

Country Technical Note
on Indigenous Peoples' Issues

Belize



Country technical note on indigenous peoples' issues

BELIZE

Submitted by:

Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Autonomy and Development

(CADPI)

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BENIC	Belize National Indigenous Council
CELADE	Population Division, ECLAC
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CICA	Indigenous Council of Central America
IACHR	Inter-American Commission of Human Rights
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPAF	Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility
IPAFT	Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility Tracking system
ILO	International Labour Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

Indigenous Peoples profile - Belize

To facilitate policy implementation at the country level, IFAD's Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples (2009) recommended that Country Technical Notes be prepared to provide country-specific information on indigenous peoples, as well as to contribute to the development of country programme strategies and project design. A number of them have been prepared by indigenous peoples' leaders with the support of indigenous peoples' organizations. The Notes are intended as 'living documents' to support learning on indigenous peoples' issues.

We thank those who have contributed to the preparation and update of this note. A special thanks goes to IWGIA. The Indigenous World book which is issued every year by IWGIA provides a source of updated and reliable information. We wish to thank Zahra Hdidou for supporting the 2017 update.

1. Demographics, history, language and culture

Total population: 324,528 (2010) 366,304 (2015)¹

Indigenous Maya population: 36,507² (2010)/ 45,257³ (2015)
Percentage Maya: 11.3%

Male: 22,052

Female: 23,206

According to the Statistics Institute of Belize 2010 Census, Belize has a population of 324,528 people, of whom 52.9 per cent are Mestizo, 26 percent Creole, 21 per cent are descendants of black Africans and Mulattos (descendants of black Africans and Europeans), 11.3 per cent are indigenous Maya and 6.1 per cent are Garifuna (descendants of black Africans and Caribbeans), and 7.8 per cent are white, of British or Spanish origin. The rest of the population comprises small communities of European, Mexican, Guatemalan, U.S., Honduran, Jamaican, East Indian, Chinese and Far Eastern origins.

Table 1. Population of Belize by age and sex. 2010 Census

Age group	Total population		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Population	%	Population	%
0-14	111,320	35.6	56,541	35.8	54,477	35.2
15-64	188,244	60.2	94,603	59.9	93,941	60.7
Over 65	13,133	4.2	6,791	4.3	6,345	4.1
Total	312,698	100	157,935	100	154,763	100

Source: 2010 *Population and Housing Census Belize*.

¹ 2015 Compendium of statistics. Statistical Institute of Belize website: <http://sib.org.bz/>

² This number corresponds to the result for "ethnic group affiliation" as oppose to simply "ethnic group" from the 2010 Population and Housing Census of Belize. This criteria will be applied to the rest of this document.

³ 2015 Compendium of statistics. Statistical Institute of Belize website: <http://sib.org.bz/>

Table 2: Population by Maya Ethnic Group Affiliation and Sex, Belize 2010

	Total	Males	Females
Maya Ketchi	20,616	10,342	10,274
Maya Mopan	13,022	6,436	6,586
Maya Yucatec	2,869	1,520	1,349

1.1 History

Belize was part of the Mayan Empire that once extended from the south of Mexico to Guatemala and Honduras. One of the region's most important political and cultural centres was located in Belize, in the place today known as Caracol, which features inscriptions in one of the major variants of Classic Maya, called Ch'olti'an language by epigraphists. To the north of the Maya highlands [Montes Mayas], the inscriptions of Lamaná are in seventeenth-century Yucatecan Maya.

Archeologists estimate that during the height of the Mayan Empire, between one and two million indigenous Mayan people lived in the region of Belize.⁴ During the classic period prior to the tenth century, close to 400,000 people lived in the territory that now belongs to Belize. Although their numbers declined during the post-classical period, the land under Mayan control was still populated when the Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century. The main inhabitants at that time were Mopan, a branch of the Yucatecans.

On land now part of Belizean territory, there are remains of numerous Pre-Hispanic Maya settlements such as Lamaná, Xunantunich, Altun Ha, Cerros, Chan Chich, Tzimin Kax and Cuello. Some of these are very old, such as the Cuello site (named after the current owners of the land where it is located) to the west of Orange Walk Town, where the oldest archeological remains date from 350 years before the Christian era. At the Altun Ha site, located 45 kilometres north of Belize City, two important pieces of Maya culture were discovered.

