

# NATIONAL REPORT

# Adult Learning & Education in Belize

Ministry of Education,  
Belize  
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## ***I PREAMBLE***

Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) has been increasingly recognized as an important way of teaching and educating the adult population of Belize. This recognition by the general populace has led to the establishment of an increasing number of training providers in a wide range of programs for adult learners. In everyday scenarios, this form of training in Belize also takes place within the workplace, mostly through extension or continuing education. Traditional secondary and tertiary level training institutions also have a component addressing adult and continuing education programs. The increasing need of adult learners to re-train (in areas already trained) or access training in new areas is reflective of present day trends in the workplace. In Belize, the work environment has been very dynamic requiring workers to keep updating their skills in order to keep abreast with rapid technological changes in their fields and also to remain competitive in the job market.

Local consultations leading to the National Education Summit in 2004 clearly indicated that there is an increasing number of persons unable to acquire training and certification through the existing formal systems of education. Adult and continuing education recommendations arising out of the Summit, therefore, spoke strongly of the need to develop alternative methods of education which would ensure that all citizens gain an opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills that will allow opportunity for personal and national development. The recommendations also dealt with the need to review and consolidate existing programs rather than to initiate new programs. Reference was made for the need for greater commitment on the part of the Government to provide financial support for those programs that seek to develop skills that will enhance employability in Belize's unskilled labor force.

While adult and continuing education has been recognized for its invaluable contribution in training and re-training adults, there has been the need for a national coordinating body to monitor and supervise all adult and continuing education providers to ensure quality and standards in the delivery of programs. At the level of the Ministry of Education, there was a Unit responsible for Adult and Continuing Education under the Employment Training and Education Service Area of the Ministry. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the National ACE Coordinator

proceed on early retirement due to illness and the Unit became non-functional in the latter part of 2006.

According to the Labor Force Survey of 2007, Belize has an estimated total population of 314,300. Based on the figure of the total population, adult population accounted for 44%. The distribution of the adult population in relation to gender for males is 24.8% or 78,092 and females 14.1% or 44,424. Employment rate in relation to the population distributed in urban and rural area is unavailable; however, a combined rate for both urban and rural for males is 22.7% or 71,502 and females of 11.5% or 36,155. The distribution of the population with regard to persons self-employed in the urban area is 3.4% or 10,832 and females 1.9% or 6,186. Rural area for males is 4% or 12,747 and female is 1.3% or 4,314. The distribution of adult population based on qualifications according to Housing Census of 2000, showed males at primary school level of 32,468, high school level 7,999, post secondary 3,751, bachelor's degree 1,428, master's degree 500. The distribution for females based on qualification for primary school level 31,847, high school 8,868, post secondary 4,259, bachelor's degree 1,164 and master's degree 295. The figures for higher qualifications are unavailable. There are eight major ethnic groups in Belize with eight different languages. Although there are eight different ethnic languages, the country's official language is English.

The present report highlights the current national status of adult and continuing education in Belize. It focuses on how adult and continuing education programs are delivered and the current need to quickly re-institute the national adult and continuing education coordination unit within the Ministry of Education to address the existing gaps in this area.

## **1 POLICY, LEGISLATION AND FINANCING**

### **1.1 Legislative and policy frameworks of ALE/ACE (Adult and Continuing Education)**

#### **1.1.1 The legislative and policy framework of ALE/ACE**

The Education Act of Belize of 1991 which was revised in 1996, makes provision for further education and training of Belizeans in such professional, technical, vocational and continuing education institutions.

A public consultation on Education was spearheaded by the Ministry of Education in May 2004. An Adult and Continuing Education Post-Summit Action Planning Committee was formed to review the recommendations made at the National Education Summit in regards to Adult and Continuing Education. The Planning Committee finally culminated with a recommended 10-year action plan for the Ministry of Education (see Plan of Action attached)

### **1.1.2 The priority goals for ALE/ACE**

The priority goals for ALE/ACE in Belize are identified as the following:

- to increase access to learning opportunities for all
- to increase literacy rates
- to increase active participation in the social, economic and political development and,
- to promote lifelong learning.

### **1.1.3 Governance of ALE/ACE**

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is a component under the Employment Training and Education Service (ETES), which is a service area under the Ministry of Education. ALE, or ACE as it is locally known, is decentralized since at this time there is no effective coordination between the private and public organizations that offer ACE/ALE programs in Belize. However, the institutions that offer alternative primary or secondary school education would, for the most part, have curriculum and other training standards prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

With Belize signing on to the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), the trend over the next few years will see an increased demand for the acquisition of basic skills in order to enter both the secondary and vocational studies. This will dictate the need for more centers countrywide to facilitate persons in attaining professional qualifications.

