Belize Early Childhood Care and Education and Female Employment(P508072)

Project Information Document (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 11-Mar-2025 | Report No: PIDDC01126



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Project Beneficiary(ies)	Operation ID	Operation Name	
Belize	P508072	Belize Early Childhood Development and Female Empowerment	
Region LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN	Estimated Appraisal Date 13-May-2025	Estimated Approval Date 14-Jul-2025	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing (IPF)	Borrower(s) Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

To improve access to quality preschool and early development services to promote female employability and employment in targeted areas.

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

Maximizing Finance for Development

Is this an MFD-Enabling Project (MFD-EP)? No

Is this project Private Capital Enabling (PCE)?

SUMMARY

Total Operation Cost	23.50
Total Financing	23.50
of which IBRD/IDA	23.50
Financing Gap	0.00

No

DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing

International Development Association (IDA)		23.50
IDA Credit		23.50
	ı	
Environmental and Social Risk Classification	Concept Review	v Decision
Moderate	The review did	authorize the preparation to continue
	l	

Other Decision (as needed)

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. **Belize is a small, middle-income, multi-ethnic country with current strong economic growth but high levels of inequalities and exposure to disaster and climate change shocks.** As of 2022, Belize had a population of about 397,483¹ and an annual population growth rate of 1.3 percent.² Although poverty incidence fell from 36.5 percent in 2021 to 25.4 percent in 2023, the level of deprivation among the poor stayed around 0.4 in the range of 0 to 1. Poverty incidence varies significantly across ethnic groups, levels of education and employment status of household heads, and household compositions. It is estimated at 76.2 and 51.8 percent for unemployed and underemployed household heads, respectively, and 30.3 percent for households with children.³ Moreover, the country's fiscal position continues to face important challenges due to high debt payments and other external risks, including global commodity prices. Belize is also vulnerable to hurricanes, storms, and associated flooding, wind damage, and storm surge. It faces key climate-related challenges, including rising sea levels, extreme temperature events, coastal erosion, and changing precipitation patterns. Climate change is expected to significantly impact the education sector. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and changing precipitation patterns may affect infrastructures and lead to more disruptions to school operations and student attendance, and impact educational attainment and learning outcomes.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

2. Investments in health, nutrition, and learning, particularly in the early years, play a fundamental role in children's development, female empowerment, strengthening families and communities, the population's wellbeing and economic growth. A healthy child is a precondition for mothers to return to work and maximize their productivity, as well as for the development of the human capital of the future workforce, thus having direct implications for the mother's employability and economic productivity. As of 2022, the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking for Belize 118, placing it as the last one in the high-HDI group, with 12.4 expected years of schooling.

¹ Belize 2022 Population and Housing Census.

² WDI 2023

³ Statistical Institute of Belize. 2023. Multidimensional Poverty Study.