Indigenous peoples had minimal contact with the English settlers of the seventeenth century, perhaps because the Maya occupy lands in the interior.⁵ Despite the large number of Pre-Columbian Maya cities in Belize, history shows that there were no Maya living in the area when the English founded their settlements. Several historians have indicated, erroneously, that the indigenous peoples of Belize came from Guatemala and Mexico. In their eagerness to demonstrate that Belize has no indigenous peoples, they have forgotten that neither Mexico nor Guatemala existed, and that all of Mesoamerica was indigenous land (Regional Unit for Technical Assistance - RUTA, 2003).

The first Europeans who came to what is today Belize were the Spanish Conquistadors. As early as 1524 this territory was part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala. English

⁴ Culture of Belize: <http://www.embajadadebelize.org/aserca/cultura.htm>

⁵ Díaz -Couder, Ernesto (2010). *Atlas sociolingüístico de Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina [Sociolinguistic atlas of the indigenous peoples of Latin America]*, page 880.

explorers began to settle in the area after 1638, and were responsible for introducing the slave trade, trafficking in African slaves, in the region.

In addition to these settlers, pirate crews often settled for brief periods on the islands and along the coast, using them as a base for attacking Spanish vessels. In 1670 the Madrid Treaty put an end to these attacks and the pirates, who were known as Baymen, had to seek alternative occupations.

In 1821, the year of Central American Independence, the territory legally passed into the sovereignty of the United Provinces of Central America, but remained under the de facto control of Great Britain. In 1840 the region was unilaterally declared to be a British colony and was named British Honduras.

1.2 Population and ethnolinguistic group

Table 3. Indigenous population and geographical location by district

Indigenous people	Population by ethnic group affiliation	%	Geographical location by district
Maya Q'eqchi'	20,616	56%	Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo, although Corozal and Orange Walk are home to some indigenous groups as well
Maya Nopán	13,022	35.6%	Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo, with small populations in Corozal
Maya Yucateco	2,869	7.8%	Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize and Cayo, with small populations in Stann Creek and Toledo
Total	36,507	100.0	

Source: Prepared on the basis of the 2010 Census.

Table 4. Percentage of Population in District Claiming Maya Ethnic Group⁶

Corozal	Orange Walk	Belize	Cayo	Stann Creek	Toledo
2.8	1.7	2.4	8.0	16.9	66.5

Table 5. Population by Maya Ethnic Group Affiliation and District

	Country total	Corozal	Orange Walk	Belize	Cayo	Stann Creek	Toledo
Maya Ketchi	20,616	399	254	1,118	1,904	1,852	15,089
Maya Mopan	13,022	169	297	926	2,371	3,910	5,349
Maya	2,869	590	226	278	1,699	47	29

⁶ According to data from the 2010 Population Census. Percentages of indigenous Maya per region were not available from the 2015 Compendium of statistics

Yucatec							
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1.3 Language and culture

In Belize, the Maya and Garifuna communities have endeavoured to maintain their cultural and linguistic heritage. The following indigenous languages are spoken in the country:

1. Yucatecan Mayan: now being displaced by Spanish;
2. Mopan Mayan: 86 per cent of Mopan Maya people consider this their first language;
3. Q'eqchi' Mayan: 96 per cent of Q'eqchi' Maya people consider this their first language; and
4. Garifuna: now being displaced by Creole.

Recent years have seen attempts to offer instruction in indigenous languages. In the south of the country in particular, several teachers are promoting a revival of the language to make teaching more effective. However, these initiatives are still limited to a few schools.⁷

2. Socio-economic, cultural and natural resource situation

2.1 Geographical distribution

Indigenous peoples, all of Mayan origin, are present in all six districts. They live mainly in rural areas in essentially peasant communities, but are not distributed uniformly throughout the country. The Q'eqchi' and Mopan Maya live mainly in the district of Toledo, and to a lesser degree in the districts of Cayo and Stann Creek, whereas the Yucatecan Maya are located mainly in the district of Cayo, and to a lesser degree in the district of Corozal.

