



# Concept Environmental and Social Review Summary

## Concept Stage

### (ESRS Concept Stage)

Date Prepared/Updated: 03/04/2025 | Report No: ESRSC04809

**I. BASIC INFORMATION****A. Basic Operation Data**

Operation ID	Product	Operation Acronym	Approval Fiscal Year
P508072	Investment Project Financing (IPF)	Belize ECDFE	2026
Operation Name	Belize Early Childhood Development and Female Empowerment		
Country/Region Code	Beneficiary country/countries (borrower, recipient)	Region	Practice Area (Lead)
Belize	Belize	LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN	Education
Borrower(s)	Implementing Agency(ies)	Estimated Appraisal Date	Estimated Board Date
Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment	Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs	13-May-2025	14-Jul-2025
Estimated Concept Review Date	Total Project Cost		
31-Oct-2024	23,500,000.00		

**Proposed Development Objective**

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

**B. Is the operation being prepared in a Situation of Urgent Need of Assistance or Capacity Constraints, as per Bank IPF Policy, para. 12?**

No

**C. Summary Description of Proposed Project Activities**

The Project will focus on quality access to preschool and daycare services to support early learning – given the very low preschool enrollment rate of 43% and the existence of only 20 daycare centers in the country. Female employability and employment will be supported through skills training and employment intermediation interventions to develop the early childhood care and education workforce for which demand will increase thanks to Project investment, as well as through existing skills training, employment and entrepreneurship programs to which the Project will make referrals.



## **D. Environmental and Social Overview**

### **D.1 Overview of Environmental and Social Project Settings**

Belize is a small, middle-income country highly vulnerable to external economic shocks and climate change. As of 2022, Belize had a population of about 397,483 and an annual population growth rate of 1.3%. Belize is multi-ethnic, with Mestizos/Hispanics at 48%, followed by Creoles (26%), Mayas (10%), and Garifuna (7%). Poverty incidence varies significantly across ethnic groups, levels of education and employment status of household heads, and household compositions.

Maternal, and child mortality has decreased, but challenges remain. Belize also faces a double burden of nutrition crisis: 15% of children and 34.6% of women are obese or overweight, while 8.1 % of children are stunted.

Participation in childcare and pre-primary education is limited. There are 20 daycare centers mostly located in Belize City and Belmopan and childcare services that are added in certain preschools to extend care in the afternoon in response to demand. According to 2022 data, 89% of 3-year-olds and 48% of 4-year-olds were not enrolled in preschool catering to ages 3 and 4 and is not mandatory.

Women's labor force participation and earnings remain lower than men's. In 2024, 44.8% of women (29.1% of Mayan women) and 71% of men participated in the labor force. Despite having higher levels of education than men, women are less likely to work in well-paying STEM fields. Men are 2.4 times more likely to enroll in vocational training programs.

The Project will include national interventions and targeted community support. It will prioritize climate resilience in ECCE environments, promote green and blue industries for skills and employment, and implement climate-smart solutions in businesses receiving entrepreneurship support. These efforts align with Belize's Nationally Determined Contributions for climate mitigation and adaptation. The Project aims to address equity, inclusion, and climate change resilience to close existing gaps.

### **D.2 Overview of Borrower's Institutional Capacity for Managing Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts**

The recently established Central Executing Unit (CEU) housed under the Ministry of Finance will be the project management unit (PMU), in direct collaboration with the key line Ministries - Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology (MoECST) and Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MoHDFIPA). With the support of the WB team, the CEU will be leading the preparation of E&S instruments during preparation, including consultation.

Although the CEU has experience in formulating the Belize Blue Cities and Beyond Project (P181064) and the Belize Reliant and Resilient Energy Systems Project (P179520), the CEU lacks experience in implementing World Bank projects under the ESF and does not currently have sufficient personnel to properly cover all projects that they implement with other multilaterals, like IDB. The MoECST and MoHDFIPA lack experience in implementing World Bank projects.

During project preparation, the World Bank will assess the experience and capacity of the relevant institutions in implementing E&S risk management measures under the ESF and will recommend capacity building measures,



considering lessons learned from other Projects, and ensuring sufficient resources. The findings, recommendations, and actions will be documented in the appraisal ESRS and in the ESCP.

