“Strengthening Civil Society Organization and Civil Servant Capacity in Belize through Partnerships”

Report on Focus Group Discussions held
September 2nd, 4th & 6th, 2019
For Civil Society and Civil Servant Organizations

Report prepared by Mr. Federico Caal, Dr. Kathleen Colverson, Ms. Celia Mahung
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Introduction

University of Florida (UF), in collaboration with the Belize Civil Society Organization (BCSO), Toledo Institute of Development and Environment (TIDE) and the Belize Ministry of Education (BMoE), Youth, Sports and Culture has embarked on the project entitled “Strengthening Civil Society and Civil Servant Capacity in Belize through Partnership.”

The purpose of this project is three pronged:

1. To enhance the capacities of the civil society sector in Belize through training on organizational management functions.
2. To provide technical support to civil servants to improve existing governance and community engagement practices.
3. To promote networking between civil society organizations (CSOs) and civil servants to establish collaborative partnerships in public service, especially addressing issues faced by underserved communities.

To address these objectives, the first capacity development workshops were organized in three locations; Belize City, Belmopan City, and Punta Gorda Town in April and May of 2019. Civil Society Organizations and Civil Servant participants were representative of all 6 districts of Belize. There was a follow up one day session of the three locations on September 2nd, 4th and 6th to discuss outcomes of previous workshops and plans for upcoming advanced capacity building workshops in 2020. The concept of a Community of Practice was also introduced and draft priorities for its development created.

WHAT

Focus group discussions on the outcomes of workshops conducted for Civil Society Organizations and Civil Servants during April-May, 2019. These discussions were followed by a training session on developing a community of practice.

WORKSHOP PROCESS

The one-day workshop began with representatives from Civil Servant Organizations responding to the questionnaire found in Annex 2. This session was followed by representatives from civil society organizations responding to the questionnaire found in Annex 3. Results from both questionnaires are found in the individual workshop reports presented later in this report. Following each written questionnaire, a focused group session was conducted separately first with civil servants, followed by civil society organizations to recap what was learned and applied in the work place from the May workshops and what further advanced trainings are needed. Results from the focus groups responses are found in the individual workshop reports.

The afternoon sessions in all workshops involved an initial presentation by Dr. Colverson on “What is a Community of Practice?” Following the presentation, small groups were created with representatives from both groups to discuss the following question: “What are our shared ideas
for working together to enhance services to underserved communities in Belize?” Results from this session are included in Annex number 6.

WHO

Twenty-five Civil Servants and thirty-three Civil Society organizations that participated in the workshops offered in April/May 2019.

WHEN

The sessions were held on September 2nd at the TIDE Conference Room, in Punta Gorda, September 4th at the George Price Centre in Belmopan and September 6th at the NARCIE Conference in Belize City. Civil Servants workshop started at 8:15am while civil society started at 10:15am. The afternoon workshop began at 1pm and ended at 4:30 pm.

Punta Gorda Workshop

Punta Gorda included sixteen attendees who had participated in the April and May workshops. Nine were from the Civil Service representing the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Department of Youth Services and seven from the Civil Society organizations representing TIDE, SATIIM, Humana, Southern Fisherfolk Association and ROC.

The session began with a short introduction by Dr. Colverson who shared that the purpose of the focus group session was for participants to share medium term impacts of the April/May workshops. After short introductions, participants were divided into two groups where they discussed how they shared information learned, effects of the workshop, and topics of interest for advanced trainings.

One participant stated, “I am glad I participated in the workshops held by Dr. Spranger. I shared the valuable information at my office with colleagues who interact with people in the field and have seen vast improvement with communications between my staff and community groups.” Other participants expressed similar experiences and assured that information gathered was shared at workshops, meetings and informally during social time.

