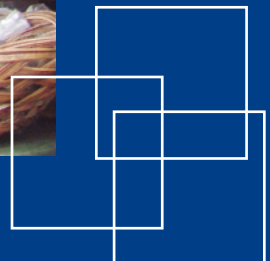


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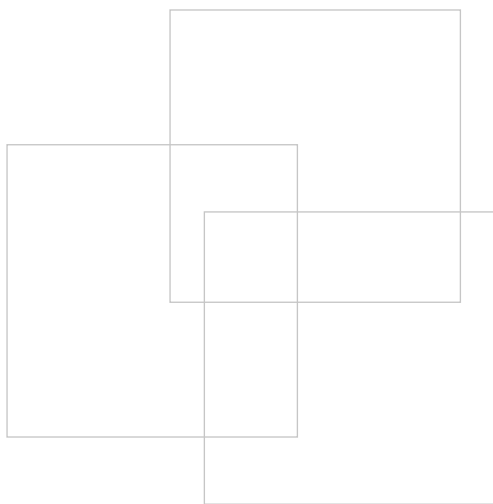
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Belize

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The socio-economic context

Belize has experienced moderate but stable economic growth over the past decade, but poverty is still widespread.

In 2018, the population of Belize was estimated to be 398,050 (Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB)), July 2018), comprising several ethnic groups, in an area of just 23 square kilometers. The Belizean economy, which is dependent on tourism and agriculture, has been growing at an average rate of approximately 2.0 per cent annually over the past ten years (SIB). The services sector¹ accounts for 65 per cent of employment, followed by the primary² (17.9 per cent) and secondary³ (17.1 per cent) sectors. Belize has the third highest per capita income in Central America, but there is a huge disparity between rich and poor, with 43 per cent of the population living below the poverty line.

¹ In terms of employment by sector, almost two-thirds of employed persons work in the services sector, particularly in wholesale and retail trade; community, social and personal services; and tourism.

² Most employed persons in the primary sector work in the agricultural industry.

³ The secondary sector mainly comprises persons working in the construction and manufacturing industries.

Educational attainment drops at secondary level and children from rural northern districts are at risk of exclusion.

While almost all children complete primary school in Belize, there is a significant decline in educational attainment at secondary school level. Only two-thirds of students complete secondary education, with the completion rate being higher for girls (72.0 per cent) than that for boys (61.2 per cent). The risk of exclusion from education is higher for male children from poor households of Mestizo (44.3 per cent), Creole (21.5 per cent) and Maya (18.9 per cent) and for those living in the rural Belize (23.7 per cent) and Toledo (20.8 per cent) districts (Young et al., 2017).

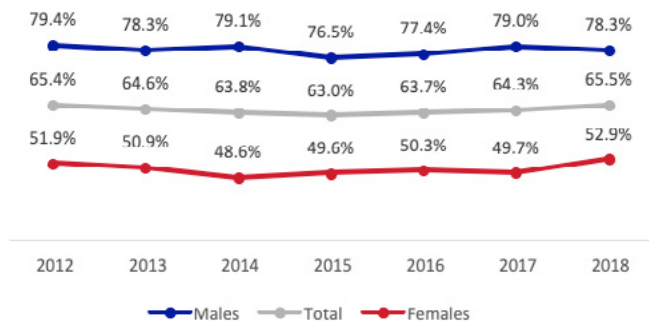


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Labour force participation is increasing, but the level of unemployment among youth⁴ remains high and the composition of the labour force is very dynamic.

In April 2018, Belize’s labour force comprised 172,086 persons, of which 59.4 per cent were males and 40.6 per cent were females. At that time, 78.3 per cent of males were employed compared to 52.9 per cent of females (figure 1). Just over half (52 per cent) of the labour force resided in rural areas, of which 52.4 per cent were employed. About 45 per cent of youth participated in the labour force, including approximately 55 per cent of young males and only 36 per cent of young females. About 90 per cent of adult males were in the labour force, compared with just over 60 per cent of females. In 2018, the majority of persons entering the labour force were female, and approximately four out of five persons were from rural areas. the trend (SIB, 2018).

Figure 1. Labour force participation rate by sex, April 2012 to April 2018.