## II. SCREENING OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RISKS AND IMPACTS

### A. Environmental and Social Risk Classification (ESRC)

Moderate

#### A.1 Environmental Risk Rating

Moderate

The Environmental risk is classified as Moderate. The project is anticipated to have positive impacts by improving early childhood care and education, and female employment. The project will mainly finance information and sensitization initiatives, capacity building, improving access to early childhood and education services, improving access to skills development and employment opportunities and contingent emergency response. Under sub-component 1.1, minor civil works are anticipated which could include construction of preschool classrooms in existing preschools located on public and collective lands in case of IPs; and refurbishment of existing classrooms, buildings and school grounds to make them more child friendly and inclusive. The potential environmental, health and safety impacts (e.g., noise, and air pollution, occupational health and safety, waste management among others) related to the civil works would not be significant and likely to be, short-term, localized and reversible and could be easily addressed through standard mitigation measures and the good international industry practice (GIIP) delineated in the WB Group General Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) Guidelines. The uncertainty regarding the potential activities that the CERC will finance at this early stage of project preparation and capacity of the Borrower contributes to the Moderate risk. The environmental risk rating will be further assessed during preparation once further details are available and will be reviewed periodically throughout project implementation to ensure it continues to accurately reflect the level of risk.

#### A.2 Social Risk Rating

Moderate

The Social Risk is rated as moderate. The project aims to deliver significant benefits by improving access to quality early childhood care and education, as well as enhancing female employment in targeted communities in Belize. It seeks to reach different ethnicities and regions within the country, contributing to the removal of barriers faced by women, indigenous people, female youth, and adults seeking skills and jobs, and persons with disabilities, among others. However, the project also entails certain low to moderate social risks, such as the potential exclusion of the most vulnerable living in remote areas, lack of cultural appropriateness when engaging indigenous groups, elite capture, and the risk of gender-based violence. To mitigate these risks, the project will implement E&S management instruments, including a grievance redress 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, including village councils, NGOs, service provider associations, and the private sector. At this stage of planning, no labor influx and no resettlement risks and impacts (as per ESS4, and ESS5) are envisaged. More detailed measures are outlined under each Environmental and Social Standard (ESS) and will be further detailed during the appraisal stage. The ESRC will be reviewed regularly throughout the project life cycle to ensure that it continues to accurately reflect the level of risk that the project presents.

### B. Relevance of Standards and Policies at Concept Stage



## **B.1 Relevance of Environmental and Social Standards**

### **ESS1 - Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts**

Relevant

The potential E&S risks and impacts are highlighted in Section A above. The project will be implemented through out the country including minor civil works, that could entail environmental, health, and safety risks. The training and employment activities under the project will require the management of social risks identified under section A2. The appropriate methods and tools for managing the E&S risks and their timing will be determined during project preparation and will be reflected in the ESCP. These methods are likely to include a screening checklist and a combination of generic Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMP)/E&S Codes of Practice proportionate to the level of risk and to be incorporated into the bidding documents, Labor Management Procedure (LMP), Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), and a Grievance Mechanism accessible to project workers and the public, capacity building plan, and other documents. In addition, a CERC-ESMF will be developed.

### **ESS10 - Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure**

Relevant

The main project stakeholders include government ministries and agencies, local governments; the private sector; civil society organizations and vulnerable groups including women -including the unemployed, children, Indigenous People, low-income households, the youth, sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, etc. Stakeholders will be further defined during project preparation. Before appraisal, the project will prepare, consult with the above stakeholders, and disclose a draft SEP proportionate to the project context, and its associated risks and impacts consistent with ESS10. The SEP will have a Grievance Mechanism to ensure that all project-level complaints are received and resolved in a timely manner and will have channels to uptake and manage SEA/SH complaints in a confidential manner. The SEP will also address the requirements of meaningful consultations in contexts of IPs, consistent with ESS7. If necessary, the SEP will be updated within the timeframe of the ESCP.

### **ESS2 - Labor and Working Conditions**

Relevant

The Project will likely include direct and contracted workers and no Community and Primary supply workers. Government employees involved in project implementation will remain subject to the terms and conditions of their contracts unless there is an effective legal transfer of their employment to the Project - only paragraphs 17 to 20 (Protecting the Work Force) and 24 to 30 (OHS) will apply to them. To manage risks and impacts, the Project will prepare a Labor Management Procedure (LMP) considering the national laws and consistent with ESS2, and , whose timeframe will be indicated in the ESCP. The LMP will have a dedicated Worker Grievance Mechanism (WGM) with channels to update SEA/SH-related complaints. The LMP will include a code of conduct for project workers, including provisions on non-discrimination and the prevention of SEA/SH.