During small group discussions, the following topics were identified for advanced trainings: Communications, Grant Writing (using a Belizean context), Collaborative Networking, Strategic Planning, Project Management, Public Relations, Project Development and Evaluation, Legal processes in Registering and Managing an NGO in Belize, and Team Building. Both groups echoed the need for sessions that would improve the relationship between Civil Servants and Civil Society groups.

After the morning break, seven participants from Civil Society organizations began their focus group session with Dr. Colverson. After a brief introduction, they were divided into two groups to answer questions regarding key aspects of organizational management, strategies used, and whether workshops were useful in planning to network with other civil society groups, civil servants and government. During presentations, group members stated that they shared the
information with their colleagues, board of directors, and management teams, and said that they will continue to use the information acquired. Two of the groups stated that they have seen improved management practices and communication within their organizations. In response to the individual that said he shared information via email, Dr. Colverson advised that it’s more effective to share information at team meetings rather than via email. Both groups identified the need for improved collaboration among NGOs especially in grant writing which, requires partnerships. One participant indicated that a number of NGO’s lack fundraising and networking strategies and are in need of assistance with meeting Belize’s NGO requirements. Training for creating a positive work place environment was also identified as an urgent need.

Dr. Colverson asked groups to discuss the question, “Do you plan to continue what you learned during the workshop? Why or why not”? There was unanimous positive response that participants want to continue using what they have learned. Group 1 said that the tools and strategies for public engagement they learned have shown positive results in the growth of the NGO at the managerial level, and helped to spark creative ways of improving communication within the organization. Group 2 said that they would continue to use planning and evaluation to ensure success. When asked if they would be interested in advanced trainings, Group 1 expressed interest in the following topics: Legal Process in Registering and Managing an NGO and Project Planning and Evaluation. A participant reinforced the importance of project evaluation based on outputs, outcomes and impact. Group 2 expressed interest in Fundraising, (using a Belizean context), Grant Writing, Management of an (NGO) mid-level, Networking, Public Relations and Communications,(specific to use of social media). Group 3 mentioned Fund Raising Trends, Project Management and Evaluation, Team Building, Collaboration, Networking, Community Assessment and Strategic Planning.

The main topics that stood out were; Grant Writing within a Belizean Context, Fundraising, Project Management and Evaluation Process.

**Belmopan Workshop**

The September 4th workshop was held at the George Price Center first for Civil Servants, followed by Civil Society Organizations. There was a total of 16 participants inclusive of both groups.

The session started with a an introduction on the purpose of the workshop by Dr. Colverson and brief introductions by the four participants from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Youth Services and Humana People to People Belize. Participants worked in groups to discuss whether they had shared information from the May workshops with their colleagues and to share the effects of the workshops on their Ministries. Most participants claimed that they shared information with their colleagues through formal and informal sessions.

Group 1 stated that they shared the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), ‘Wicked Issues’ and strategies of dealing with difficult people with their supervisors. They also stated that the workshop ideas and materials had positive effects on their organizations as they observed that staff were more open minded, and that there was improved collaboration and networking among
them. Group 2 mentioned that they used more effective strategies to address community issues, and that these improved their relationship with communities.

Twelve Civil Society participants attended the session and worked in small groups to discuss organizational strategies that have increased their efficiency and effectiveness and with networking with other Civil Society organizations, Civil Servants and government agencies.

They reiterated that some NGOs do continuous work at the community level but are very reliant on grants, therefore the fundraising session was the most useful, but there need to be more practical training sessions in the future. Other participants said that they have seen improved community engagement from using a bottom-up approach in addressing community issues. One group member mentioned that governance at her organization has been strengthened and that her organization has won a new grant since attending the last workshop. Finally, one participant said that her organization instituted new policies and procedures, and nominated a new board of directors who have overall responsibility for governance of their organization. It was obvious that participants benefitted significantly from the previous trainings, but it seems that there has been limited collaboration between Civil Society and Civil Servant groups. This could be addressed by future joint training sessions.