#### **1.1.4 Alignment of policy and implementation strategies**

The basic goals of ALE/ACE, as outlined previously are interwoven among the various sectors and different Government Ministries offering any form of adult and continuing education program. All programs offered promote gender equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and cultural/linguistic diversity. Most programs also aim at creating knowledge economies. The major limiting factor, however, is the lack of a national ALE/ACE coordinating body that would maximize the use of limited resources and thus minimize the duplication of activities, sometimes targeted to the same population. The specific goals of every ALE/ACE program are integrally aligned with the national development goals and that of poverty reduction.

#### **1.1.5 The Challenges related with development of ALE**

One of the main development challenges of ALE/ACE in Belize is the current lack of a national coordinating mechanism for all ALE/ACE training providers to ensure quality and standards across all programs offered. This challenge further creates the lack of documentation and gathering of key statistical data in aspects pertaining to ALE/ACE. Another major limiting factor is the inaccessibility of adult learners even to some basic technical skills training programs. Due to the constant advances in technology, there is the need for workers to constantly engage in lifelong training activities. Workers sometimes find it difficult to access training locally in the areas needed, and if found, workers may find it difficult to cover all costs associated with the training.

#### **1.1.5 Other policies that impact ALE**

Generally, the already mentioned policies are the major policies directly impacting adult and continuing education in Belize.

### **1.2 Financing of ALE/ACE**

#### **1.2.1 Public investment in ALE/ACE**

There is no separate budget allocation for Adult Education Programs only. All investments to the ALE/ACE are implemented through annual budget allocated by the

government for education system in Belize. Budgetary allocations are made to the Employment Training and Education Services (ETES) area of the Ministry of Education under which funds are included for the operations of the ACE/ALE sub unit.

### **1.2.2 Foreign bilateral/multilateral donor investment in ALE/ACE**

There are several projects with donor and lending agencies in Belize. Directly within the Ministry of Education, the Caribbean Development Bank along with the Government of Belize has co-financed the implementation of an Enhancement of Technical and Vocational Education (ETVET) Project. This projects aims at establishing the infrastructure for the provision of quality technical and vocational education in Belize to youth and adults in a number of trade programs.

The Inter-American Development Bank also has an on-going project with Belize Youth Business Trust in enterprise development for youth and adults. Belize also participated in a non traditional skills training project for women in 2000. This project aimed at increasing the level of skilled labor available in the country, by increasing access and employment opportunities for low-income women, a marginalized but substantial sector of the labor force, through the delivery of training for specialized skills.

UNICEF also assists in funding the HELP (Helping Early School Leavers) Program which is being implemented through YWCA (Young Women Christian Association), Belize.

In June, 2008 YWCA also received a nine hundred thousand dollar grant from Belize Rural Development Program (BRDP), which is funded by the European Union to fund a project to reduce poverty among women and youth in rural communities. Under this project YWCA is seeking to recruit 150 women and youth from the rural communities around Belize. These 150 women will have access to skills training offered by the YWCA and other Adult Training Institutes. The training will involve areas such as hospitality management, food preparation, cake decorating, sewing, child care, etc. By the end of this two year project it is expected that the women and youth in rural communities will have access to more employment opportunities and will probably be more involved in micro enterprises by starting their own businesses.

The Belize Rural Development Program funded by the European Union financed a number of adult training programs aimed at poverty alleviation. Other organizations receiving donor funding to implement adult training programs include Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) and Youth Enhancement Services (YES), among others.

### **1.2.3 Support to ALE/ACE form private corporate sector**

Whereas, support from the private sector for ALE/ACE, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) has as one of its priority areas, grants for environmental education and awareness. PACT advances its mission in building awareness of Belize's unique marine ecosystems, species as well as the various seascapes and landscapes associated with the Belize coastal environment.

### **1.2.4 Civil society support to ALE**

While most of the financial support for ALE in Belize can be linked to Non governmental Organizations (NGOs), there is a small portion that is funded through religious institutions. These institutions specifically design programs to assist their members and other interested participants. Some Embassies within Belize support ALE/ACE. The Embassies of Mexico and Venezuela, for example, support the teaching of Spanish and English to Adults in order to increase their economic participation. Some ALE/ACE programs are created to address a specific urgent need and are supported by external funds through the region or NGOs.

