

Belize



KEY FACTS:

- ◆ Joined Commonwealth: 1981
- ◆ Capital: Belmopan
- ◆ Population: 288,000 (2007)
- ◆ GDP growth: 2.3% p.a. 1990–2005
- ◆ Official language: English
- ◆ Time: GMT minus 6 hours
- ◆ Currency: Belizean dollar (Bz\$)

Current vulnerabilities and threats

1. What are the health risks from current or future climate change impacts that are of most concern to your country?

- ◆ Certainly it is the increase in numbers and intensity of hurricanes.
- ◆ Floods or drought and its impact in food safety and security with the consequent undesirable effects in the prevalence of malnutrition and chronic non-communicable diseases are of great concern.
- ◆ The potential threat of increased vector-borne and communicable diseases are likewise priorities kept under close monitoring.

2. What population groups in your country are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change and what are the impacts likely to be?

- ◆ People living in poverty, children, elderly, pregnant women, subsistence farmers, and the impact is to be felt in their access to culturally accepted food, anaemia, eventually increase of infectious diseases and emergent / re-emergent diseases (cholera, dengue, malaria, TB, Chagas Disease, etc.)
- ◆ Diabetes, Hypertension and Obesity are at epidemic proportions Belize affecting children and young adults; these groups are impacted from the school cafeterias selling unhealthy food to lack of policies at the workplace to encourage physical activities and less dependence on fast food and high calories carbonated drinks.

Strategy and policy

3. How much of a priority is addressing the impacts of climate change on health for your country? (please click box)

Low priority.

4. Please describe the strategies your country has developed (for example, Health and Climate Change Adaptation Strategies) that address the health impacts of climate change.

There has been no specific strategy neither formulated nor implemented in Belize to date. Few initiatives have been carried out with the intent of raising awareness to impact of climate change.

Belize has just started to participate in Safe Hospitals Initiative supported by Regional Caribbean PAHO Office. This is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of health facilities to natural hazards but also to 'other' hazards.

An assessment was recently made of the impact of Climate Change and

Dengue which was found to be an illness affecting neighbouring countries and of considerably underreported by our Epidemiological Surveillance System.

5. Has health been integrated into national climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies?

Yes.

6. What steps have been made towards implementation of these strategies?

None.

7. What are the current policy gaps in addressing climate change and health?

Unregulated development: deforestation, unplanned urbanisation, lack of diversification of the agricultural sector, building code not enforced, national referral medical centres continue to be concentrated in highly vulnerable coastal areas of the country.

Indeed very limited intersectoral integration of national policies to deal with climate change and health.

8. How well equipped is your health system to cope with the impacts of climate change?

Belize has a basic but strong primary healthcare network, with excellent MCH component and a good Environmental Health Program which includes vector control, food safety and water safety among others.

9. Have you made any changes to your health system in response to increased risks resulting from climate change and if so what changes have you made?

There aren't many examples to cite but I believe the relocation of Rock View Hospital (Mental Health Hospital) to Belmopan (Palm View area) can stand as an example of reducing vulnerability of a health facility to hurricane and flooding made extremely more challenging due to the fact of dealing with mentally challenged individuals.

The implementation of Belize Health Information System will contribute to the active surveillance of diseases that are linked to climate change effects but the utilization of the information both at the national and sub-national level for decision-making still needs to be increased.

The implementation of the National Health Insurance in areas of the

country where most vulnerable population groups exist brings equity and reduces the gap in terms of access to quality healthcare and therefore minimize the adverse effects of climate change regarding diseases like malaria, dengue, chagas, diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases and chronic communicable and non communicable diseases.

10. What are the main constraints to addressing the health impacts of climate change in your country and how will these be addressed?

The knowledge and being able to proactively take measures to minimise the impact of climate change seems to be in my opinion the main hurdle.

From the Political level to the farmer and/or the street vendor, the teachers, students, housewives: every body need to be exposed to more and more information linking what is happening in the environment to the effects of 'climate change' and how each person can contribute to minimize it.

Human Resources shortage at different levels of the Health System, but specially at the primary healthcare level is a serious constraint that really demands reviewing of the existing capacity (strengths), identifying the gaps (weakness) and producing a Human Resources Development Plan with vision and projections into the future that can be sustainable and respond to the present and future challenges.

11. Have national resources been allocated to address climate change and health in your country? If so, approximately how much has been allocated and for what issues?

I am not aware of allocations from national resources with the exception of the Regional Climate Change Observatory situated in Belmopan but its functioning, scope and benefits to Belize are not known, understood or taken advantage of by most.

12. Is the Ministry of Health working together with other ministries (such as Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Fisheries and Finance) to address health and climate change issues?

No.

13. Has your country been involved in work to manage climate change and health at the international level?

Under the SICA (Sistema de Integracion Centro-Americana) there have been Sub-regional Initiatives integrating Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Health but lack of follow up at the National and Sub-National levels is evident.

14. How would you describe the capacity of your country to participate at the global level on climate change and health?

Belize is at the very early stage of capacity development in the area of climate change and health.

Any other comments or information you would like to provide

Support is needed for the formulation of policies with regards to climate change and its effects in health.