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UNICEF Belize: Improving WASH in Primary Schools

*A Final Report Prepared for Mr. David Kim
December 2013*

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Thank you for your generous support and commitment to improving the lives of the children of Belize. Your investment to repair the WASH facilities in three schools has and will continue to improve the learning conditions of these children and allow them to focus on their learning and education. This final report summarizes the status of the project and highlights the importance and impact of the assessments conducted during Phase I as well as the completion of Phase II of the project – the remodeling and construction of the WASH facilities in New Horizon, San Pedro and Caye Caulker primary schools. Because of your leadership and generosity, UNICEF has leveraged over \$1.4 million from the Government of Belize and other partners, for the development of WASH in Belizean primary schools – thank you.

Situation Overview

The national education statistics in 2012-2013 Belize illustrates that 90.3 percent of all children are enrolled in school. While this might seem like a major success, only 40.3 percent of children complete primary school within the prescribed period of eight years. Further analyses additionally indicate that there is inconsistent attendance by officially enrolled children. In Belize, children from poor households are disproportionately affected by the high cost of education, and unhealthy school facilities, hidden hunger, poor nutrition, poor school readiness, corporal punishment, micro-nutrient deficiency and weak parents and school partnership.

Stann Creek together with the poorest district Toledo are the two southern-most and often labeled “forgotten districts” in Belize. These districts are home to the majority of Belize’s two indigenous groups with Toledo being the traditional homeland of the Mayas and Stann Creek, the Garifuna. These two indigenous groups constitute 19 percent of the total population, however their socio-economic status depict stark inequalities when compared to other ethnic groups. The national social and economic statistics also continually portray the southern districts with indicators far behind the rest of the country. The Stann Creek District is also the heart of the banana and citrus industries that employ migrant workers who come to Belize with their families and children, constantly challenging the planning abilities of the Ministry of Education and denominational school managements to keep pace with ever expanding student populations in rural primary schools. Indigenous and migrant children constitute two of the most vulnerable and underserved populations in Belize having more than doubled the poverty, chronic malnutrition, child labor and other social indicators of other groups in the country.

The situation on the islands tells a different story since Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker are mainly tourist destinations. These northern islands are approximately an hour and a half away by boat from Belize City and have a combined population of 11,800. Although there is major infrastructural development on San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, poor communities such as San Mateo, San Juan and San Pedrito are home to an immigrant population who face many challenges in terms of the changing ecology. There are many outside influences on this small population that affect children staying in school and transitioning to secondary schools. Children are more enticed by tourism, the possibility of migration and the varying outside influences of cultural values and lifestyle.



● Key areas of work are in Stann Creek and Toledo.

UNICEF in Action

During 2013, your lead gift and commitment to the initial assessment of the 11 schools inspired approximately 19 additional primary schools in Belize to assess their physical needs in terms of water and sanitation facilities. Teachers, students, and parents have benefitted from increased awareness of WASH in schools in over 19 communities. **As a result of your gift, 1,884 students from the three primary schools on the islands (New Horizon S.D.A., San Pedro R.C. and Caye Caulker R.C.) have received new bathroom facilities which are now aligned with the national and international standards of WASH in schools – a tremendous accomplishment.**

The results of these assessments motivated the development of various activities which focused on key component standard #5 of the national Quality Child Friendly Schools (QCFS) framework: safe, supportive and learning community. The water, sanitation and hygiene project is incorporated under key component #5; therefore, for schools to implement successful water, sanitation and hygiene projects, schools must go through the process of becoming a QCFS. The self-assessment process enabled capacity building of key stakeholders in the program, and garnered the commitment of general managers, technical engineers and the Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA) as never before. The schools' self-assessment also evaluated the extent to which their delivery of the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum is impacting health and hygiene practices of students and staff.

Catalyst for Change: Improving WASH Conditions in Schools for the Children of Belize

The initial assessment of the eleven schools selected for this project, completed in 2013, stimulated an unexpected outcome for UNICEF Belize. After discussing with the Government of Belize the engineer's findings, The Ministry of Health, the Social Investment Fund and the National Emergency Organization (NEMO) all decided to partner with UNICEF to improve WASH facilities in 84 schools throughout the country, a development that costs around \$4 million. **UNICEF Belize has been able to obtain pledges for \$1.4 million from the Government and other partners for this project.** In addition, UNICEF Belize collaborated with the Government in developing and adopting new common standards for WASH in schools to ensure that the construction of WASH facilities meet acceptable international standards. **A U.S. Fund for UNICEF donor in New England was also inspired by your dedication to this project and has recently pledged support in the amount of \$43,402 to renovate WASH facilities in the Central Christian Primary School, Belize City.**

Your continued support serves as a catalyst for change in Belize – the Government and other individual donors are now investing in the importance of this initiative and without your commitment to improving WASH facilities in schools for the children of Belize this sea change would not be occurring on such a large-scale.



