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BELIZE
2020

"PROMOTING
AN OPEN GOVERNMENT
ECOSYSTEM
IN BELIZE"





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An Open Government ecosystem is critical to improving public safety, governance, and overall transparency. When there is an Open Government ecosystem, there is greater public participation that translates to increased government accountability and client-focused public service delivery.

Funded by the U.S. Embassy in Belmopan, the project entitled “**Promoting an Open Government Ecosystem in Belize**” laid the foundational work to the development of Open Government, access to information and Open Data, transparency, and citizen participation in the country. The project made significant progress on promoting collaboration to capitalize on government, private, and civil society resources and networks to collectively work together to improve, expand, or complement government service delivery (particularly to vulnerable populations); and working on advocacy for improved government transparency.

During 2018 and 2019, The Trust for the Americas and the Organization of American States (OAS) through its Department for Effective Public Management (DEPM), have worked hand and hand in Belize with government, civil society and the private sector, towards the strengthening of central and local governments in support of advancing democracy and governance efforts through civil society engagement.

The “Promoting an Open Government ecosystem in Belize” project was able to conduct capacity building training for Belizeans from various sectors through seminars, workshops and roundtable activities. This dedicated training enabled the creation of small government/civil society coalitions for the development of 6 hackathon solutions and 8 innovative projects through the sub-grants incubator. Finally, as the advancement of democratic governance goes hand by hand with economic development, the project also focused on strengthening the dialogue on how the Belizean private sector could harness the economic value of Open Data. Through a series of activities, the Trust, the OAS and the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) collaborated to bridge Open Data and business opportunities by launching a dialogue to find answers as to ensure a collaborative approach to unlock the economic potential of Open Data in the country, most notably within Belize’s tourism sector.

Today, Belize has ongoing open government’s initiatives well underway, while the project was also able to accomplish the insertion of the country at the regional level by joining 6 other countries in the pursue of Open Government through the Development the Caribbean (DevCa) initiative; coordinated by the Caribbean Open Institute (COI) in Jamaica. While it is an important milestone, these are the very first steps towards an effective Open Government in the country. The Government of Belize needs to consolidate the open government efforts, providing new opportunities and spaces for collaboration, and setting the ground to finally take it to the next level. This will also activate international platforms and mechanisms that will support with technical and financial resources, enabling the country to join the Open Government global movement through international organizations such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

1 OBJECTIVE

Reinforce existing e-government initiatives to guarantee public access to information and effective service delivery.

Through a series of capacity building training workshops for government officials, the Trust provided technical expertise to share best practices and international standards for e-government, how to develop user-friendly websites and open up public data to citizens, and compliance with regulations or other relevant legal frameworks.

Project activities contributed significantly to the technical design and development of the e-government virtual services portal led by CITO. In particular, in the process to ensure that the portal reflected national ownership features and embedded formal and informal public feedback mechanisms. As a result, CITO indicates that they are currently collaborating with approximately 75% of the public sector ministries in the national government in improving information and communication technology capabilities, digitizing information and data sets and enhancing e-government service capabilities. Therefore, the potential for influencing service delivery and scaling policy development in this area is considerable.

2 OBJECTIVE

Strengthen the capacities of CSOs to participate in coalitions and advocate for the improvement of government services.

Under the Open Government project, the Trust provided capacity-building workshops, led by technical experts to deliver training to a wide representation of civil society groups, including media outlets, domestic NGOs, academic institutions, private sector and labor unions, to enable these organizations to better advocate and build strong relationships government institutions to call for greater public sector transparency and accountability.


The project was successful improving the level of stakeholder knowledge of e-government, open data and open government specifically. Particularly, if considered as an initial intervention to raise public and key stakeholder awareness about open government in a country that previously had low levels of understanding or engagement of the concept. Additionally, through it different activities, the project created a basic ecosystem of organizations and actors interested and motivated in working together in this area.

3 OBJECTIVE


Promote effective collaboration between government and civil society through coalition-building processes and social innovation mini-grants.

Through this significant process under the project, the Trust provided eight (8) teams with sub-grant funds, of US\$5,000.00 each, for the best innovative projects that were designed to promote collaboration between civil society with public sector actors. The goal was to improve government services and provide innovative solutions to local challenges. Themes covered open data, citizen participation, transparency and technology, access to public information, and open government at the municipal level.