The final segment of the workshop had participants reflect on workshop topics that would address their needs in the workplace or field in future trainings. They listed the following as topics of interest: Proposal Writing, Governance Processes, Effective Networking, Information Management Systems, Developing Strategic Plans, Mentorship, Directory/Database, Income Generation to ensure Sustainability of the Organization, Team Building and Conflict Resolution.

Belize City Workshop

The September 6th workshop was held at the NARCIE Conference in Belize City with 23 participants. The first session was with 10 Civil Servants from the Ministries of Health, Education, Economic Development and Housing and Urban Development. After brief introductions, participants were divided into three groups and asked to discuss if they had shared information from the workshop with colleagues and effects of the workshop on their organization. One group stated that information from the workshop was shared through discussion with colleagues and management through emails and phone calls. Another shared that their strategic plan was amended based on information learned at the workshop. One member of the group said that her ministry was more open to engaging the community and that the training aided in increasing their service delivery. A few participants expressed that their ministries carried out a SWOT analysis in an effort to improve their communication with the public. Participants reiterated the importance of collaboration, networking, internal and external communications.

The second segment focused on questions that elicited what was learned and what information participants will continue to use. Group 1 said that information learned was used in revision of their strategic plan and increased their ability to approach funders and partners. They also stated that despite limited resources, they made an effort to have continued engagement with communities. Some participants said that the workshops have helped with increasing networking
and communication skills. One person said she has learned to use tools to work with ‘wicked issues’ and learned to be more humble, patient and better at communicating with local people. She added that her department has ‘written off’ housing loans as a result of her giving a ‘listening ear’ to locals feeling comfortable expressing their housing needs with her. She said that rather than being rude, and inattentive, she used strategies she learned at the workshop to improve her communication with locals.

After much deliberation, participants identified the following topics for advanced trainings: Proposal Writing, Engagement/Communication from top to lower levels, Human Resource Management, Taking and Providing Feedback, Conflict Management and Resolution, Internal Management Systems, Internal and External Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation, Marketing and Fundraising.

The Civil Society focus group discussion met with thirteen participants. After brief introductions, participants were divided into 4 groups to discuss overall trends of growth in their NGO and the NGO sector in Belize. Group 1 stated that there was an increase in the number of NGO’s offering social services and taking a lead on advocacy issues. However, they admitted that with the increase in the number of NGO’s, there is more competition for funding as sources are limited. When asked if they had shared information from the workshop with their colleagues, the unanimous response was that they shared through formal and informal conversations, staff meetings and at the NGO network’s annual general meeting. When asked about the effects the workshop had on their organization, Hand in Hand Ministry reported that “they acquired a new grant for capacity building after attending the workshop”. Another organization said “they had completed their 2019 audit, and their board of directors was taking a greater lead in their organization”. Another participant said that she “appreciated the value of having trained and motivated staff to meet customer needs in the tourism sector of their NGO”. One participant said that “the workshop was informative and well received by management, and gave them an opportunity to reflect on their organization’s strengths and weaknesses in order to improve on their performance”. Group 2 said that they learned about the internal operation of an NGO and learned more about taxation issues. One participant said that “they have modified their vision and mission, expanded their board of directors, modified their programs and improved their compliance as an NGO”.

Participants in Group 1 reported that they plan to continue expanding their operations, networks and improving operational procedures using learnings from the workshop. They also expressed interest in maximizing resources through partnerships with stakeholders. Group members expressed interest in strengthening capacity of staff in proper administration of limited resources, ensuring transparency and accountability. They also saw the need to improve on marketing their organization. Group 2, said that they plan to continue practicing what they have learned because they recognize that there are key areas in the functioning of their NGOs that require improvement.

All participants expressed willingness to attend advanced trainings and Group 1 indicated interest in the following topics: Advanced Training in Grant Acquisition, Financial Management, Taxation Rules and Regulations in Belize. Group 2 added the following topics:
Internal Systems Management, Conflict Management, Internal and External Communications, Monitoring and Evaluation, Marketing and Fundraising.