- 3. In Belize, maternal, child health and nutrition outcomes (MCHN) have generally improved, but some key indicators have stagnated, and disparities remain across socioeconomic factors and geographic locations. Access to key MCHN services is high, but some aspects have low coverage, such as preconception care at 10 percent. Moreover, child vaccination rates are still recovering following the vaccine hesitancy that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, 15 percent of children are obese or overweight, while 8.1 percent stunted, with significant inequities (e.g., the stunting rate is 33.2 percent in Toledo district). Key factors driving challenges in health and nutrition coverage and outcomes include variations in access and quality of MCHN services, especially between urban and rural areas; prevalence of risk factors; and demand side barriers, such as limited knowledge; and poor engagement of males.
- 4. Participation in childcare and preschool is markedly limited in Belize. According to 2022 data, only 11 percent of 3year-olds and 52 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in preschool, which caters to ages 3 and 4 and is not mandatory. Of the 223 preschools, 52 are government-owned, 117 government-aided, 49 private, and 5 specially assisted; 150 preschools are attached to a primary school (sharing a principal and facilities), while the rest operate independently. The preschool teacher-to-student ratio of 1:19 in urban areas and 1:16 in rural areas in 2022 suggests that both supply and demand supports are needed to improve preschool enrollment. Preschools are to provide 180 school days in a school year and 3 hours per day, ending at around 12pm. In certain preschools, childcare services are added in the afternoon in response to demand. There are 24 daycare centers in total, offering full-day or afternoon services. Most daycare centers are in Belize City and Belmopan and cater to ages 3 months-4 years. Visits to daycare centers revealed that the main reason for enrollment in daycare for ages 3-4 was short preschool hours. Potential drivers of the general low participation rates in formal care and preschool include multidimensional poverty, lack of access, cultural and social norms, and lack of knowledge about the benefits of early childhood development (ECD). In addition to formal care and preschool, the Roving Care Program (RCP) supports in-home child nutrition and stimulation, maternal health, parenting, and parent/caretaker accompaniment, targets children between birth and three years who lack access to formal early childhood education service, and in disadvantaged communities. Currently, 36 rovers are supporting 801 children in 772 households.
- 5. The Government of Belize (GoB) has shown commitment to improving the quality and inclusiveness of early childhood care and education (ECCE) services. The benefits of quality childcare and early learning settings for the child include improved school readiness, reduced repetition and drop-out rates, and higher achievement in school⁶⁷. A new national preschool curriculum framework was launched in March 2024 to promote a consistent, high-quality child-friendly environment, using the concept of play. Aligned with the framework, the current assessment instrument applied by preschool teachers uses clearly stated, measurable criteria to determine learners' performance in Pre-literacy Competencies, Pre-numeracy Competencies, Physical and Psychosocial Development Competencies, and Creative and Performing Arts Competencies. Daycare centers use a self-assessment tool in reporting to the Inspector of Social Services Agencies to ascertain compliance with regulations. Other instruments for quality and inclusiveness that are child-centered and applicable to different ECCE settings include the early childhood education (ECE) universal screening tool, preschool screening tool, and child functioning model. The adoption of these instruments has been guided by the ECD National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017-2021 and ECD NSP 2024-2030 developed through collaboration between the ministries of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, E-Governance (MoECST), Health and Wellness (MoHW), Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MoHDFIPA), and Economic Development (MoED), with

⁴ UNICEF, Country Office Annual Report 2023. MICS 2015 (latest data available; next round of data expected to be available in Q1 of 2025).

⁵ https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.searo.NODESUBREGchildmalnutrition-BLZ?lang=en

⁶ Heckman, J. J., & Masterov, D. V. (2007). The productivity argument for investing in young children.

⁷ Engle, P. L., Fernald, L. C., Alderman, H., Behrman, J., O'Gara, C., Yousafzai, A., ... & Iltus, S. (2011). Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet*, *378*(9799), 1339-1353.

UNICEF's support. The ECD NSP covers ages zero to nine and aligns with the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents 2017-2030 and the Belize Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy.

- 6. Gaps in data collection, sharing, and analysis impede accountability, appropriate and timely monitoring and prompt course correction. For example, the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey was conducted in 2015, and the next round is expected only in 2025. Plans exist to build multi-sectoral dashboards for timely data sharing and automated referral systems between the key line ministries. The recent education and health public expenditure review highlights gaps in accountability in use of public resources and opportunities for more effective investments.⁸
- 7. Women's labor force participation and earnings remain lower than men's, but promising new initiatives are underway. In 2024, 44.8 percent of women (29.1 percent of Mayan women) and 71 percent of men participated in the labor force. Despite having higher levels of education than men, women are less likely to work in well-paying engineering, technical and technological fields.⁹ The primary constraints to women's employment include domestic and caregiving responsibilities, limited access to skills and employment services as well as to financing, a high rate of adolescent pregnancies, and social and gender norms that impede women's entrepreneurship. Domestic violence is another hindering factor: domestic violence reports increased by 21% from 2021 to 2022, with 7 in 10 cases involving persons ages 18 to 45¹⁰. The recently approved National Gender Policy (2024-2030)¹¹ emphasizes female empowerment and the need to address gender-based violence (GBV), along with gaps and needs related to health, education and employment creation. The existing Active Labor Market Policies are concentrated in Belize City and Belmopan and lack coverage of women. Some programs offer certifications that are not formally accredited and not recognized outside of Belize. There are six Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centers in six different districts and TVET classes in about a third of high schools, but uptake is low. Men are 2.4 times more likely to enroll in vocational training programs. 12 In 2023, MoHDFIPA launched the Economic Empowerment Program to enhance women's skills and economic opportunities. The Ministry of Rural Transformation, Labour, and Local Government (MoLabor) is preparing new project financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to promote skills development and employment.
- 8. The proposed Project directly aligns with GoB's ECD NSP 2024-2030 and Horizon 2030. The Project will contribute to selected objectives and results of the ECD NSP and GoB's goal in Horizon 2030 to invest in its people, focusing on improving equitable access to quality services to improve ECD outcomes and support female employment. The GoB programs and initiatives mentioned above, among others, will be leveraged to build on achievements and lessons learned, and reinforce coordination and collaboration across ministries, between the public and private sectors, and among partners and stakeholders.