2.2 Major economic activities

The economic activities practised by indigenous peoples in Belize vary by region. To the north of the country, the Yucatecan Maya people have an economy based on growing sugarcane to produce sugar for export. The indigenous peoples in the south practise subsistence farming using traditional cropping methods. Maize, beans, rice and cacao are grown for family consumption or local sale, and in some cases the hunting of wildlife continues to be practised (RUTA, 2003).

2.3 Organization and degree of political participation

A foreign system of village councils has been imposed on the indigenous Maya people of Belize. As a rule this system acts in step with the political party in power and is in charge of all socio-political matters and projects carried out in a given community. This new organization supersedes the system of *alcaldes*, or local magistrates, in the country's more assimilated communities. In the south of Toledo – where the Maya have been least stripped of their way of life – the village council exists jointly with the community *alcaldía* – which was originally a traditional community governance system with no party affiliation that oversaw all aspects of life in indigenous communities (RUTA, 2003).

⁷ Díaz-Couder, Ernesto (2010). *Atlas sociolingüístico de Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina*; country data, pp. 2-3.

There is also an ethnic and cultural revival movement, "Mayas del Norte", which promotes Maya alliance for political lobbying at the governmental level, through the indigenous organization Xunantunich.⁸

Indigenous participation in the design and implementation of development projects in Belize has become an imperative that will be increasingly impossible to ignore.

Table 6. Socio-economic situation of indigenous peoples⁹

Employment

The following data are available on the employed population over 15 years of age:

Indigenous population: Employer: 3.9% Self-employed or unpaid family employment: 45.8%

Employee: 49.7%

Total population: Employer: 5.5% Self-employed or unpaid family employment: 22.0%

Employee: 71.7%

Unemployment rate

No specific data are available. ECLAC /CELADE (2000) indicates that among the population over 15 years of age, those who worked for a salary, benefit or for family gain were as follows:

Total indigenous population: 41.5%

Total population: 47.3%

However, national unemployment according to the 2010 Census stood at 23.1%. The highest rate was seen among women, at 33.3%, compared to 13.1% unemployment among men.

Health

Infant mortality rate, total: 21.95 deaths per 1,000 births

Male: 24.43 deaths per 1,000 births

Female: 19.35 deaths per 1,000 births (2011 est.)

Sexual and reproductive health

Overall fertility rate:

No specific data are available.

Based on information from ECLAC /CELADE (2000), the following data have been calculated:

Indigenous women aged 50-54 have had an average of 8.14 children by the end of their reproductive lives.*

Women in Belize aged 50-54 overall have had an average of 5.9 children by the end of their reproductive lives.*¹⁰

*Measure of parity. Calculated on the basis of information from ECLAC /CELADE. Should be taken as a general approximation of fertility trends. Not recommended for data referencing.

Maternal mortality

WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank indicate that in 2005 the maternal mortality rate in Belize was between 52 and 100 deaths per 100,000 births. In the absence of specific data, the maternity rate among indigenous women can be expected to be in the higher range.

⁸ Díaz-Couder, Ernesto (2010). op.cit., p. 4.

⁹ It was not possible to obtain disaggregated data from the 2010 Census for each of the categories included in the table.

¹⁰ Index Mundi. Belize: Infant mortality rate.

Education

Illiteracy

No specific data are available. However, in 2000, 68.5 per cent of indigenous peoples had no education whatsoever. ECLAC/CELADE (2000).