Objective three provided examples and opportunities such as hackathons and seed funding to develop innovative ideas and creating a community of practice in Belize through partnerships. In addition, we accomplished this by enabling Belize to join international platforms and support from the regional community. Involving Belize for the first time in the Developing the Caribbean (DevCa) initiative, the project allowed the country to become an active participant in the open data Caribbean ecosystem and set the stage for further involvement in the global community.



SITUATIONAL // AWARENESS



The Government of Belize through its Central Information Technology Office (CITO), Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has engaged the services of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) to design a **National E- Government Policy**, Strategy and Plan of Action to leverage the power of ICT as a driver of economic and social transformation. This project took into account the 2015–2018 National Electronic Government Strategy and aligned overall with five of its seven strategic themes, including legislative and policy reforms and quality social services.

In terms of Freedom of Information, currently Belize has two existing pieces of legislation for the protection of the freedom of information. These are:

THE PROTECTION OF THE PRIVACY OF A PERSON AS ENSHRINED IN THE BELIZE CONSTITUTION.

THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CAP. 013 OF THE 2011 REVISED EDITION OF THE LAWS OF BELIZE.

The latter however is limited to only personal data and correspondence. The application of the Freedom of Information Act has its own limitations, as it is not applicable to information being held by courts of Belize including the Registry or from the Office of the Governor-General.

Belize is not an Open Government Partnership (OGP) member yet. Eligibility is determined by the evaluation of a country's performance in four critical areas of open government:

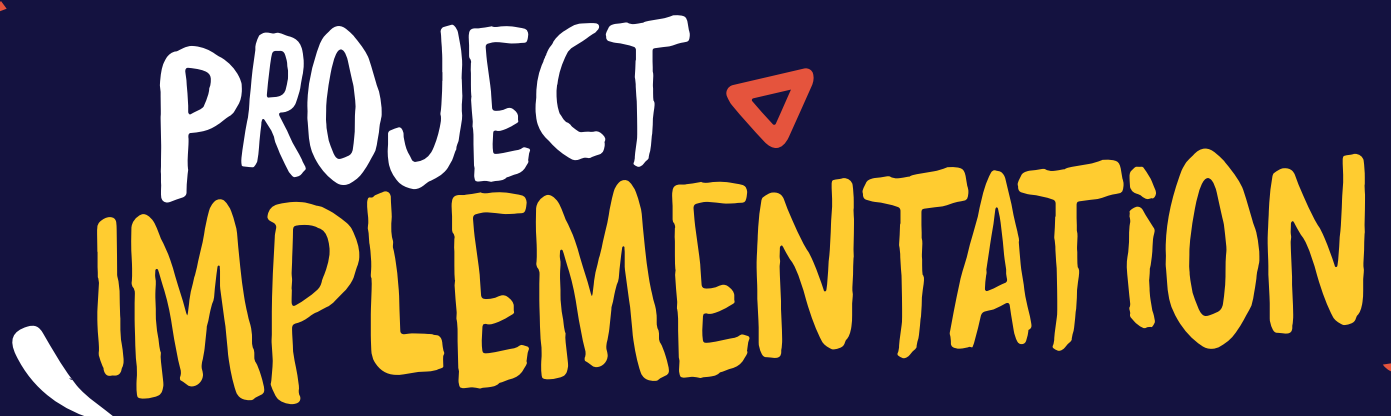
A FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

B ACCESS TO INFORMATION

C ASSET DISCLOSURE

D CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

To be eligible, countries must earn at least 75% of the possible points. Belize scored 66.7% of the applicable points in the latest evaluation. Although the country has made progress in key areas, it needs to address significant challenges to join the OGP. In July 2018, we conducted a survey to a sample of the Open Government Ecosystem in Belize, with significant data that confirmed the need of the project's activities. **See results of the initial assessment here.**



PROJECT ▽ IMPLEMENTATION

The aim of this project was to establish an Open Government ecosystem that would lead to improved quality and coverage of government services in Belize, resulting in improving public safety and governance. Furthermore, elements of the project also served to raise the awareness of national authorities about the importance of joining international Open Government platforms.

The Trust implemented the project with the technical support of specialists from the Department for Effective Public Management (DGPE) of the OAS, and regional experts and partners working on transparency, accountability, technology, innovation, and citizen participation. Results included greater capacity and collaboration of civil society, media, the private sector and government on transparency and accountability.