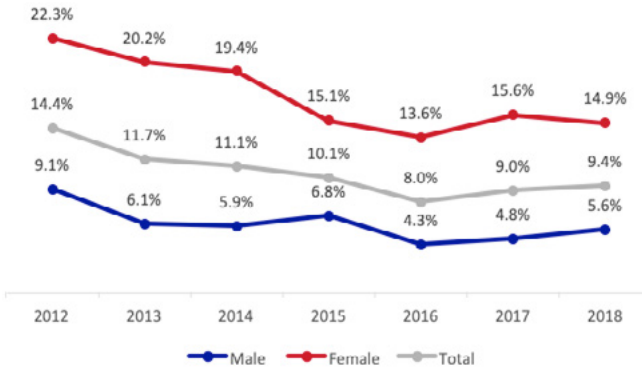
Source: SIB, 2018.

⁴ Youths are persons aged 14 to 24 years, and adults are persons aged 25 years and older.

Between 2012 and 2016, the unemployment rate declined steadily, but since April 2016 has been increasing, reaching 9.0 per cent in 2017 and 9.4 per cent in 2018.

In 2018, the labour force grew faster than the rate at which jobs were being created. The net increase in the number of unemployed was higher for males than for females, but females still made up 64 per cent of the unemployed population. However, the difference between the male and female unemployment rates reduced by 1.5 percentage points between 2017 and 2018 (figure 2). The unemployment rate among youth was 21.3 per cent, with this age group being the most susceptible to unemployment. The rate of unemployment was also slightly higher in urban areas than in rural areas (SIB, 2018).

Figure 2. Unemployment rate by sex, April 2012 to April 2018.

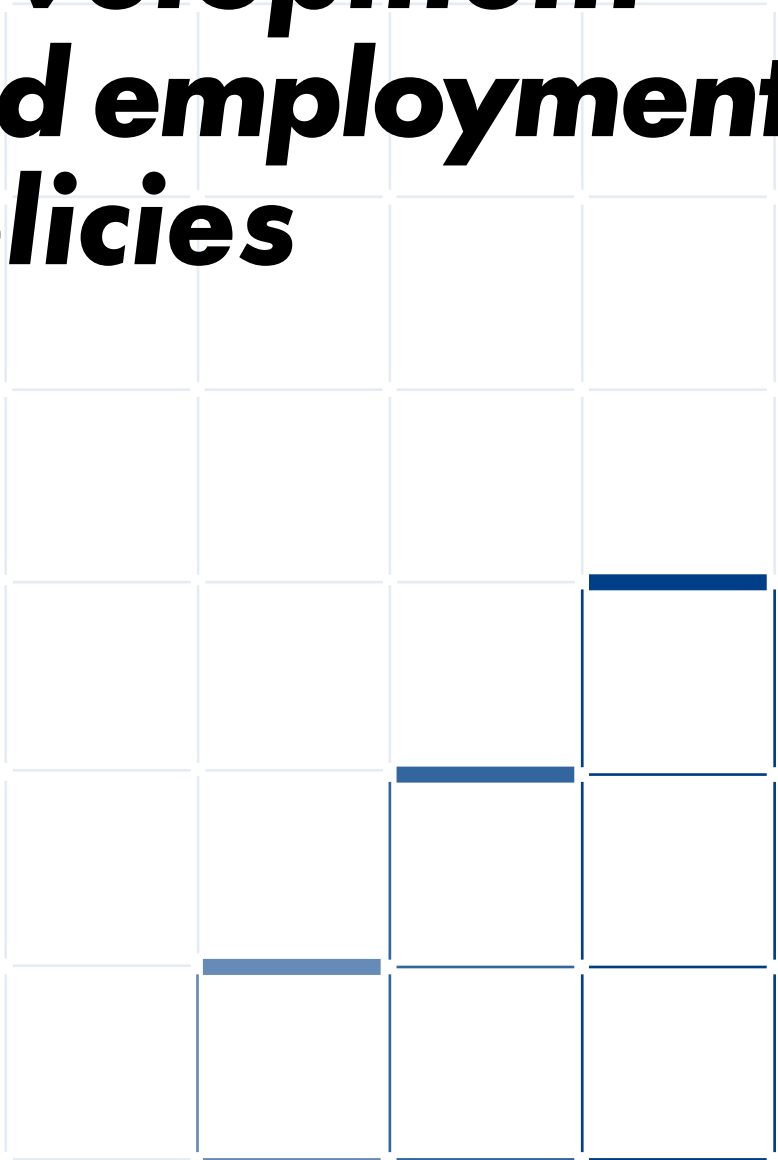


Source: SIB, 2018.