Highest year of schooling completed. ECLAC/CELADE (2000):

Indigenous peoples:

None: 68.5%
Primary school certificate: 26.6%
Secondary school diploma: 2.9%
Other degrees: 1.4%
Not sure: 0.6%

Total population of Belize:

None: 44.0%
Primary school certificate: 37.3%
Secondary school diploma: 10.3%
Other degrees: 7.4%
Not sure: 1.0%

Highest year of schooling completed by sex: ECLAC/CELADE (2000)

Indigenous women:

None: 71.0%
Primary school certificate: 25.67%
Secondary school diploma: 1.98%
Other degrees: 0.83%
Not sure: 0.5%

Indigenous men:

None: 66.0%
Primary school certificate: 27.5%
Secondary school diploma: 3.86%
Other degrees: 1.96%
Not sure: 0.68%

Housing

CELADE/ECLAC (2000)

Total housing units: 51,945 Total indigenous housing units: 24,501

Infrastructure

Housing with deficient sanitary services (ECLAC, CELADE: 2000 Census):

Indigenous housing: 11.8 % with shared sanitary services
Non-indigenous housing: 10.0% with shared sanitary services

Housing with electricity (ECLAC, CELADE: 2000 Census):

Indigenous housing: 40.0% with electricity
Non-indigenous housing: 81.7% with electricity

Inadequate water supply. Percentage of homes with water supply from rivers, streams or cisterns (ECLAC, CELADE: 2000 Census):

Indigenous housing: 10.62% Non-indigenous housing: 2.24%

Economic conditions

Access to credit: None found

2.4 Poverty index

In April 2009 when the Living Standards Survey took place, more than 30 per cent of households in Belize were living in poverty, and about 10 per cent in abject poverty. A further 13 per cent of households were classified as poverty-vulnerable.¹¹

7.39% of the population are in multidimensional poverty, according to the UNDP. The poverty rate is 41.3.¹²

According to the 2010 Poverty Assessment Report (PAR), rural poverty affects 44% of rural population while urban poverty incidence is 22%¹. Further 14% of households is deemed vulnerable to poverty, with uneven access to resources across groups and communities along age, gender or ethnic groups. Therefore, more than half of all households (57%) are either poor or susceptible to being poor. Several internal and external factors have contributed to the decline in living conditions of the rural poor, inter alia unemployment, inadequate tax and trade policies, no institutional support to poverty programmes, limited institutional capacity, increased crimes and violence. Belize's small-size economy, high dependence on exports and imports, and exposure to natural disasters make the country particularly vulnerable to terms-of trade shocks and volatility. Recently, Belize has experienced lower oil exports and decreased agricultural and fishery outputs. On the upside, the US economic expansion has boosted the tourism sector.¹³

2.5 Social and economic conditions relative to the population as a whole

The social and economic conditions of indigenous peoples in Belize are characterized by poverty, marginalization and inequality, in addition to a lack of recognition for their rights. Among these are territorial rights, including rights to ancestral land and natural resources, which have a direct impact on their economic conditions.

The United Nations system agencies are in agreement on this point. UNICEF and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child have expressed concern over inequalities and widespread poverty among the indigenous population. The Committee has recommended that priority be given to effective measures to reduce poverty among indigenous and minority children (A/HRC/12/4, 4 June 2009).¹⁴

¹¹ National Human Development Advisory Committee (2010). Belize country poverty assessment. <http://www.belize.gov.bz/public/Attachment/131612515371.pdf>

¹² <http://www.bz.undp.org/content/belize/en/home/countryinfo/>

¹³ IFAD Belize Country Strategy Note, 2017

¹⁴ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Belize. Human Rights Council. Twelfth session, June 2009.

3. National legislation: indigenous peoples, lands and territories

3.1 Rights recognized by the Government

Belize has not ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169. The Political Constitution of 1982 is confined to recognizing traditional fundamental rights such as freedom from prejudice on the basis of race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, credo or sex (article 3), and prohibiting discrimination (article 16). Following an amendment in 2001, the preamble to the Constitution now mentions the need for a State that protects the cultural identity and values of Belizeans, including those of indigenous peoples.¹⁵

The Constitution recognizes the cultural diversity of the country's territories, but has not been amended to provide for government action on multiculturalism. Moreover, it does not recognize customary rights or indigenous jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the Government of Belize has undertaken a commitment to reactivate initiatives promoting respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which the government adopted in 2007.¹⁶

3.2 Lands and territories

Communal lands are known as reservations. Legally they continue to be subordinated to a land tenure regime of colonial origin (there are 10 "Indian reservations" covering a total of 70,000 acres, in which only 51 per cent of the Maya population live) that grants the Government the right to administer them "in the best public interest" and with no definition of their permanent legal existence (Grünberg, 2003).¹⁷