The DGPE of the OAS contributed to the project by sharing its combined technical expertise and networks in the areas of digital government, open data, and open government. Also, the DGPE is the Department of the OAS tasked with the Strengthening Democracy Mandates from OAS Member States towards the implementation of policies for open government, e-government, open data, fiscal transparency, administrative streamlining, open budget, electronic public procurement and contracting systems, and public registry of state suppliers, taking into account the participation of civil society and other stakeholders [AG/RES. 2931 (XLIX-O/19)].



▷ DIRECT
ENGAGEMENT

To better sensitize the efforts of the project, missions to Belize were conducted to identify prominent local stakeholders and communicate with them the upcoming agenda of activities, seek on the ground information on local ecosystem, forge ties that have been leveraged throughout the project and introduce the team driving the Open Government and Open Data agenda forward.

The following activities were carried out throughout the life of the project:

Inception Meetings

Initial meetings to visit various stakeholders from government and civil society to secure support in moving the project and respective activities forward in the country. Notable stakeholders visited include the Central Information Technology Office (CITO), Attorney General's Ministry, the Economic Development Council of the Office of the Prime Minister, the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), and the University of Belize (UB).

Initial Capacity Building Workshop (May 2018) "Innovating in Public Management through Open Government in Belize"

As one of the first activities under the Open Government project in Belize, **a public webinar conducted in May 2018 introduced Open Government concepts and case studies to the general public.** 56 registered participants representing the Government of Belize, private sector, academia, and other civil society groups, **engaged in the following presentations:**

Openness in the USA:

International expert – Mary Beth Goodman, former OGP Country Lead for the US Government.

Open Government and Public Innovation experience in Canada:

International expert – Mark Levene, Senior Advisor on Open Government, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS).

This initial training exercise demonstrated the benefits of Open Government and Open Data, and decidedly paved the way for further capacity building trainings, workshops and seminars on Open Government and Open Data.

Open Data Trainings for GOB officials (July 2018)

Testimonial – Government Partner

–

“I was very pleased with the project and initiatives brought forth. CITO has begun works on some projects that utilize the Open Government and Open Government concept. One of these is redoing the Government of Belize Citizen portal. In conclusion, the project was a success as it got people talking about Open Government and it also introduced the concept to the general public and private sector; it even elicited creativity from young minds. I would like to say CITO was a proud partner in all this.”

– Francisco Gonzalez, Ag. Assistant Director, Central Information Technology Office (CITO).

The opportunities included six (6) capacity building workshops that were conducted throughout July 2018. Training courses conducted under Objective 1 included:

Introduction to Open Data (Latin-American Open Data Initiative - ILDA):

What is Open Data and what it is not, why is it important and how to do it.

International expert - Fabrizio Scrollini.

Study Cases:

How Open Data has been done - A discussion on the how, policies, challenges faced, and their Open Data portal.

International experts - Andrea Barenque, Enrique Cusba, and Agustin Benassi.

Open Data Principles, Tools and Resources:

The International Open Data Charter.

International expert - Natalia Carfi.

Opening Data:

The technical aspects of creating data sets.

International expert - Camila Salazar.

Using Open Data I:

Success cases.

International expert - Maurice McNaughton

Using Open Data II:

The technical aspects of using Open Data.

International expert - Juan Manuel Casanueva

Open Data Training for Civil Society Organizations (August 2018).

—

“The Open Government initiative implemented by the OAS and the Trust for the Americas was very well received by the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN). We were pleased to share project information with our BNN members and to encourage them to participate in the project. Several NGO representatives attended the various seminars and webinars, and were actively engaged in learning about the Open Government Ecosystem and made suggestions to advance Open Government in Belize. We learned that with the right mix of political will and public pressure and engagement, Belize could become a model for Open Government in the region. We stand ready to do our part to ensure that the Open Government movement keeps moving forward in Belize.”

— Senator Osmany Salas, 13th Senator, Non-Governmental Organizations.

Training courses conducted under Objective 2 were completed in August 2018 and included:

Introduction to Open Government and Open Data:

What is Open Government, what is Open Data, why is it important, and how civil society organizations can get involved in the process to co-create better government services.

International experts – Felipe Stefan and Nicolas Martín.

Open Government support mechanisms:

How this collaborative process between government agencies and citizens as end users are supported worldwide by international platforms such as the Open Government Partnership and regional foundations.

International experts – Emilene Martinez and Arturo Muenta.

Practical Cases of Open Data:

How Open Data can create better services and promote social and economic development in your community. A discussion on the use of data in Tourism, Health, Trade, and other relevant sectors.