### **1.2.5 Learners/individuals contribute to ALE**

Learners/individuals contribution to ALE/ACE is mostly through payment of fees. Due to the absence of a national ALE/ACE coordinating body, it is difficult to verify what amounts may have been contributed to the overall area.

### **1.2.6 Financial incentives in support of ACE**

There are no direct financial incentives that can be associated in support of ALE/ACE. This may be due to the absence of the coordinating body responsible for the implementation of ALE/ACE. There are some ALE/ACE programs, however, that provide a small stipend per

week as an incentive for participation in ALE/ACE program. Lack of financial incentives usually deters adults from attending ALE/ACE programs.

A number of scholarships and financial assistance are offered every year through the Ministry of Education to a number of training programs, most of which are accessed by adults. Other providers and supporters of ALE may offer a set number of scholarships to encourage participation in the program.

Study leave with pay is another incentive granted to workers to pursue further studies in ALE programs. Through the government services, study leave with pay is a general scheme that is applicable to all workers within the service. Scholarships are available for persons who apply and qualify for the scholarship. Different types of scholarships are available throughout the year through the Ministry of Education, some directly pertaining to ALE programs.

### **1.2.7 ALE financing benchmarks**

Unfortunately, ALE does not have a direct allocation in the National Budget to fund its operation, however, grants are provided to instructions by the Ministry of Education from time to time. What would be an ideal benchmark is the allocation of a budget specifically for ALE through the government. If this is not possible, donor agencies and stakeholders who have traditionally funded ALE can be asked to assist with the establishment of an ALE fund supported by individual persons becoming members of ALE and membership fees are paid. This would ensure that ALE has a constant fund that can support its the development.

## **2 QUALITY of ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION: PROVISION, PARTICIPATION and ACHIEVEMENT**

### **2.1 Provision of ALE and Institutional frameworks**

At present ALE is offered through a number of training providers. Each training provider provides its own infrastructure, materials, tools, equipment and, for the most part, curricula that

guide the training. Training is provided in a number of areas, some directly relating to literacy. There is presently no functional national coordinating body that ensures the quality and standards across all ALE training providers. There is however, provision within the Ministry of Education for a national ACE Coordinator, whose responsibility would be to oversee ACE at the national level. The Ministry of Education is in the process of filling this position.

As a result of the CSME (CARICOM Single Market and Economy) Agreement, adult learning programs in the TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training) sector are being geared towards regional quality and standards. The system has in place room for persons who have been trained in the formal system or in alternative programs to acquire certification. The Tourism Board and other organizations have stepped up their training and certification requirements to address the increasing demand for tourism services. Adult learners have the opportunity to take short term courses or customized courses in tourism and become employable in that sector.

### **2.1.1 Institutions responsible for managing and coordinating ALE/ACE at the national level.**

The Ministry of Education through the Employment Training and Education Service Area is responsible for managing and coordinating ALE/ACE at the national level.

### **2.1.2 ALE program providers**

Comprehensive, consolidated, and updated information is unavailable. The collection of current data on all ALE program providers needs to be conducted when the National ACE Coordinator is appointed.

### **2.1.3 Linkages between formal and non-formal approaches**

A few existing secondary and tertiary level training institutions have an adult and education component that offer a number of training programs for adults. These programs are usually implemented within a formal setting. Other non-formal training providers also offer a number of ALE programs. Usually, there is limited linkage between the formal and non-formal approaches. There is, however, an effort to link the TVET system closer to the secondary formal

education system by way of an OAS-Hemispheric Project. Through this program/project, secondary school students will have access to TVET certified programs in their last two years of high school.

#### **2.1.4 Certification of ALE/ACE**

Currently most ALE/ACE programs offered within existing formal institutions are certified by the institutions offering the program and in some cases, by national and regional certification. The TVET programs are nationally certified with work currently underway to have them regionally recognized. Other non-formal adult programs are not nationally certified.

### **2.2 Participation in ALE**

There is currently very limited to no updated information that would provide an overall national ALE participation picture. There are many ALE training providers across the country. There is no national body to which these institutions should register; as a result there is no record of the exact number of training providers and the types of training they offer.

#### **2.2.1 Statistical data on participants**

While there may be scattered data in regards to programs and participation rates, these are mostly available with each training provider. There is no national documentation bringing together the required data of all the various types of ALE programs offered, at the time of preparing this report. There is recognition, however, by Employment Training and Education Services of the Ministry of Education of the need to gather these types of data much needed for the planning and development of training programs.

#### **2.2.2 Existing surveys/studies on non-participation**

No major surveys/studies have been lately undertaken on non-participation and groups that are difficult to reach.