Key Results (From PCN)

- i. Number of children ages 3-4 benefiting from supported services
- ii. Quality of supported preschools and EDC (to be defined using an agreed tool to set measurement threshold of quality, such as of preschool classroom pedagogy or child development)
- iii. Number of women with completed training, employment, or increased income due to Project support

D. Concept Description

 $^{{8 \}over https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/7b8bec6f9c262427c8b46dac4daaf3d8-0370012024/original/Belize-Public-Expenditure-Review.pdf}$

⁹ Näslund-Hadley, Emma et al. (2020). Skills to shape the future: Employability in Belize.

¹⁰ https://bco.gov.bz/gender-based-violence-2023/gender-based-violence-2022/

¹¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/604665626bb4328821a62cb8/6621343271f094ed0496381e 2024NationalGenderPolicy.pdf

¹² Statistical Institute of Belize.

9. **The Project is organized in four components.** Component 1 invests in increased access, quality and full-day schooling and childcare for children ages 3-4. Component 2 supports system-wide intersectoral capacity building and demand generation for ECCE and for female skills development and employment. Components 3 supports Project management, and Component 4 provides contingent mechanisms in case of an emergency.

Component 1: Increasing access to quality, inclusive preschool and early development services in targeted areas (tentatively US\$18M)

10. **This Component aims at four interrelated objectives:** (i) increasing the current preschool enrollment rate of only 43%, with priority given to disadvantaged communities, (ii) supporting early development and preparedness for primary school, (iii) extending afterschool services to further support ECD and facilitate training and work opportunities for mothers and other household caretakers, and (iv) generating professional and efficient childcare employment. Female employment is expected to increase in two ways. First, the increased availability and use of services will allow more time for household child caretakers, who are predominantly female, to dedicate to training and income-generating activities. Second, there will be new teacher, teaching aide, and care service provider positions, which mostly benefit women.

Subcomponent 1.1. Increasing access to quality, inclusive preschool services (tentatively US\$14M)

- 11. This Subcomponent will expand access to government and government-aided preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. Interventions will benefit about 2,500 children annually (about 16% of 3- and 4-year-olds in Belize) in about 160 preschool classrooms. Interventions will include (i) constructing new preschool classrooms in attachment to existing government or aided primary schools that do not have preschool yet, (ii) constructing additional classrooms to existing government or aided preschools, and (iii) rehabilitating and enhancing the learning environments of existing preschool classrooms.
- 12. Beneficiary schools will be identified based on data on gaps and needs in preschool services in disadvantaged communities which tend to be rural. MoECST has prepared a list of 41 communities that have a government or government-aided primary school but no active preschool. In such communities, increased demand for ECD has been observed and motivated, in part, by the longstanding RCP covering 36 communities in 4 districts (Toledo, Corozal, Cayo, and Belize). The RCP has played an important part in sensitizing these communities about good parenting practices and early childhood stimulation and development. Existing preschools also face increased demand from parents for support to students with special needs. More data will be collected to inform the identification of beneficiary schools as well as types of interventions. Primary schools and preschools to be selected for Project investments will have readily available land for construction of additional classrooms.
- 13. The Project will finance quality physical and human resources for well-functioning ECCE. Investments will include safe, inclusive, and climate-resilient infrastructure and equipment, play-based furniture and materials, and climate-smart spaces. The Project will support training and professional development of teachers and training of teaching aids, including ECD, early stimulation, and support to special needs. Teaching aides who are not government employees will receive stipends. Teachers will receive pedagogical assessments and coaching. Relevant standards, frameworks, tools and processes related to child development and health, and relevant referral mechanisms (such as to health clinics, counselling or family support) will be put in place or enhanced.