International experts – Maurice McNaughton, Luiza Barbosa and Luiza Jardim.

Data Journalism:

New publishing platforms are empowering everyone to gather and share data digitally, turning it into information.

International experts – Claudia Baez, David Hidalgo and Ana K. Tuduri.

BELIZE OPEN WEEK (BOW) (OCT-NOV 2018)

Belize Open Week has been identified as a unique multi-stakeholder opportunity to learn about Open Government and to participate in co-creation processes. Being the first of its kind for Belize, BOW provide a week filled with trainings, roundtable discussions, joint-country hackathon and a high-level political forum specifically on Open Government and Open Data.

The week of activities included:

Day 1

Modern Trends & Tools for Effective Open Government (October 30, 2018)

In the context of the implementation of the Belize Open Week, activities began by delivering a training session to actors from different sectors about Open Government and Open Data. The training entailed an overview of the processes and experiences of opening and using data from the government perspective and the civil society perspective. Experts from Argentina, Colombia and Jamaica accompanied by the OAS facilitated the trainings.

Day 2

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue Roundtables (October 31, 2018)

The Open Government dialogue roundtables are a space for inclusive discussion to the search general consensus about a specific outcome being pursued. It promotes the enrichment in the processes of construction of a public policy or services by means of the analysis of multiple points of view in the approach of subjects that require a particular expertise, in which other actors different to government can offer greater value. In the case of this roundtable in Belize, the dialogue focused on Strengthening Partnerships: Building Belize's Public Services through Digital and Open Government, to ensure collaborative approach to the development of government digital services.

Day 3

Open Data Hackathon (November 1, 2018)

The DevCa2018 Belize Hackathon was held on November 1st – 2nd at the UWI Open Campus location in Belize City as part of the Belize Open Week (BOW) series of activities. DevCa – Developing the Caribbean, is a regional technology for development conference that seeks to highlight both the current and potential impact of Open Data and software innovation by addressing social challenges globally and particularly in the Caribbean. The DevCA hackathon was organized as a 24-hour event dedicated to teams working and using open data in conceptualizing the development of new services, visualizations or applications. The Hackathon was fueled by Open Data provided by the Belize Ministry of Tourism and was organized under the theme: “Building Innovation and Urban Resilience in Tourism”. At the end of the two days, all the teams presented their prototypes and solutions before a panel of judges). A total of 4 teams participated, with 4 innovative submissions. The hackathon featured two teams from key public sector agencies (CITO & SIB) which is an early signal of Government commitment to the Open Data ecosystem.



Belize Open Week (Oct - Nov 2018)

Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, Nestor Mendez

DevCa HACKATHON TOP TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

CITO (1st Place) with Vegan Voyage:

Vegan Voyage is an interactive application that highlights local vendors in categories such as entertainment, transportation and food. Their main target market are cruise line passengers. The main objective of the application to make traveling and finding reliable services easily available. Having a database with geographical results in order to find a vegan friendly environment makes all the difference in allowing a vegan or anyone in the pursuit of a plant based, dairy free culinary journey and more so an environmentally sustainable experience to benefit while enjoying the amenities of a new country. The app provides users with ease of access to the closest vegan friendly establishment nearby in addition to a taxi service and local guides nearest to them.

SIB (2nd place) with Belize Hot-Spots:

Using the data provided by the Ministry of Tourism, the application uses an API to connect to the Ministry's Database (or any DB) to periodically extract geo-referenced information on Attractions and Accommodations and display on a Map. The map also allows registered users to add their own locations. The solution also kept in mind local entrepreneurs that do not have enough capital to do their own marketing. Giving them a free space online in the map to list their locations geographically. Once added to the map, the entrepreneur would be able to build their personal page, marketing their location and products. Any location listed will be viewable by tourists.

Jaguarondis (3rd place) with Indigenous Tourism:

The team sought to provide a platform for strengthening socioeconomic fabric of small communities. The impact is to increase tourism income in underserved populations; strengthen social fabric by providing opportunities to young people in small communities. The stakeholders involve public, private and government sectors: Indigenous communities, tourists, Community-based Organizations, and the government. A web-based project concept, preliminary data sources and design mock-up were developed for the ePlatform.