To better plan for the upcoming workshops, the participants from the three venues spoke on the importance of having a joint series of workshops with both Civil Society and Civil Servants. Trainings listed would include: Grant/Proposal Writing, Monitoring and Evaluation; Human Resource Management, Rules and Regulations associated with becoming an NGO in Good Standing in Belize; Sharing Information through Network of NGO’s and government agencies.

Finally, results from the questionnaires sent to participants that did not attend the meetings, reveal that the three most used strategies by Civil Servants are ‘Wicked Issues and Techniques, followed by Steps in Developing, Implementing and Evaluating a Public Participation Plan and Strategies and lastly, Techniques in Dealing with Different Types of People in Meetings. They all have implemented one or more of the strategies to increase efficiency and effectiveness at the work place. One of the respondents said that one of the biggest challenges is being able to work together to achieve community development. When asked if the workshop was useful in planning to network with Civil Society organizations or the public for collaboration, a representative from the Ministry of Health stated, “Definitely the workshop was helpful in giving us more insights to look within communities especially for strengths and opportunities”. They would like more workshops that can enable them to respond to the many challenges of NGOs and Government organizations working together.

Summary of Community of Practice Recommendations

In the combined group session in the afternoon, Dr. Colverson introduced the concept of the “Community of Practice” (CoP), and clearly explained what it entails. Participants were divided into groups to share their ideas for improving communications and working together to enhance services to underserved communities in Belize as a CoP. There is limited interaction and communication among groups currently, and in some instances there is duplication of efforts. Below is a summary of ideas presented for working to enhance services together in the future.

In Punta Gorda, participants were interested in Capacity building, Creation of a shared database that includes expertise of both Civil Society and Civil Servant groups, and Creation of a group Facebook page for information sharing.

In Belmopan, the top ideas for working together were to: Establish an online database for sharing between NGOs and the Government of Belize, Advocacy for revision of the existing NGO Act in Belize and Capacity building.

The top suggestions in Belize City included: Strengthening the Belize Network of NGO’s, Development of a shared database system and a Symposium for both Civil Society and Civil Servant groups.
Overall the top recommendation for a joint Community of Practice moving forward is *creating a shared database that contains expertise of both groups*. Other organizations in Belize are working on this, so it was recommended to connect with them to avoid duplication of efforts. There is some confusion among organizations regarding the establishment and criteria for membership in the Network of NGO’s, so a session addressing this topic was highly recommended. There is also interest in bringing both groups together to fully appreciate how they each contribute to the development of Belize and how much more they could accomplish if they worked together.
July 30, 2019

Dear (Civil Servants Workshop Participant):

Thank you for your participation in this year’s capacity building of Civil Servants Organization’s (CSO) workshop in May. As a follow up, TIDE and the University of Florida would like to invite you to reflect on your participation in the workshop, and how this has benefited your governmental organization. We will be hosting focus groups to discuss your reflections and begin developing our Community of Practice (CoP) with other organizations in Belize. “A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do together through regular interactions. They often create shared goals and visions to improve something, or strengthen their mutual work.”

The focus group is scheduled for September 2, 2019 at the TIDE Conference Room, Punta Gorda at 8:15am. A draft agenda is provided below. Lunch will be provided and it is free of cost. Dr. Kathleen Golovsky from the University of Florida will facilitate this workshop. We invite you to be part of establishing a CoP in Belize to develop mutual relationships and improve the sharing of information related to your shared goals of improved governance. Please confirm participation no later than August 23, 2019.