#### **2.2.3 Existing surveys/studies on learner motivation**

No survey/study has been conducted on learner motivation.

#### **2.2.4 Measure to mobilize learners**

While there may be some measure by specific training providers to mobilize learners, these are very limited or non-existent, and usually not documented.

#### **2.2.5 Specific groups targeted by ALE/ACE**

Generally, most ALE/ACE programs are targeted to the general adult population. There are only a few targeted specifically to the poor, the disadvantaged group or to females. Updated and complete documentation of these are unavailable.

#### **2.2.6 Participation benchmarks**

Most ALE/ACE training providers follow specific benchmarks for the programs that they are offering. Some are dictated by the national, regional or international standards. As indicated earlier, there is not a national body in place, at the time of this report, to monitor the overall quality and standards of ALE/ACE programs offered nationally.

### **2.3 Monitoring and evaluating programs and assessing learning outcomes**

#### **2.3.1 Assessment of ALE learning outcomes**

Assessment of learning outcomes of ALE programs are done by individual providers of ALE programs. Some providers benchmark the performance of learners' through successful performance on the GED. Depending on the objective of the program, individual providers design and develop their own assessment mechanism.

#### **2.3.2 Tools and mechanisms to evaluate ALE programs**

There is currently no mechanism in place to monitor and evaluate programs to ensure good quality.

### **2.3.3 Use of results to guide legislation, policy formulation, and program development**

Monitoring and evaluation of existing programs have been limited to have any direct impact on legislation, policy formulation, and program development within the ALE.

### **2.3.4 ALE/ACE Benchmarks**

Based on the available materials that are used for training, the outcomes are benchmarked against standards from British Columbia Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology and other materials that were produced exclusively for use in ALE.

## **2.4 Adult educators/facilitators' status and training**

### **2.4.1 Educational qualifications/training for adult educators and facilitators**

There is no legislation directly prescribing the educational qualifications/training for adult educators and facilitators. Adult educators/facilitators within traditional secondary and tertiary institutions follow the same certification requirements of teachers offering secondary and tertiary level training within these institutions. Usually, teachers teaching at the secondary level should have at least an Associate's Degree. Teaching at the tertiary level would require a minimum of a Bachelor's degree. In the informal setting where short skills training are offered, facilitators would possess a certificate in the area for which training is offered or a certificate in a related area.

### **2.4.2 Adult education as a specific profession**

Adult education within its own right can be considered a specific profession. However, in most instances it is used as a vehicle through which most training is conducted.

### **2.4.3 Ratio of adult educators/facilitators to overall teaching personnel**

This data is unavailable.

### **2.4.4 Terms of employment and remuneration for ALE**

Terms of employment and remuneration for ALE may vary slightly within the public sector as compared to the private sector. Within the public sector, remuneration is according to

the government pay scales which are applicable, based on qualification, to all training providers. It does not differentiate between an ALE or non-ALE service provider.

### **3 RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND GOOD PRACTICES**

#### **3.1 Research studies in the field of adult learning**

##### **3.1.1 Key studies undertaken**

Within the Ministry of Education, no major study has been recently undertaken that directly impacts the present trends of ALE/ACE in Belize. A Baseline Survey in TVET was conducted in 1999 to assess the status of the country to offer skills training programs through the Ministry of Education, but this did not specifically address the ACE/ALE situation.

##### **3.1.2 Major questions addressed**

Not applicable since no key study has been recently conducted.

##### **3.1.3 Key findings**

Not applicable since no key study has been recently conducted.

##### **3.1.4 Extent to which findings informed policies**

Not applicable since no key study has been recently conducted.

#### **3.2 Innovations and examples of good practice**

An example of innovation/good practice is the development and implementation of the ACCESS (Alternative, Collaborative, Community Education Support Services) Program. The goal of this program is to improve the socio-economic opportunities of Belizean youth and young adults to an extent. Through this program, learners acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, become aware of available occupational trades and standards, learn the importance of life and employability skills, practice employability and communication skills in the workplace, and become aware of the technical language and mathematical concepts used in the various occupations.

The YWCA Belize's "Helping Early School Leavers Program" (HELP) focuses on improving literacy, math and pre-vocational skills of at-risk young women who are school dropouts. There is also a strong emphasis on social skills, and students learn to make healthy decisions that lead to long-term self development and economic sustainability. The two-year program was started in 1993, and it has helped many young women to go on to secondary school or prepare themselves for gainful employment.