Day 4

High-level Open Government Best Practice Exchange Forum (November 2, 2018)

This very first Open Government Best Practice Exchange Forum in Belize allowed participants to navigate the latest and most successful developments in open government and open data as a reference for Belize own undertakings. The forum gathered top government authorities from Belize, and experts from around the world, together with civil society and other non-State actors, to depict the open government ecosystem of Belize at large of its virtues and benefits.

BOW Metrics:

119 total participants from various civil society and government sectors engaged in various activities during BOW.

5 international experts participated from Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Jamaica and US.

Open Government Dialogue Roundtables (April 2019)

In the case of this roundtable in Belize, the dialogue focused on finding answers as to how the Belizean private sector could harness the value of Open Data to ensure a collaborative approach to unlock the economic potential of Open Data.

BELIZE DevCa2019 HACKATHON

The 2019 DevCa Hackathon was an event where developers across the region will be able to “test-drive” a new Smart Community Tourism platform by creating Tourism Apps and Prototypes. For this reason, the 2019 DevCa Hackathon’s theme was “Smart Communities, Smarter People” which provided a unique opportunity for various stakeholders including technologists, entrepreneurs, governmental and non-governmental organizations across the Caribbean to convene to combat some of the largest challenges the region currently faces.

DevCa Hackathon Top Team Highlights:

TEAM 1

PLAN IT: BELIZE!

This team created an application named Plan It: Belize!

Their focus was connecting tourists and Belizeans to activities. The developers hope to ensure that tourists can maximize their trips to Belize by connecting them directly with adventures. The team mentioned that its stakeholders would be tour operators, restaurant owners, village leaders or any location with an adventure or experience to provide. While the team emphasized the importance of having Belizeans utilize the app, they geared it toward cruise tourists who generally have between four to six hours to explore Belize City. The application would allow tourists to have access to a larger variety of experiences and adventures. It would not only provide adventures and experiences but also aid in the planning process.

Main Objectives:

- a) Increasing the efficiency of the in-transit visitor experience**
- b) Bridging the gap between visitor arrival and embarkation on an adventure/tour**
- c) To maximize the options for in-transit visitors**
- d) To promote Belize's local businesses/destinations**

TEAM 2

DIGI DEVS

Opting to work off site, they chose to focus on the creation of a platform that could assist in the further development of the tourism industry.

The platform would be a web application that is geared toward specifically targeting tourists and tour guides to provide them with the opportunity to connect with each other with ease. Currently tour guides lack an effective platform to communicate the services provided with tourists. The creation of this application will not only ensure that tourists have a fulfilled experience once in Belize but can also provide tour guides with a larger market access.

Main Objectives:

- a) Ability to allow a tour guide to create and manage their profile**
- b) Tour guides will be able to set schedules and make them available to Tourists**
- c) Ability to allow tourists to filter and browse tours/tour guides by location, tour types & pricing, etc.**
- d) Ability to book tours/tour guides**



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Open Government Closing Ceremony (June 2019)

Lessons learnt, best practices and presentation of results from sub grantees.

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION
BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH
COALITION-BUILDING PROCESSES AND SOCIAL
INNOVATION MINI-GRANTS.

Open Government and Open Data have shown practical gains to advance and achieve transparency and development outcomes worldwide. By introducing modern collaborative and participatory methodologies of co-creation; public management is innovating together with civil society and the private sector in the design and delivery of new public services or social and commercial opportunities to productive sectors of the economies and to citizens.

Under this objective, stakeholders were able to attend capacity building training sessions, participate in engagement meetings, workshops and roundtable activities. This list of activities and events enabled the creation of small government/civil society coalitions for the development eight (8) innovative projects through sub-grant funds, of **US\$5,000.00** each.

The goal was to improve government services and provide innovative solutions to local challenges. Furthermore, the seed-funding component sponsored the participation of civil society in the implementation of specific projects under the principles of open government (transparency, collaboration and citizen participation).

Themes covered open data, citizen participation, transparency and technology, access to public information, and open government at the municipal level.

This subgrant component sought to encourage initiatives linked to promote collaboration between civil society and government, to provide innovative and high impact solutions to public services or needs identified in each district, which specifically demonstrate the benefits and opportunities that open governance represents. As a result, the projects financed were comprised of Belizean social organizations in alliance with a government counterpart partner.

Members of an evaluation committee evaluated all proposals received.

