent desk review and notified the Permanent Representative of Belize of the UN's readiness to support the government in the preparations for the referendum in 2018. An Advisory Mission was carried out from 17-21 July 2017 and defined the nature and scope of electoral assistance that could be provided by the UN. Based on the findings of the mission, UNDP is preparing a project to support the education campaign for the referendum as well as technical support for the voter re-registration exercise.

It is important to recognize that the territorial differendum between both countries will require not only the peaceful legal settling of the claim, but also to address local development problems and the manifestation of threats on human security; which translates into poverty, environmental degradation and weakening of traditional management for the prevention and resolution of conflict. These in turn fuel local conflicts and illegal activities across the borders. Hence combining work on the political and judicial settlement of the dispute with support to local dialogue and local sustainable development and

resilience building in Belize, is critical and very timely, especially with the understanding that implementing Agenda 2030 and the SDGs contributes to sustaining peace.

Factors that contribute to conflicts in the border region is the human insecurities evident from limited access to social services, economic opportunities and spaces for leisure for children, youth and families. In addition to local development needs in the communities which are located closest to the border region of Belize, there are cross-border movements happening through formal border crossings, as well as informal ones. Many children from Guatemala access education services in Belize; whilst Belizeans enter Guatemala to access health services, purchase retail items and sell agricultural produce to neighboring communities. The border also sees migrants and refugees pass through in search of economic wellbeing and safety, respectively.

III. Development context

Both Guatemala and Belize have progressed since 2014 towards enhancing development gains through the signing of an agreement for strengthening bilateral relations. A Belize Guatemala Joint Commission was established to explore and develop projects and programs between the two countries, with the goal of strengthening the bilateral relationship and fostering regional cooperation and integration. By way of separating the political dialogue on the territorial claim and providing space for development cooperation, sixteen bilateral agreements (thirteen formal and three informal) were agreed.

The various agreements signed by Belize and Guatemala, under the aegis of the OAS, provide a suitable framework and entry point for the UN's proposed programme for local implementation of the SDGs in Toledo and Cayo districts with a focus on sustaining peace and resilience building. Among the agreements are those related to: MoUs for the protection of the environment, including the sustainable use of natural forest resources in the respective countries; a meeting of Mayors; meeting of planning and economic development authorities of both countries; promotion of culture and sports events; and meeting of young leaders of both countries.

Another aspect that will facilitate an interagency programme of this nature is the fact that the UNCT does have experience with project implementation in both Toledo and Cayo districts. Participating UN agencies have presence on the ground with operational and programmatic capacities. IOM and UNHCR are currently developing activities along the border; UNDP is supporting important work in environmental protection and sustainable agricultural and fishing practices; UNICEF is supporting the sustainable and child friendly municipalities initiatives with local authorities in both towns of Punta Gorda and Benque Viejo del Carmen and FAO has supported agricultural projects in Belize for many years.

Furthermore, very recently civil society groups on both sides of the border have adopted a bi-national local development plan called (Action Plan Mayan Mountains Chiquibul (Belize -Guatemala) - June 2017). Its nature as a grassroots plan to promote a multisectoral collaborative mechanism based on co-responsibility of the natural and cultural assets by local stakeholders from both sides of the border makes it another important entry point that the UN could support in Belize.

All in all, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNCT see the opportunity to engage in a proactive way through this joint programme to foster and improve coordination and cohesion in preventative actions to sustain peace in a manner that bridge and consolidate the UN's work in Belize on sustainable development.

IV. Objectives and Outcomes of the project

Project interventions under consideration would be activities principally aimed at advancing sustainable development and preventing conflict by supporting border communities in Belize (Toledo and Cayo districts).

Outcome 1. Capacities to promote common understanding and dialogue for sustainable development, conflict prevention and resilience is improved at local and community level

Specific results to be achieved would include:

- 1.1.** Youth leaders from Belize and Guatemala have increased capacities to become peacebuilders and advocates for sustainable development and can hold dialogues to promote peace and development.
- 1.2.** Increased capacities of local governments and civil society institutions in cross-border conflict prevention and development management strategies.
- 1.3.** *'Safe Spaces for Peace'* are developed to facilitate sport and cultural exchanges to promote a greater understanding among communities and youth.
- 1.4.** Increased capacities of governments and civil society institutions to adequately respond to the needs of those persons in need of international protection.

Outcome 2: Improved trans-border networks, services and community infrastructure promotes cooperation and commitment to sustainable development and conflict prevention.

Specific results to be achieved would include:

- 2.1.** Evidence on socio-economic conditions and inter/intra-community relations of trans-border communities updated and enhanced.
- 2.2** Increased access to social services to reduce vulnerabilities.
- 2.3** Communities are provided with environmentally friendly sustainable livelihood solutions.
- 2.4** Shared community spaces and cross-border infrastructure created and/or improved.
- 2.5** Raised awareness about counter trafficking in the communities.

V. Participating/Recipient UN Organizations

- IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP

VI. Estimated budget and implementation period

- USD 2 Million
- 24 months (January 2018 – December 2019)

September 2017
United Nations, Belize