Their territorial rights having been violated by logging and oil interests with government support, the Q'eqchi' and Mopán Maya peoples living in 30 communities in Santa Cruz and Conejo, in the district of Toledo, filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR). In 2004, the Commission ruled on the case, issuing a report¹⁸ against the Government of Belize for failing to recognize communal property rights to the lands occupied by indigenous peoples and granting the use of assets and resources thereon to third parties. The ruling called for the Government to initiate a process of demarcation, delimitation and titling of indigenous lands in these communities and to "provide them with the protections necessary to exercise their right to property fully and equally with other members of the Belizean population".

The IACHR, in that report, criticized the judicial authorities for having "violated the right to judicial protection... to the detriment of the Maya people, by rendering domestic judicial proceedings brought by them ineffective through unreasonable delay and thereby failing to provide them with effective access to the courts for protection of their fundamental rights".

¹⁵ Díaz-Couder, Ernesto (2010). Op.cit.

¹⁶ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Belize. Op.cit.

¹⁷ Díaz-Couder, Ernesto (2010). Op.cit.

¹⁸ IACHR. Case 12,053, Report 40/04, Maya Indigenous Community in Toledo District (Belize)

Three years later, in 2007, the Supreme Court of Belize recognized the property rights of the Q'eqchi' and Mopan Maya communities to the ancestral lands they occupied. In this ruling, the Court began to distance itself from the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth with a historical statement that it was time to do away with the fallacy that the acquisition of sovereignty equals property, and that a change in sovereignty in and of itself did not extinguish indigenous rights to land.¹⁹

Although the Government of Belize appealed this ruling, in June 2010 the Court again found in favor of the indigenous petitioners, stating that customary ownership to Maya land had always existed and continued to exist in the south of Belize.²⁰

The 2010 ruling upheld the 2007 ruling, stating that indigenous land ownership existed in all Maya communities in Toledo District and that, where it existed, it conferred collective and individual property rights in the sense of sections 3.d and 17 of the Constitution of Belize.

Belize has undertaken to review the recommendations made by the Human Rights Council to protect Maya customary property rights in accordance with Maya customary laws and land tenure practices in consultation with affected Maya people of the whole Toledo district.²¹

3.3 Rights recognized by the State in matters of education

Access to education continues to be limited for a high proportion of the population, and even more so for indigenous peoples. English is the official language and the language of instruction at school. A mastery of English is a prerequisite for making progress in education. Since the indigenous population has less of a mastery of the language than other groups, they are at a disadvantage in gaining access to and staying in school, especially in rural regions where most of the Maya indigenous peoples live.²² Moreover, the Constitution does not include cultural diversity and indigenous perspective as part of its political agenda in educational matters (Del Val, 2008).

3.4 Obstacles to the exercise of rights

The fact that indigenous peoples are invisible in the Constitution owing to discrimination creates a difficult situation of legal insecurity in terms of land, in combination with the lack of access to quality education, technology and the investment capital needed to develop the wealth of socio-cultural resources of these peoples. This situation not only stands in the way of addressing the problem of poverty, but also places the sustainability of the region's biodiversity at risk.

The system of government and constitution do not allow for authentic political representation of indigenous peoples, since participation is confined to voting for a political party. This party system means that the interests of indigenous peoples are not represented in the National Congress.

Indigenous peoples are used as a bridge to political power. Primarily, the Government has failed to guarantee two rights to indigenous peoples. The first is access to land – either for

¹⁹ <http://www.pueblosoriginariosenamerica.org/?q=libro/pueblos-originarios-en-america/pueblos-originarios-en-america/belice>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Belize. Op.cit.

²² Díaz-Couder, Ernesto (2010). Op.Cit

farming or to build houses. Where indigenous communities do hold communal lands, the Government has the authority to assign plots to the party agent in the community.

The second right that has been denied is the right to traditional, non-party government. Since power is one of the political resources that the Government is not prepared to cede to indigenous peoples, decision-making at the community level has been taken away from the people and they will not recover it until such time as they have developed the capacity for effective lobbying to convince the Government of the social and political benefits of certain actions or projects (RUTA, 2003).