Subcomponent 1.2. Increasing access to quality, inclusive early development services (tentatively US\$4M)

14. To complement preschool services that are only three hours a day, the Project will invest in developing and extending afterschool childcare in non-government early development centers (EDCs). This Subcomponent will benefit

about 1,000 children annually (about 6% of 3- and 4-year-olds in Belize) in about 60 EDCs. Interventions will include extending and developing (i) community-based EDCs and (ii) privately managed EDCs. Despite the focus on 3- and 4-year-olds, the supported EDCs can operate full day and take in 0-2-year-olds during morning hours.

- 15. The community-based modality will focus on rural areas, while the privately managed modality will focus on urban areas. Community-based ECDs to be supported will build on the recent initiative launched by MoHDFIPA with UNICEF support for 3- and 4-year-olds. Privately managed EDCs to be supported will target business sectors (such as the BPO sector that has expressed interest with GoB) and communities in which working parents have greatest needs for childcare and are able to afford the care. Community-based EDCs will be expanded or newly developed in the communities what will be receiving support for increased access to preschool services under Subcomponent 1.1. EDC spaces will be provided by the community. Care service providers could be trained RCP rovers that work additional hours, as in the recent MoHDFIPA initiative, or other qualified and trained individuals in the community that will receive stipends. In the privately managed modality, grants will be provided to set up new EDCs and upgrade existing daycare centers that already demonstrate a strong focus on early development and learning. Upgrading interventions will allow centers to accommodate larger enrollment and/or longer hours, higher quality contents and more diversely abled students. Both community-based and privately managed EDCs could be standalone or attached to existing preschools.
- 16. The Project will provide supported EDCs with essential quality, inclusive resources and capacity building at setup. Investments will be provided in directly to community-based EDCs and as part of the setup grant to private EDCs. Investments include the acquisition of equipment and materials, the training of service providers, stipends for community volunteers, pedagogical assessments and coaching to service providers, and the application of early childhood development and education standards, frameworks, tools and processes. In addition, demand for early development jobs will increase and expected to employ mostly women. For privately owned EDCs, training will include entrepreneurship and business development skills and support.

Component 2: Supporting system-wide intersectoral coordination, capacity building and demand generation for ECCE and for female skills development and employment (tentatively US\$3.5M)

17. Interventions under this Component will have a system-wide scope and will support both the beneficiaries under Component 1 and other schools, centers, service providers and students. This Component will also support government personnel working on ECCE and on female skills development and employment more generally.

<u>Sub-component 2.1. Supporting system-wide intersectoral coordination, capacity building and demand generation for ECCE (tentatively US\$2M)</u>

- 18. This Subcomponent will support the development of a dashboard to facilitate interoperability of ECCE indicators and related data across concerned ministries for improved implementation and coordination of services. Data will be disaggregated by gender and other important dimensions of inequality and include information on the climate exposure and hazards of targeted beneficiaries. The Project will finance the assessment of existing data systems, the development of a strategy for the management and utilization dashboard, and the development of the dashboard itself.
- 19. The Project will also support the operationalization and enhancement of frameworks, standards, tools and processes for higher-quality, more inclusive ECCE. Some key guiding principles for these interventions are play-based and learner-based approaches, mathematics logic, and science curiosity in small children. The Project will support the adaptation and application of ECD and early learning evaluations and of teaching processes (such as the WBG-developed Teach early childhood tool to observe and assess teaching practices ECCE settings) in the Belize context. The Project will

also support the contextualization of ECCE modalities for sectors of the population such as rural, urban, and indigenous, as well as the development and enhancement of ECCE programs for those with special needs. Training will be provided accordingly to relevant personnel across concerned sectors, such as education, health and social protection. Efficient and effective referrals for relevant services between ministries would be critical as well.

