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**United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, now part of UN Women
United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America/ Subregional Headquarters for
the Caribbean**

**Expert Group Meeting on good practices in national action plans
on violence against women
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Discussion Notes Prepared by:

Debra J. Lewis*
Independent Expert
Belize
E-mail: lewest@btl.net

* *The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations*

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and evaluation. Those at the highest level of the systems and Ministries responsible for them must take *ownership* of the implementation of these plans.

- 5) *Guaranteeing a fast and effective police response* must be a high priority. Women's confidence in this response can only be assured through the implementation of *mechanisms for external oversight* of police actions.
- 6) *Civil society*, and in particular women and women's organizations, *has a critical role to play* in advocating for individual women needing protection and support, as well as in advocacy for changes in public sector policies and practice. It also has an important responsibility in developing a deeper understanding of the roots of violence against women and in raising public awareness of this.
- 7) Government must demonstrate the *political will* to take action to address violence against women. A key part of demonstrating this political will is in *providing the human and financial resources necessary for an effective response*.

The plan is organized around 4 goals and corresponding objectives. These are:

Goal 1: There is zero-tolerance for gender-based violence in Belize.

Objective 1-1: Police response to survivors of gender-based violence is improved.
Complaints concerning police response are reduced.

Objective 1-2: Prosecution of acts of gender-based violence is strengthened. Attrition in reported cases that go to trial and result in convictions is reduced by 50%.

Objective 1-3: Survivors of gender-based violence have access to justice, including adequate legal representation.

Goal 2: Survivors of gender-based violence in both urban and rural areas are provided with adequate services and support.

Objective 2-1: All survivors of gender-based violence have access to adequate health services delivered in a supportive, respectful and confidential manner.

Objective 2-2: All survivors of gender-based violence have access to adequate support and advocacy services.

Objective 2-3: All victims of domestic violence in crisis have access to adequate shelter and financial support.

Objective 2-4: Rural women who are victims of gender-based violence have access to justice and support.

Objective 2-5: There is strong cross-sector collaboration in responding to survivors of gender-based violence.

Goal 3: Gender-based violence in Belize is reduced, and ultimately eliminated.

Objective 3-1: Recidivism by perpetrators of gender-based violence is reduced by 30%.

Objective 3-2: There is greater public understanding of the roots of gender-based violence.

Objective 3-3: Men take greater responsibility for understanding the roots of gender-based violence and take action based on that understanding.

Goal 4: It is possible to measure both the extent of gender-based violence in Belize and the effectiveness of strategies to respond to it.

Objective 4-1: Systems designed to measure reported cases of gender-based violence

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A review of the current situation, statistics and studies was carried out as part of the National Assessment that preceded the development of the Plan. This review was not repeated in the National Plan document, but its findings provided input to the Plan and can be accessed through the Women's Department. One problem, however, is that studies on violence against women in Belize are very limited, and further work needs to be done to strengthen existing methods of generating statistics and implement additional methods to assess the incidence, frequency and severity of gender based violence in Belize. This issue is dealt with explicitly in the Plan of Action under Goal 4.

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Consultations were carried out in both the assessment/review and plan development stages. The methodology used for the national assessment included a literature review, key informant interviews and focus groups with sector representatives, women's advocates and survivors. The justice system review also conducted extensive interviews specific to that sector. In the formulation of the plan, a draft plan was circulated to key informants in various sectors and interviews were undertaken to get further input. Two key issues for this last set of consultations was to insure that the Plan would be "do-able" within the time frame allotted and that there should be stronger sectoral ownership of the plan than had been the case with the previous plan. The final draft of the Plan was also circulated to the Chief Executive Officers of the relevant Ministries, and a meeting held with the CEOs for their input. This step was particularly important to the process of achieving Cabinet endorsement of the Plan.

Civil society (including women's shelters and other groups providing services and advocacy on violence against women and girls) was involved in the process through a focus group of women's advocates carried out in the assessment. In addition, the Director of the Women's Issues Network of Belize (an network of civil society groups) was interviewed on the draft Plan, particularly on the responsibilities of civil society organizations. The Programme Coordinator of UNICEF was interviewed as a key informant during the assessment process.

The National Assessment, justice system review and proposed Plan of Action were released at an event sponsored by the Women's Department in November 2009. Copies of all three documents were provided on disc at that event. The National Plan of Action will be available in print in September 2010. The documents are not yet available on the internet, as the Ministry website is currently being updated.

The process of consultation carried out in the development of the National Assessment, justice system review and Plan of Action was very important. As mentioned previously, particular attention was placed on insuring that key players in the various sectors see the Plan as being "do-able" and that the sectors take ownership of their part. In addition, insuring that the CEOs of the relevant Ministries were "on board" with the Plan was essential to achieving Cabinet endorsement. Since the Plan is at the very beginning stage of implementation, it is not possible to assess whether this will lead to greater commitment to putting the Plan into action. An early activity included in the Plan is the strengthening of gender focal points within each Ministry build on the consultation process and carry it through to implementation.

(iii) Legislation

There is no national legislation on violence against women *per se*. The Domestic Violence Act and Criminal Code provisions on sexual offenses are the main legislation in this area. There is no reference or requirement for a NAP in legislation.