For more information, contact 651-9477, 722-2274/2431 or via email: fcaal@tidebelize.org

Respectfully yours,

Federico Caaal
Education Coordinator, TIDE

Agenda – Focus Groups and Community of Practice

8:15 – 8:30  Welcome and Introductions
8:30 – 10:00  Civil Servants Focus Group Discussion
10:00 – 10:15  BREAK
10:15 – 10:30  Welcome and Introductions
10:30 – 12:00  Civil Society Focus Group Discussion
12:00 – 1:00  LUNCH
1:00 – 3:00  Community of Practice Development
3:00  ADJOURN
July 30, 2019

Dear (Civil Society Workshop Participant):

Thank you for your participation in this year’s capacity building of Civil Society Organization’s workshop in May. As a follow-up, TIDE and the University of Florida would like to invite you to reflect on your participation in the workshop, and how this has benefited your organization. We will be hosting focus groups to discuss your reflections and begin developing our Community of Practice (CoP) with other organizations in Belize. “A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do together through regular interactions. They often create shared goals and visions to improve something, or strengthen their mutual work.”

The focus group is scheduled for September 6, 2019 at the NARGIE Conference (MOE), Belize City at 10:15am. A draft agenda is provided below. Lunch will be provided and it is free of cost. Dr. Kathleen Cobversion from the University of Florida will facilitate this workshop. We invite you to be part of establishing a CoP in Belize to develop mutual relationships and improve the sharing of information related to your shared goals of improved governance. Please confirm participation no later than August 23, 2019.

For more information, contact 651-9477, 722-2274/2431 or via email: fcaal@tidebelize.org

Yours sincerely,

Federico Caal

Education Coordinator, TIDE

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Annex 2 - Civil Servants Follow Up Questionnaire

Strengthening Civil Society and Civil Servant Capacity in Belize through Partnership
Focus Group Discussion on the Outcomes of the Workshops during April-May, 2019
For Civil Servant Organizations

Name: _______________________________________________________
Organization: _________________________________________________
Date: September 2, 2019 at TIDE Conference Room

Dear workshop participants,

Once again, thanks for participating in our April-May workshops. The post-workshop survey that all of you completed clearly showed increased knowledge and skills on various organizational management topics covered during the workshops.

As mentioned at the end of the workshops, we would like to know the medium-term impact of the April-May workshop that you participated in. Could you please briefly answer the following questions, and afterwards we will have an opportunity to discuss your responses. Thank-you!

1. During the April-May workshops, the Civil Servant workshops covered key organizational management aspects of:

   Concepts of community and community development approaches; ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) Processes; Wicked issues and techniques used to address them; Tools and strategies for public involvement through the Spectrum of Public Participation; Steps in developing, implementing and evaluating a public participation plan; Creating a community asset map; Tools and techniques to facilitate meetings; Strategies and techniques in dealing with different types of people in meetings.

Which organizational capacity building strategies/activities were most useful for you and your organization? Please list in order of importance.

2. Have you implemented any of the strategies to increase the efficiency & effectiveness of your Civil Servant organization? ________

If so, how?

3. Was the workshop useful in planning to network with Civil Society organizations or the public for collaboration? Please explain.

4. Was the workshop useful in planning to network with other Civil Servant organizations for collaboration? Please explain.
Annex 3 - Civil Servants Focus group Questions

Questions - Civil Servants

1. Have you shared information from the workshop with colleagues?
2. What are the effects of the workshop on your organization?
3. Do you plan to continue using what you learned in the workshop? Why or why not?
4. Would you be interested in participating in an advanced capacity building workshop? What topics would you like to see covered?
Annex 4 - Civil Society Follow up Questionnaire

“Strengthening Civil Society and Civil Servant Capacity in Belize through Partnership”
Focus Group Discussion on the Outcomes of the Workshops during April-May, 2019
For Civil Society Organizations

Name __________________________________________________
Organization ____________________________________________
Date: September 6, 2019, NARCIE Conference Room, Belize City

Dear workshop participants,

Once again, thanks for participating in our April-May workshops. The post-workshop survey that all of you completed clearly showed increased knowledge and skills on various organizational management topics covered during the workshops.