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Development and employment policies



The development of Belize is guided by Horizon 2030, which is the national development framework. The framework recognizes three major weaknesses in the public sector planning process, which, by extension, directly affect the policies and planning for skills development.

- Stakeholders felt that development is centralized in Belize City and Belmopan, with people in rural communities feeling marginalized and isolated.
- The current approach to development divides social and economic issues into artificial segments, which in effect places barriers against effective information sharing and coordination between sectors. This affects skills development adversely because it cuts across sectors.
- Planning and implementation of government policy and programmes have suffered from the absence of clear monitoring and evaluation processes limiting the planning of skills development.

The Horizon 2030 framework covers several thematic areas, organized under four main headings. One of these, “Economic resilience”, includes the following three economic goals: with implications for Institute for Technical Vocational Education and Training (ITVET) because they have needs for human development. Similarly, the education for development – education for life’ heading calls for the development of a national human resource development strategy to respond to Belize’s development goals for the next 20 years. However, none of the following thematic areas has specific measurable outcomes:

- Increase agricultural production in a sustainable way and increase local value added through the development of agro-processing.
- Ensure a sustainable and profitable tourism sector.
- Develop a strong small business sector, a strong work force and a strong corps of entrepreneurs.

These goals have implications for Belize’s Institutes for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ITVETs) because they all have a human development dimension.

Similarly, under the “Education for development – education for life” heading, the framework calls for the development of a national human resource development strategy to respond to Belize’s development goals for the next 20 years. However, the framework does not give specific, measurable outcomes for any of the thematic areas.

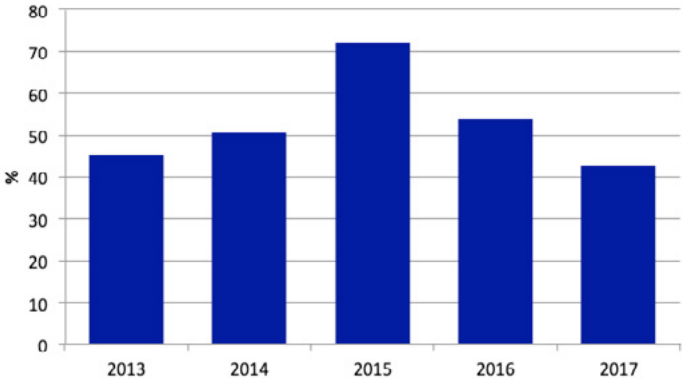
A complementary economic plan is the National Sustainable Tourism Masterplan for Belize 2030. This plan calls for capacity building for employees in the sector, and envisages the creation of a Hospitality Polytechnic Institute as a centre of excellence for tourism hospitality training and tourism sustainable development. All these strategies are gear toward strengthening capacity and facilitating employment, but no national policy specific to employment.



The skills system in Belize

Skills development in Belize is delivered through public and private education and training providers. The ITVET system plays a critical role in the delivery of vocational training programmes in different occupational areas at the secondary level and, through the community colleges, at post-secondary level. Over the period 2013 to 2018, the number of persons receiving ITVET training fluctuated, but overall there was an increase from 1,058 in 2013 to 1,283 in 2018 (SIB, 2018). A particular challenge for the ITVET system is a shortage of qualified instructors. From 2014 to 2017, the number of students enrolled in ITVET programmes increased each year, but the number of instructors declined. Another challenge is that only around 54 per cent of students who enrolled in an initial TVET programme completed their programme (figure 3).

Figure 3. Completion rate at ITVETs, 2013 to 2017.



In 2018, the ITVET enrolment figures by gender were skewed in favour of males, at a ratio of 4:1. Indeed, the number of females enrolled on ITVET programmes has always been lower than the number of males (MOE, 2018). The cost of education is minimal at primary and secondary school levels, but ITVET students pay relatively higher fees than secondary school students. For example, high school fees at government schools range from \$350 to \$500 (Belize dollars), while ITVET programmes range from \$700 to \$2,000 for one training cycle (one year). This can be a burden for poorer household, and thus discourages girls from enrolling in ITVET programmes.