4. Information on treaties, declarations and conventions ratified by the country

Table 7. Status of international treaties, declarations and conventions

Status	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	Convention No. 169	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples	Agenda 21	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	Optional Protocol to CEDAW	Belém do Pará Convention
Signed	September 2000		07/09/2007		07/03/1990		15/11/1996
Ratified					16/05/1990	09/12/2002 (a)	25/11/1996

Source: Prepared on the basis of international treaties, declarations and conventions

Factors limiting or preventing compliance with the treaties, declarations and conventions ratified by the country:

Belize has neither signed nor ratified ILO Convention No. 169. One case submitted to the Supreme Court of Belize by the Maya community of Santa Cruz and others (ruling of 18 October 2007) claiming recognition of their customary right to property of their land based on traditional occupation and use of land by Maya peoples, on the grounds of provisions in the Constitution of Belize, Maya customary law, international human rights law (e.g. ILO Convention No. 169) and common law, was resolved in a manner satisfactory to indigenous communities, based on an analysis of the arguments of the communities, the response of the State and the evidence produced, substantially accepting the arguments and claim of the plaintiffs, citing, among other legal instruments, ILO Convention No. 169. Nevertheless, investigators acknowledge that the defense of land rights vis-à-vis the State continues to be weak owing to the lack of unified leadership.

5. Regional, national and grass-roots organizations and networks

(Includes information from the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility - IPAF data base)

The indigenous peoples of Belize have set up the following organizations:

1. The Maya Cultural Council of Toledo
2. The Q'eqchi Council of Belize
3. The Maya Women's Council of Toledo

4. The Association of Alcaldes of Toledo in southern Belize
5. The Xunantunich, Ukuxtal Masewal association, in the north
6. The Maya Institute of Belize
7. The National Garifuna Council

They have also formed alliances such as the Maya Leaders Alliance of Toledo, bringing together the five organizations of the south, which undertook a process of negotiation on land rights with the Government.

In 1996, the aforementioned organizations founded the National Indigenous Council of Belize (BENIC) to create a forum for dialogue and consultation and to exert influence both nationally and internationally in matters of indigenous rights and to promote their own development. This National Council is now a member of the Indigenous Council of Central America (CICA).²³

Information is provided on the organizations below:

Garifuna National Council

Garifuna Indigenous People of Belize

Mission: to preserve, strengthen and develop our culture, and to promote economic development among the Garifuna people.

<http://www.ngcbelize.org/index.php>

Contact:

Address: Pablo Lambey Garifuna Cultural Center; 59 Calle Commerce; Dangriga, Belize

Tel: (501) 669-0639

Email: ngcbelize@gmail.com

National Indigenous Council of Belize (BENIC)

Born of the recognition of the need for an organization to fight for the rights of indigenous peoples in Belize, to promote harmonious and cooperative relations, to promote the principles of justice, equality and non-discrimination, and to ensure the dignity, survival and well-being of the indigenous peoples of Belize. Pillars of work are: land security, indigenous rights, women's participation, recovery and preservation of indigenous culture, education and the environment.

<http://www.consejoindigena.org/Organizacion.html>

Contact:

Email: benic@ciaregional.org

²³ RUTA (2003), information on the indigenous peoples of Belize as input for the Regional Integrated Ecosystem Management Project in Indigenous Communities in Central America.

6. Operations by IFAD and IPAF

IFAD Country Strategy Note Belize 2017

The Country Strategy Note (CSN) strategic objectives including climate change adaptation and capacity building among farmers for food-production and nutritional security will focus on rural youth, women and indigenous communities.

The CSN recognises the Milpa or 'slash and burn' system practiced by traditional Mayas, however it recognises that this system is on the decline and has been affected by the increasing intensity and variability of climatic change. It aims at improvements in sustainable cropping systems combined with better watershed management which would provide opportunities for these systems as would foster availability of selected inputs and improved access to markets.

Lessons learned from other countries are that the connection of indigenous people to land and other forms of self-determination is a sensitive yet highly important issue. CSN recognises the need to assess the representation of different ethnic groups in decision-making for their own development, as well as the need for community leaders, both traditional mayors and local councils to receive more leadership training.