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Impact of Your Investment

Phase I: Initial Assessments and Key Consultations

Phase I of the project was completed by July 2013. The major challenge in the project was conducting initial assessments and key consultations for the three primary schools on the Islands. When the project initially began, UNICEF had conducted assessments and consultations for 11 schools in the Stann Creek District (Southern District). These schools were already designated UNICEF Child Friendly Schools.

As UNICEF prepared to start work on the physical infrastructure of the schools in the Southern District, the project focus was shifted from these schools to three schools on the Islands to accommodate your request to help attract other potential donors. In order to make this shift, UNICEF needed to conduct initial assessments and consultations to prepare the community and three new schools for the project. This lengthy process to effectively and efficiently lay the foundation to collaborate with the government and community to improve the WASH facilities in these three schools took many months to complete.

Several other factors added to the project's timeline. The first was only one of the three Island schools was designated a UNICEF Child Friendly School. UNICEF needed to conduct the process for the other two schools to gain CFS designation. Other factors were the increased travel time back and forth to the Island schools due their location, and inclement weather as this is the country's hurricane season (June – November). We cannot express how important these initial consultations and assessments were – not only for the benefit of the three selected schools but for the precedent they set for assessments and thus plans for addressing inadequacies within schools across the country.

Phase II: Renovations and Remodeling

We are happy to report that all WASH facility renovations have been completed in the New Horizon S.D.A., San Pedro R.C. and Caye Caulker R.C. primary schools. **The completed renovations at the three selected schools have qualified the schools to be recognized as QCFS.** The handing over ceremonies took place November 27-28. The ceremonies were a tremendous success and the renovations have been very well received by school officials, teachers, parents and students.

San Pedro R.C. Primary School

The restroom facility at the San Pedro R.C. Primary School has been renovated to accommodate 9 toilet stalls for females with two hand wash basins; and 7 toilet stalls for males, three urinals and two hand wash basins. These renovations now adequately meet the needs for approximately 1,000 students. An addition restroom structure will be considered for another phase of this project to ensure the proportion of students to facility at this school meet national standard guidelines.



Renovated Female Restrooms



Renovated Male Restrooms



San Pedro R.C Primary School – Exterior View

New Horizon S.D.A. Primary School

New Horizon has a current student population of 484; 234 males and 250 females and 18 staff members including support staff. During Phase I of this project it was determined that all restrooms needed to be upgraded and expanded to meet the needs of students and staff. As a result of the renovations, all student and staff restrooms now include hand wash basins – prior to renovations there were none. The renovations have since installed hand wash basins and students and staff no longer relies on the one standing pipe outside of the bathrooms. Bathroom stall doors have been elevated and each unit has been renovated. All of the remodeled bathrooms have now been upgraded to national standards that take into account hurricane safety standards and lighting and safety issues.



Completed Female Stalls - Upper Division (Left) and Lower Division (Right)



Completed Male Lavatories - Upper Division (Left) and Lower Division (Right)



Completed Lavatories Exterior

Caye Caulker Primary School

Caye Caulker Primary School has a current population of 400 students: 203 males and 177 females. During Phase I, the existing restroom between the east and west classroom buildings was remodeled to create two bathroom units for lower division boys and girls. As you may recall, the bathroom facility in the upper school building was not accessible by students from the outside of the building. Renovations have addressed this issue by constructing stairs so students can access the facility without interrupting learning. This bathroom facility has been remodeled to national standards and there are now five working units available for use by students and staff, if necessary.



Completed Female Lavatories – Lower Division (Left) and Upper Division (Right)



Completed Male Lavatories – Lower Division (Left) and Upper Division (Right)



Completed Lavatories Exterior
Lower Division

A Message of Thanks

The impact of your support has provided access to quality education for the most disadvantaged children in Belize, which is vital to their personal and social development and wellbeing, in addition to their communities and future families. With this investment, more girls and other vulnerable children are now able to complete their education, more children have access to safe, healthy and conducive learning environments, and more children will survive. Our investment in children today will produce the leaders of tomorrow. With you and your friends' transformational gift of \$116,000, UNICEF has been able to mobilize, lead and generate significant collaborations between the government and the local community to improve the WASH environment of the schools so children can safely and effectively focus on their learning and education. By supporting Quality Child-Friendly Schools in Belize, you are helping to build an environment that is conducive to learning and a quality education to the most vulnerable children in Belize.

On behalf of the children of Belize, thank you.



Students at Caye Caulker Roman Catholic School, April 17, 2013
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