20. In addition, the Project will support sensitization activities to promote demand for quality ECCE. The target public will include preschool principals and teachers, early learning service providers, parents and caretakers of student beneficiaries, and local communities. The topics to cover include the benefits of quality ECCE; social norms; male roles; household dynamics, behavior and welfare; and best practices related to child rearing, nutrition, health, early stimulation and learning and vulnerabilities. Activities could include large-scale communication campaigns on traditional and social media; engagements at community townhalls and other community spaces, schools and care centers; and sensitization through existing community-based programs such as the RCP, parenting workshops and mobile clinics.

<u>Sub-component 2.2.</u> Supporting system-wide intersectoral coordination, capacity building and demand generation for female skills development and employment (tentatively US\$1.5M)

- 21. This Subcomponent will support referrals, training, entrepreneurship and employment, especially for women, with a focus on skills, jobs and businesses related to ECCE services. Beneficiaries especially female will include (i) parents and household caretakers of children beneficiaries under Component 1, (ii) other adults and youth in the communities supported under Component 1 and (iii) other adults and youth, in decreasing order of project support intensity. Skills training for employment and entrepreneurship will be facilitated through coordination and referrals on skills and jobs between ministries and with the private sector. The Project will support integration of climate-informed training in skills development and climate resilience and sustainability in curricula. ECCE services to be supported include teaching and caretaking services in formal settings as well as informal babysitting services. In addition, the Project will leverage existing programs, such as the Women's Economic Empowerment Program under MoHDFIPA, the new IADB-supported employment program under MoRTCDLLG, and agriculture initiatives seeking to improve agricultural practices that may be particularly beneficial to the Mayan population and other ethnic groups. The Project will also coordinate with GoB initiatives and other WBG-financed and partner-financed projects in terms of green and blue industries for skills and employment support and climate-smart solutions for businesses receiving entrepreneurship assistance.
- 22. **Similarly to Subcomponent 1.1, the Project will support sensitization activities to promote female employability and employment.** The activities will benefit from newly developed approaches outlined in the National Gender Policy 2024-2030 and the Social and Behavior Change Communication Strategy on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The target public will include public and private employers, parents and caretakers of student beneficiaries, and local communities (including through churches, health clinics etc). The topics to cover include the benefits of female empowerment and employment; social norms; male roles; household dynamics, behavior and welfare; and the options for employers to support women and parents.

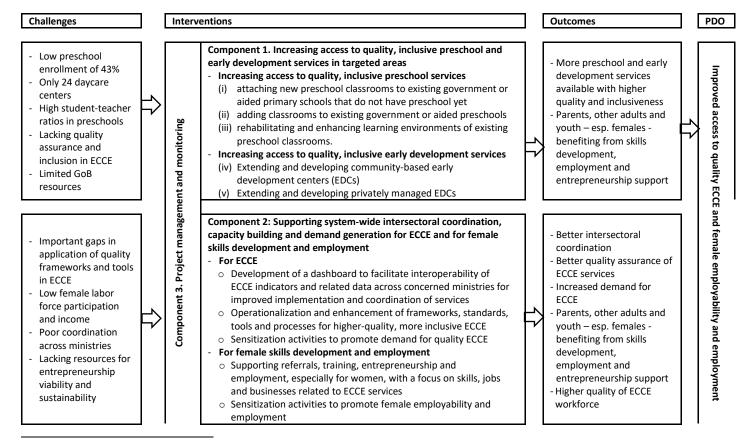
Component 3. Project Management (tentatively US\$2M)

23. The CEU under the Ministry of Finance will be responsible for the implementation and coordination of Project activities in collaboration with the key line ministries MoECST and MoHDFIPA. Activities will include the management of operational, technical, fiduciary, environmental, and social aspects, as well as monitoring of Project implementation progress and outcomes, and process and impact evaluations. Broader coordination and/or consultation with other ministries, partners and stakeholders will also be assured as relevant in certain activities.