- **Project title: Rural Finance Programme**

Project area: National scale

Target group: Mayas (Mopan and Kekchi) and Garifunas

Co-financiers: Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) (US\$1.9 million)

% of beneficiary indigenous peoples: 45%

Total amount of benefits to indigenous peoples: 2.70

IFAD financing benefitting indigenous peoples: 1.350

Year approved: 2008

Implementation period: 2009-2016

Status: Closed

- **Project title: Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Management Project**

Project area: Stann Creek District, Toledo District.

Target group: Mayans

% of beneficiary indigenous peoples: 20%

Total amount of benefits to indigenous peoples: 1.333

IFAD financing benefitting indigenous peoples: 0.451

Year approved: 1998

Implementation period: 1998-2006

Status: Closed

- **Project title: Toledo Small Farmers development.**

Project area: Toledo District

Target group: Ketchi Maya, Mopan Maya, Mestizo, Garifuna, east indian, Creole ethnic groups.

% of beneficiary indigenous peoples: 7%

Total amount of benefits to indigenous peoples: 0.228
IFAD financing benefitting indigenous peoples: 0.145
Year approved: 1985
Implementation period: 1988-1994
Status: Closed

Source: Prepared on the basis of project data.

Other projects financed by IFAD under IPAF:

- **Project title: Strengthening food security, traditional land governance and forest protection of the Q'eqchi people of southern Belize, 2011**

Organization: Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM)

Target group: Q'eqchi Maya

Grant amount: US\$40,000

The Q'eqchi Maya community of Midway produces 95% of its food through an ancestral practice known as 'milpa' farming, also known as 'swidden' agriculture. However, maize yields have declined dramatically over the years, leading to the fragmentation of communal land management, food shortages and a decline in income for the community.

SATIIM and the community of Midway plan to combine Western agricultural science with traditional agronomy, to strengthen community food security, communal land governance and traditional forest protection. Specifically, the project will integrate modern and organic agriculture practices into traditional 'milpa' cultivation. This will be accomplished in two years whereby the community of Midway will establish experimental and control plots for comparison of soil fertility, yield and harvest mechanization of traditional maize. They will also organize a new Mayan Farmers Sustainable Development Association to promote sustainability, training in new techniques, marketing and distribution strategies of farm products.

- **Project title: Preservation and promotion of local varieties of traditional crops, 2008**

Organization: Tumul K'in Learning Centre

Target group: Q'eqchi', Mopán and Yucatecan Maya.

Grant amount: US\$29,000

This project aimed to provide Q'eqchi, Mopán and Yucatec Maya people living in the Toledo and Cayo districts of Belize with traditional crops as alternatives to hybridized crops that require fertilizers and chemicals and represent an extinction risk for traditional crops. The project was based on three components:

- seed propagation and participant selection;
- education and seed cultivation: non-conventional educational seminars incorporating traditional Maya ceremonies were carried out with the

- communities on issues related to land preparation, cultivation and harvesting, and planting materials and seeds were distributed;
- documentation, monitoring and integration with the farming plan and curriculum of the Tumul K'in Learning Centre. Agricultural data was gathered on different varieties of corn and beans in the various cultivated areas.

The project directly benefited 51 people (34 men and 17 women) from eight communities in Toledo, who were given easy access to local varieties of corn and beans and became able to provide other families in the surrounding areas with the seeds. As a result, local varieties of these traditional crops are being preserved and their consumption has increased since they are more readily available. The tradition of consuming different colours of corn is therefore being retained. Additionally, the traditional meetings held along with the high involvement of young people in the activities fostered youth appreciation for local Maya food.

The primary change brought about by the project implementation is that of reminding people of the importance of preserving traditional varieties of corn and beans. The project has brought to the forefront the importance of traditional agriculture and food sustainability and will assist parents with income generation, thus enhancing financial security for the education of farmers' children.

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ANNEX

Annex 1. Map showing distribution of indigenous peoples



Fuente: Fundación para el Avances de los estudios Mesoamericanos: <http://research.famsi.org/>