### **ESS3 - Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management**

Relevant

The project will finance minor civil works such as construction of preschool classrooms in existing preschools and refurbishments which could include redoing playgrounds, walkways, inclusion of ramps, improving windows for better lighting etc, following green building practices. The environmental impacts are not expected to be significant and likely to be localized, including those related to air, noise, and waste management during construction. The nature of the work suggests that the level of air emissions will not be excessive or cause long-term nuisance and can be controlled with standard and easy to implement mitigation measures, such as watering dust-generating areas and



installing dust barriers. Waste and hazardous wastes expected include construction materials, paints and solvents. Procedures to be followed will be detailed in the ESMP/ECOPs to avoid dumping construction waste in uncertified sites/in the open.

**ESS4 - Community Health and Safety**

Relevant

Disturbance to surrounding communities, students and staff at the schools may occur while works are being undertaken although it is anticipated to be limited due to the nature and scale of the works at each site. Additionally, interaction with communities during the implementation phase of the project could pose GBV related risks. The ESMPs/ECOPS will address relevant E&S mitigation measures proportionate to the risk level, including Life & Fire Safety measures. As part of the implementation of the SEP, the project will promote safe and inclusive environments in community centers and other community-approved spaces where non-formal learning and alternative preschools will be established. These efforts aim to create a safe and supportive environment for children, mothers, and other caretakers, thereby improving overall community health and safety outcomes. Universal access will be considered in the design of work associated with preschools.

**ESS5 - Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement**

Not Currently Relevant

The Project expects to entail minor civil works in existing school building that will not require land acquisition nor will cause economic displacement. Works for alternative preschools will not result in any physical or economic displacement.

**ESS6 - Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources**

Not Currently Relevant

ESS6 is not relevant. The civil works will take place within existing school premises and will not lead to significant degradation of natural habitats.

**ESS7 - Indigenous Peoples/Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities**

Relevant

The project will prioritize vulnerable communities, including those with significant indigenous populations. Tailored interventions will address the specific socio-economic barriers faced by indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups, informed by ongoing studies and technical work. An Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF), will be developed during the project preparation phase, and post appraisal, to guide the formulation and implementation of activities within Indigenous communities, including Indigenous Peoples Plans (IPPs) as needed. The SEP will address the requirements of meaningful consultation in the context of indigenous peoples. The need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is not foreseen, as no project activities will negatively impact indigenous peoples in terms of adverse impacts on their land and natural resources, causing relocation from their land and natural resources, or affecting their cultural heritage.

**ESS8 - Cultural Heritage**

Relevant

The project will develop and implement a chance finds procedure to manage any unexpected discoveries of cultural significance during project implementation. During implementation, consultations with local communities will take



place, particularly in areas where minor infrastructure works are planned to ensure that all activities are culturally appropriate and respectful of local traditions and cultural heritage.

**ESS9 - Financial Intermediaries**

Not Currently Relevant

FIs will not be part of the project.

**B.2 Legal Operational Policies that Apply**

**OP 7.50 Operations on International Waterways**

No

**OP 7.60 Operations in Disputed Areas**

TBD

**B.3 Other Salient Features**

**Use of Borrower Framework**

No

**Use of Common Approach**

No

None

**C. Overview of Required Environmental and Social Risk Management Activities**

**C.1 What Borrower environmental and social analyses, instruments, plans and/or frameworks are planned or required by Appraisal?**

Prior to appraisal, with the support of the WB Team, the Borrower will prepare:

1. A draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) with is Grievance Mechanism.
2. Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF)
3. A draft Environmental and Social Commitment Plan.

During Implementation, once the exact locations of the activities are known under sub-component 2.2, screening will be undertaken based on which Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs)/ECOPs will be developed proportionate to the risks. Labor Management Procedures will also be prepared during Implementation and within the timeframe outlined in the ESCP. The CERC ESMF will be part of the CERC manual to be developed.

**III. CONTACT POINT**

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