Component 4. Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC, US\$0M)

- 24. This no-cost Component will facilitate access to rapid financing by allowing for the reallocation of uncommitted Project funds in the event of either a formal declaration of a national emergency and a formal request from GoB. When eligible, GoB may request WBG to reallocate Project funds to support emergency response. A CERC manual and emergency action plan acceptable to WBG will be prepared and will make a disbursement condition for this component. The manual and plan will include provisions for Paris Alignment of potential activities to be financed with the CERC.
- 25. **Theory of Change.** The Project's design is based on global evidence on the positive impacts of ECCE on female employment,¹³ as well as its impacts on children's development and long-term outcomes¹⁴ Child development and caregivers' livelihoods are increasingly recognized as being inter-dependent and mutually enhancing¹⁵. Figure 1 shows the identified key challenges, proposed interventions, and expected outcomes of the Project. The intended main beneficiaries include 3-4-year-olds and their mothers. Additional beneficiaries include 0-2-year-olds, preschool and daycare providers; female youth and adults seeking skills and jobs; public and private training providers; and government personnel. Key development partners for collaboration include UNICEF on ECCE and IDB and MCC on skills and employment.

Figure 1. Theory of Change



¹³ Amarante, V., Rossel, C., & Scalese, F. (2024). Hours of Work and Early Childhood Education and Access to Care Services in Latin America: Evidence from Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. *Journal of Family Issues*, 45(8), 1867-1896.

¹⁴ Behrman, J. R., Gomez-Carrera, R., Parker, S. W., Todd, P. E., & Zhang, W. (2024). *Starting Strong: Medium-and Longer-run Benefits of Mexico's Universal Preschool Mandate* (No. 24-029). Penn Institute for Economic Research, Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania.

¹⁵ Sommer T., Franchett E., Yoshikawa, H., & Lombardi, J. (2024). A Global Call for Two-Generation Approaches to Child Development and Caregivers' Livelihoods.

26. Experience and evidence on ECCE point to the importance of good data systems, of the quality and diversity in types of service provision, and investment in disadvantaged communities and families.¹⁶ Experience and evidence also highlight the importance of certifying skills, tailoring skills training to the individual trainee and to local labor market demands, and educating job seekers about relevant sectors and locations for employment and career and wage trajectories.¹⁷ The Project will incorporate these lessons and recommendations.

Legal Operational Policies	
Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No

TBD

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

Projects in Disputed Area OP 7.60

The Environmental and Social risk is classified as Moderate. The E&S risk rating is considered Moderate due to (i) the possible occupational and community health and safety risks during civil works; (ii) potential exclusion of the most vulnerable living in remote areas; (iii) lack of cultural appropriateness when engaging indigenous groups; (iv) the risk of gender-based violence; (v) Elite capture; and vi) capacity of the Borrower. The potential environmental, health and safety impacts (e.g., noise, and air pollution, occupational health and safety impacts and risks, waste management among others) related to the civil works would not be significant and likely to be, short-term, localized and reversible. To mitigate the risks, the project will implement environmental and social management instruments, including a grievance mechanism, with dedicated staff and regular supervision. Additionally, the project will prepare and implement a culturally appropriate Stakeholder Engagement Plan to ensure effective communication and engagement with various stakeholders, an Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF) to guide the formulation and implementation of activities within Indigenous communities, including Indigenous Peoples Plans (IPPs) as needed, and Environmental and Social Management Plans and/or Environmental Code of Practice to manage the impacts from the civil works. Any technical assistance and capacity building activities will be consistent with ESSs 1-10. A CERC Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) will also be prepared. The Environmental and Social Commitment Plan will list the actions to be taken by the Borrower during implementation.

CONTACT POINT

World Bank

¹⁶ Devercelli, A. E., & Beaton-Day, F. (2020). Better jobs and brighter futures.

¹⁷ Carranza, E. and McKenzie, D. 2024. Job training and job search assistance in developing countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 38(1), 221-244.

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APPROVAL

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Country Director: Federico E. Baechli 11-Mar-2025			Country Director:	Federico E. Baechli	11-Mar-2025
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