As mentioned at the end of the workshops, we would like to know the medium-term impact of the April-May workshop that you participated in. Could you please briefly answer the following questions, and afterwards we will have an opportunity to discuss your responses. Thank-you!

1. During the April-May workshops, the Civil Society workshops covered key organizational management aspects of:

   Developing a strong mission, Vision & core value statements, Improved governance structure and process, Program planning with strong goals & SMART objectives, Program evaluation focusing on identifying immediate, Intermediate and long term outcomes, Strategic planning, Strategic partnership with other CSOs and government officials, and Diversified fund raising & Grant writing.

Which organizational capacity building strategies/activities were most useful for you and your organization? Please list in order of importance.

2. Have you implemented any of the strategies to increase the efficiency & effectiveness of your Civil Society organization? ______

   If so, how?

3. Was the workshop useful in planning to network with civil servants or any other government entities for collaboration? Please explain.

4. Was the workshop useful in planning to network with other Civil Society organizations for collaboration? Please explain.
Annex 5 - Civil Society Focus group Questions

Civil Society Questions:

1) What is the overall trend of growth in the NGO sector in Belize? Your organization?
2) Have you shared information from the workshop with your colleagues?
3) What were the effects of the workshop on your organization?
4) Do you plan to continue what you learned during the workshop? Why or why not?
5) Would you be interested in attending an advanced capacity building workshop? What topics would you like to see covered?
Annex 6 - Summary of Community of Practice Recommendations

The Community of Practice workshops provided feedback on topics they would like to focus on in the future. These include:

- Training of Trainers on building community capacity through empowering community leaders
- Having a mechanism for sharing information that incorporates co-training, attending each other’s events and meetings and decentralizing resources, thereby strengthening communication across civil servants and civil society organizations
- Evaluating the effectiveness of programs and activities through joint training sessions
- Increasing economic sustainability of groups through alternative livelihood activities or formation of empowerment groups (women’s group, craft, etc.)

Groups shared ideas on ways to build relationships through establishing trust, being transparent, practicing two way communications, taking ownership and being more inclusive about membership in the Belize Network of NGOs. Networking should prioritize to seek funding and support on behalf of clients and underserved communities, and organizations should act as a liaison or mediator and practice higher levels of professionalism.

Annex 7 - Workshop Participants List-Punta Gorda
### Annex 8 - Workshop Participants List-Belmopan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Address, community/village</th>
<th>Ministry, Department, Council, Commission, etc.</th>
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### Annex 8 - Workshop Participants List-Belmopan

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<thead>
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<th>First Name</th>
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<th>Ministry, Department, Council, Commission, etc.</th>
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**Training Workshop for Civil Society Organizations on Community of Practice**

**Location:** NARCIE Conference, Belize City

**Dates:** September 6, 2019 at 10:15am

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Workshop Photos – Punta Gorda
Workshop Photos – Belize City

Group 1

1) Growing NGO Sector
   - Development process
   - Received social needs
   - Response by NGOs/CBOs
   - NGOs need right training
   - Keep NGO growing & adapting

2) Yes Board of Directors
   - Staff
   - Partners
   - Potential partners/members

Scheduled meetings to discuss
   - Vision & Mission Change
   - Board membership (expanded)
   - Project & Programs
   - Compliance & Reporting
   - Financial oversight

3) Yes Plan to Continue:
   - Expanding Operations/Network
   - Gaining awareness of NGOs
   - Better insight on operational procedures
   - Diversity & Integration
   - Partnership with community & stakeholders (clients)
   - Strengthening of Capacity Building
   - Non-Profit Administration & available resources
   - Transparency / Accountability
   - Marketing/Publicity
   - Staff Training

4) Yes for Advance Training
   - Grant Acquisition Financial Management
   - Technical Support / Rules
   - Cost Sharing / Taxation Regulations in Belize

Conference Room