### **3.2.1 Policy formulation, financing, teaching/learning methods**

Since 1997, there was the Education Summit which was held in May 2004 which charted the way for a ten year action plan for ACE/ALE. However, there has been no serious attempt to formulate new policies for ACE/ALE in Belize.

### **3.2.2 Learner mobilization and involvement**

Rapid changes in requirements for work in Belize have been the impetus for adult learners to want to seriously access these programs. Also the strict regulations for example in the tourism sector have triggered the mobilization of learners to many of these training programs. There is room for improvement in the way the programs are designed for adults. Most adult learners would prefer to do very short impact programs that would enable them to function more efficiently and effectively in the workplace or as self-employed individuals.

### **3.2.3 Consideration of above-mentioned examples of good practice as innovations**

The above-mentioned examples can be considered as innovations because they are the first of its kind to be implemented to address the needs of the disadvantaged youth and young adults effectively.

## **4 ADULT LITERACY**

The Literacy Council of Belize (LCB) was set up in 1992 with the focus to eradicate illiteracy in Belize. UNICEF was the most significant partner in Belize's effort to reduce and eventually eliminate illiteracy. A number of studies and activities were undertaken during the EFA decade. The evaluation of the LCB and its recommendations relating to the future of adult

literacy programmes in Belize (March 1997) states that English Language literacy is a significant problem in this country.

#### **4.1 National literacy definition**

Adult learning education in Belize is usually tied to adult and continuing education. Adult education in Belize refers to any learning or educational activity at any level in which an adult is engaged. Continuing education, on the other hand, is not confined to an age group. It encompasses education at any level with or without the formal system.

#### **4.2 Implementation and adoption of new policies**

As indicated earlier, the Education Act of Belize of 1991 that was revised in 1996 makes provision for further education and training of Belizeans in such professional, technical, vocational and continuing education institutions. Further to this Act, in 2005, the TVET Act was enacted. While this act does not make direct reference to adult learning or adult and continuing education, it is understood that the target population of TVET training providers can include adult learners.

#### **4.3 Effective practice and innovative literacy programs**

Many individual ALE training providers implement effective and innovative literacy programs aimed at increasing the literacy rate and continuing professional development among adults. There is currently very limited to no documentation of the wide variety of literacy programs offered throughout the country. One program, however, that was developed and widely implemented among youth and to an extent adult is the ACCESS (Alternative, Collaborative, Community Education Support Services) program. The goal of this program is to improve the socio-economic opportunities of Belizean youth and young adults to an extent. Through this program, learners acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, become aware of available occupational trades and standards, learn the importance of life and employability skills, practice employability and communication skills in the workplace, and become aware of the technical language and mathematical concepts used in the various occupations and on everyday life.

#### **4.4 Policy and program focus on gender**

All policies relating to ALE/ACE is not gender specific; they encourage both male and female participation.

#### **4.5 Building of literate environment**

The overall thrust of any ALE/ACE training program is to build an environment where individuals are literate and functional in society.

## **5 EXPECTATIONS OF CONFINTEA VI AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF ALE**

### **5.1 Expected outcomes from CONFINTEA VI**

The main expectation from CONFINTEA VI is the compilation of a report documenting the present status of ALE/ACE at the regional and international level. As a result of this report, a plan of action for ALE should be developed for the region. It is also expected that a regional and international network of ALE providers be established as a platform for the sharing of information pertaining to ALE.

### **5.2 Main issues that ALE will address**

One of the main issues that ALE will have to address is a revision and update of existing policy framework for ALE at the national level. Where there is a lack of such framework, then there needs to be urgent development of an ALE policy that should mandate and guide all ALE operations within the country. Policy update/or development must focus on current best practices of ALE both at the regional and international levels. In the case of Belize, the quick revitalization of the National ACE Unit will have to take place. With this Unit in place, basic research will have to be conducted at the national level to obtain current information of all ACE/ALE service providers. A national network and directory should then be established for the sharing of information and maximizing the use of already limited resources.

## **6**     ***CONCLUSIONS***

Belize recognizes the importance of adult and continuing education/adult learning education. The Ministry of Education, in particular, recognizes the invaluable contribution that adult and continuing education can have on the development of the country. In line with this recognition the Ministry of Education is currently engaged in completing a Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) enhancement project, part of which focuses on providing skills training to adults and with time, data gathering will also become a major component of the process. There is much to be done in this area, and while there is no functional adult and continuing education unit in place at the time of this report, Employment Training and Education Services of the Ministry of Education will make every effort to initiate the process of information gathering and documentation, much needed for charting the future direction of adult education in Belize.