Investigation

- Review and revise existing police protocols
- Review, expand and implement police recruit and in-service training
- Ensure that all officers (including senior officers) have basic training in the Domestic Violence Act
- Establish a system of long-term specialist officers for responding to

	of gender based violence
Education/ Educational Curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement in-service training for teachers on legislation and obligations on sexual abuse • Incorporate training in basic counseling skills in teacher training programmes • Insure that a counselor trained in the identification and response to all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, is available in each school • Appoint and train specialist teachers to teach matters relating to sex and sexuality, violence against women and children and related matters
Sensitization of the media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the impact of the media's treatment of women on attitudes and practices related to gender based violence
Empowerment of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a network civil society organizations working on violence against women to develop and sustain countrywide services and advocacy
Involvement of youth, men and boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop materials to raise awareness among young people on the roots of gender based violence • Hold a symposium for men on masculinity and gender based violence • Support the establishment of a men's group addressing issues of masculinity and gender based violence
Rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the current Batterers' Intervention programme and review the programme based on that evaluation, if necessary • Obtain long term commitment from cabinet to continue financial support for the Batterers' Intervention Programme after the pilot

An important part of this work must be to develop greater understanding of the roots of violence against women in a system of gender inequality and women's subordination. Effective change cannot only look at symptoms but must also address the deeper causes.

(vi) Protection, support and assistance to victims/survivors

The Plan provides the following measures with respect to protection, support and assistance to victims/survivors

Area	Measures
Support services/ health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise protocols and train health care workers in hospitals and clinics • Annual in-service training on gender based violence for health care workers, including developing an understanding of how the issue affects themselves and their patients • Strengthen the Ministry of Health's Complaints Policy and disseminate to all agencies working with survivors • Implement emergency contraception and prophylactic treatment for

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	<p>HIV for all victims of sexual abuse/sexual assault</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase social workers available in hospitals• Strengthen a system of doctors permanently resident in Belize who specialize in gathering evidence and giving testimony in cases of sexual abuse and other sexual offenses
Support services/ integrated services and shelters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support the creation of a network on violence against women to develop and sustain countrywide services and advocacy• Assess the need for community based services for survivors and support the expansion of existing services and the establishment of new services• Develop and implement a mechanism for secure ongoing financial support (from government) for community based services

Protection orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is included in the context of overall strengthening of policing, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the new Domestic Violence Act.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hire one additional social worker in each district to provide adequate support and advocacy for survivors of child sexual abuse• Develop criteria for the maximum case load for social workers and, if necessary, recommend hiring additional social workers

In terms of support services/integrated services and shelters, the model proposed in the Plan (and described in more detail in the National Assessment) is for community-based violence against women crisis centres operated by civil society organizations. These organizations would provide crisis response, peer counseling, practical assistance, shelter services and advocacy. Priorities would be defined by community in each district of Belize. Because of Belize's ethnic and cultural diversity, these community based centres would also be in the best position to identify those groups of women needing specialized services and support.

To accomplish the development of services as well as the national network on violence against women (which is being proposed as a sub-n

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Goal 4 of the Plan specifically addresses issues concerning data collection, as well as monitoring and evaluation. It includes the following measures:

Area	Measures
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise the existing process for gathering the Police Department’s <i>Gender-Based Violence Statistics Nationwide</i> (in particular to insure consistent application of the system) • Review and revise the Ministry of Health’s <i>Surveillance system on Gender-Based Violence</i> to insure that both domestic violence and other sexual offenses are recorded. Revise the list of those responsible to complete the forms, including Community Health Workers • Develop and implement an ongoing mechanism to measure the incidence, frequency and severity of gender-based violence in Belize (through the Statistical Institute of Belize)
Monitoring and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a plan to monitor and evaluate the effects of the new Domestic Violence legislation. • Develop and implement a system to record complaints by victims advocates that minimum standards of response and care by specific systems are not being followed. • Complete the review of the Sexual Harassment Act and propose amendments to the act and strategies for more effective implementation.

In addition to the above, the Plan includes a section outlining the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Plan itself. An important part of this process will be strengthening Gender Focal Points in each Ministry to be responsible for overseeing implementation and monitoring within that sector.

The Plan includes indicators for each objective and activity, as well as timelines for implementation.

(ix) Implementation

Implementation of the Plan is coordinated by the Women’s Department, who chairs the National Gender-Based Violence Committee, a multi-sectoral body including both government and civil society representation. Strengthening the district GBV committees is also proposed in the Plan. Both the national and district committees pre-date the current plan, but work is needed to insure consistency and effective collaboration.

Because implementation of the plan is just beginning, it is not possible to identify good practices in the process at this point.

The Plan includes estimates for most of the activities (with a few requiring additional planning before costs can be finalized), and designates resources needed as “recurrent” or “short-term”. Those resources needed for the provision of the ongoing response are listed as “recurrent” and should most appropriately be integrated as part of government’s annual budget. Problems continue to occur when activities that should be an ongoing part of government’s responsibilities

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are covered by funds from external sources. Too often, these activities are dropped or marginalized once external funds have run out. Set up costs or one time activities (such as specific public education campaigns or research projects) can appropriately be accessed from external sources and are designated as “short term” resources.

Although endorsement should imply a commitment to the necessary resources included in the Plan, government has not yet allocated funds for the various activities. Further work will be needed to insure that support for the activities is included in the budget process during the period of the plan for recurrent resources, and to identify and pursue sources of external funding for short-term activities.

Overall implementation will be monitored by the Women’s Department with support from the National Gender-Based Violence Committee, the Gender Focal Points and civil society (through the Women’s Issues Network of Belize).