The Government of Belize subsidizes industry demand-driven training programmes through the Belize Training and Employment Centre (BTEC), a unit of Beltraide.⁵ The objective of this unit is to increase the employability of individuals by improving their soft and industry-specific skills. Currently, BTEC focuses on the business process outsourcing (BPO), tourism, home health-care, and professional development services industries. The BPO programme trained 1,540 individuals for employment in industries between 2014 and April 2019, of which 1,120 found employment.

⁵ Beltraide is a statutory body of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Government of Belize.

TVET policies and reform

Belize's Employment, Training and Education Services (ETES) and the ITVETs strive to improve the quality of education and training by implementing policy actions expressed in the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) Strategic Plan 2017–2020 and in the country's primary planning document, Belize 2016–2019: Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS). The GSDS refers to the following policy strategies: `

- Increase relevance by identifying the skills required to support economic development.
- Improve the quality and relevance of education and training aligning education and training to labour market needs.
- Develop a national qualifications framework.
- Promote the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of delivery of TVET programmes at the ITVETs.

It is worth noting that the NCTVET Strategic Plan 2017–2020, which has four key results areas, addresses most of the strategic policy issues within the framework of a TVET system. The key results areas include the following:

Key Result Area 1: Governance, management and communication.

The main objective of this area is to strengthen the monitoring and support mechanism for TVET institutions in order to increase accountability for student outcomes and meet national development needs. It also helps to develop and implement a model for financing of TVET to promote sustainable growth and development.

Key Result Area 2: Quality assurance – standards, certification and accreditation of training.

The objective of this area is to ensure that all trainees satisfy the quality assurance requirements of the Belize National Vocational Qualification (BzNVQ) and/or the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ).

Key Result Area 3: Relevance – curriculum/training development and infrastructure, and equipment.

The objective of this area is the continuous development and revision of curricula/training programmes in response to local and national needs. The infrastructure and equipment required to successfully implement these curricula/training programmes must be available to the TVET institutions.

Key Result Area 4: Instructor/trainer development.

The objective of this area is to upgrade instructors' skills to meet specific standards or accreditation requirements for the purpose of ensuring local (BzNVQ) and regional (CVQ) equivalence.

Governance

TVET in Belize is governed by the Education and Training Act 2010, which replaced the Education and Training Act 2005. The 2010 Act established the NCTVET, which brings together workers' organizations, sectoral employers' organizations and broader civil society. According to the Act, the overall function of the NCTVET is to “advise the Minister on all matters related to technical and vocational education and training” and “make proposals to the Minister on matters relating to workforce performance and development as it considers expedient”. More specifically, the NCTVET is to advise and assist in matters related to:

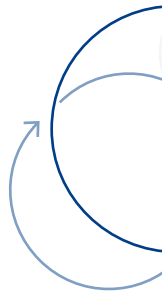
- design of curricula, establishment of occupational standards, and development and conduct of assessments;
- monitoring and evaluation of the system's performance; and
- development of policies and procedures for the recognition of competencies acquired in other member states of the Caribbean community.

The executing agency and technical secretariat for the Education and Training Act is the Employment Training and Education Services (ETES), a department within the Ministry of Education (MOE). ETES directly monitors and supports ITVETs and the national apprenticeship programme. More specifically, it promotes quality in occupational education and training by offering professional development opportunities, coordinating testing and certification (NVQs), guiding curriculum development, organizing TVET conferences and liaising with industries.

Social dialogue

Social dialogue in the governance of TVET started in 2006, with the establishment of the ITVET and the involvement of employers in TVET curriculum development. Further involvement of social partners happens through the NCTVET, which comprises a range of representatives from the MOE, the management of ITVETs, the National Council for Education, the National Trade Union Congress, the Labour Department, the Belize Tourism Board, the Belize Chamber of Commerce, the Belize Business Bureau, the Ministry of Human Development, the Public Utilities Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture. In the past two years, the NCTVET has been very active and provided guidance to the ITVETs. The ITVETs also have local boards composed of stakeholders from the communities they serve. About half of these boards are active, and link the institutions' ITVETS with enterprises to increase the relevance of programmes they offer.

The Government, through the provision of institutional support, is responsible for creating an environment that enables effective social dialogue on quality skills development. The social partners, on the other hand, should engage in effective dialogue, to share in the investment in TVET.