The Committee included the following members:



Dr. Sharmayne Saunders
Asst. Director, UWI Open Campus



Dr. Leroy Almendarez
Executive Director, BELTRAIDE



Ishmael Quiroz
Executive Director, Economic
Development Council



Mike Mora
Specialist, OAS

The evaluation was carried out on 20th December 2018, with eight successful project proposals approved by the US Embassy in Belmopan out of ten received.

Sub-Grant Project Proposals

Read more about the eight (8) projects that were successful in receiving sub-grant seed funding of US\$5,000.00 to support the pillars of Open Government and fostering citizen participation and public accountability.

Access to our latest publication [HERE](#).

Testimonials – Sub-Grant Teams

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“As students of the Corozal Junior College (CJC) we were delighted to have embarked on this project. This was a wonderful learning experience for us since it gave us real life experience in managing and executing a project from its inception to completion. The entire process was made easier due to the support of the people responsible for the project. It is our hope that these initiatives can continue developing our country.”

Nydia Young, Team Leader, PING, Corozal Junior College.

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“The Ya’axché sub-grant “Improving Crop Production Yields Using Climate-smart Agricultural Practices” is a small project for Maya Golden Landscape (MGL) farmers from our beneficiaries’ communities who are improving their livelihoods through sustainable farming. A web-based community outreach and livelihood online database has been developed to record agricultural production from beekeeping, annual cropping, agroforestry such as cacao, and inga alley. Ya’axché recognizes community efforts to sustain the local economy by diversifying opportunities, which also requires open data to build farmer profiles, to measure and understand the impact of conservation efforts through our integrated-management approaches at the landscape level. The work continues even beyond the project as we aim to improve the database as well as staff and farmers’ capacities to collect, store and manage data.”

Marvin Vasquez, Operations Director (Conservation Project Manager), Ya’axché Conservation Trust.



**"RESULTS, LESSONS LEARNED,
RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY"**

The “Promoting an Open Government Ecosystem in Belize” project provided opportunities for public institutions and citizens to co-create public goods through social innovation. To that end, the project sought to strengthen the civil sector’s capacity to better engage in the improvement of public service delivery through effective collaboration between government and citizens to establish social innovation projects. Enabling an Open Government ecosystem has laid the support mechanisms to calling for improved governance in Belize. The project was successful in building pro-transparency coalitions among civil society and local governments, imperative to fostering citizen participation through enhanced civic engagement and increasing the effectiveness and resilience of public institutions.

The project being implemented simultaneously during the final year of implementation of the national e-government strategy portal resulted in opportunities for training and advisory services to be offered to CITO, which materially improved the technical design of the soon to be launched GoB e-government portal. Capacity building sessions and guidance were cited as two examples of highly useful and effective advice to ensure that the portal reflected national ownership features and embedded formal and informal public feedback mechanisms.

In qualitative terms, the project was designed and implemented taking into account the needs of the country in the area of Open Government, based on an analysis of the environment and the institutional and social capacities of all the stakeholders. Initial consultations were held to align the work plan of the project with the e-government strategy of CITO. In addition, local stakeholders were very satisfied with all capacity building trainings and workshops delivered, along with other key project related activities and events, as the project engaged a wide representation of civil society groups, including media outlets, conservation NGOs, academic institutions, private companies, labor unions, and other international organizations.

Stakeholder awareness building via strategic communication, capacity development activities (such as training and providing advisory services) and the design and execution of specific open data focused initiatives such as hackathons and innovation competitions are project components that can be replicated at wider scale and be sustained in follow-up open government initiatives, according to the evidence collected after implementation.


A key outcome of the project was that of the subgrants component, as this element demonstrated to be innovative and a big contribution to the relationship between civil society and the public sector. Under this component, the project facilitated coalition-building processes between government officials and civil society groups identified under Objectives 1 and 2 to collaboratively develop, review, and improve e-government and open government initiatives. Local stakeholders we assisted in the set-up of mechanisms for collaboration, defining joint agendas and projects with government leaders. As a result, 8 innovative projects in different regions of Belize were implemented. The project’s subgrantees has contributed to Belize with innovative long-term solutions in transparency and accountability, and many of them remain sustainable and scalable.

The project held 21 various training seminars, workshops, activities and events. More than 23 international experts contributed with their expertise via online training workshops or in country visits. Beneficiaries included a wide approach to civil society (including grassroots organizations, media, private companies, universities, etc.) and a wide participation from government officials. By contrasting the beneficiaries' perceptions before and after the implementation of the project, the responses show a radical change in the understanding and behavior regarding Open Government and Open Data concepts.

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