Financing

Funding for TVET comes from the Government and is allocated based on the number of students, and the types of programme it offers. Approximately 2 per cent (\$4 million) of the MOE budget is spent on TVET. The Government is spending over \$6,000 per trainee at ITVETs. The ITVETs generate additional income from fees paid by students enrolled in their programmes. Approximately 82 per cent of the government subvention goes towards salaries, while the income generated from fees is used to purchase teaching/learning materials and for building maintenance. The ITVETs do not receive any financial contributions from the private sector. Enterprises provide a few scholarships to students enrolled in customized training programmes. With the current level of public funding and low enrolment in programmes, many of the ITVETs' programmes are not very stable or sustainable. Private sector funding – and the involvement of the private sector in policy decisions and the design and delivery of programmes – is needed to improve the quality of TVET in Belize.



Skills anticipation

Belize does not currently have any systematic or consistent strategies for identifying what skills are needed by enterprises and, therefore, what programmes ITVETs should offer. In 2001, as part of a project entitled “Enhancement of TVET”, a committee of technical officials from the MOE conducted a labour market information study to determine what programmes the ITVETs should offer. Since then there has been one follow-up (in 2015), carried out by the ETES, with assistance from the ITVETs and with the European Union providing data collection and funding. Future responsibility for anticipating, planning and monitoring skills requirements rests with the ITVETs, with assistance and guidance from ETES. The Ministry of Labour is working on a database for tracking labour market demands/needs.

In 2015, businesses were surveyed on their skills needs (Young 2015). Thirty-five per cent reported a need for highly skilled workers and 32.1 per cent expressed a need for manual or low skilled workers. The majority of businesses (89.3 per cent) currently had vacancies. In total, they had 275 vacancies across different occupational areas. Most vacancies were in Cayo and Belize districts, with fewer than 20 located in each of the other districts.

When these openings are disaggregated by key activity and location, there were only five instances where there were ten or more vacancies on each activity in any of the locations. These were in engineering and maintenance (13) and merchandizing (10) in Belize district, tourism and hospitality (43) and engineering and maintenance (19) in Cayo district, and tourism and hospitality (11) in Stann Creek district. Furthermore, businesses were also asked what they envisaged would be the three most critical skills needs of their business. The most common responses were customer services (13.3 per cent), sales and marketing (13.3 per cent), computer skills (9.1 per cent), management (8.5 per cent), and accounting and financial (7.9 per cent).

Some specific recommendations from the 2015 survey were that programmes should include more practical training, institutions should determine the demand for programmes, and programme curricula should be more relevant to the needs of industry. Similarly, 2018 the Belize Chamber of Commerce conducted a study on Skills Mismatch in the agriculture, and information and the communication technology (ITC) sectors. In 2019 it conducted a further study on “Measuring Curricula Mismatch for Food Processing and Tourism Sectors”.

Skills development

Enrolment in TVET programmes increased by 21 per cent between 2013 and 2018, from 1,058 to 1,283 as the result of promotion of TVET and greater interest in TVET among students (table 1). Sixty per cent of students enrolled in vocational programmes are in the ITVET system, while 40 per cent are in regular high schools. Students enrolled in high schools pursue a regular high school core curriculum, but also have the option of technical and vocational courses or programmes. In both cases, students are trained in the classroom and in laboratories/workshops and at the end of their programmes are given work experience of up to a month within an industry. Students on the ITVET track, however, have more options for technical majors than students attending regular high schools with no TVET programmes.

Table 1. Enrolment and completion for TVET programmes, 2013 to 2018.

	2013		2014		2015	
	Enrolment	Completion (rate)	Enrolment	Completion (rate)	Enrolment	Completion (rate)
Total	1,058	507 (47.9%)	1,211	459 (37.9%)	1,362	755 (55.4%)
Full time	598	230 (38.5%)	565	168 (29.7%)	614	243 (39.6%)
TVET in high school	318	164 (51.6%)	306	46 (15.0%)	389	224 (57.6%)
Others	142	113 (79.6%)	340	245 (72.1%)	359	288 (80.2%)

	2016		2017		2018	
	Enrolment	Completion (rate)	Enrolment	Completion (rate)	Enrolment	Completion (rate)
Total	1,647	693 (42.1%)	1,631	n.a.	1,283	n.a.
Full time	708	388 (54.8%)	769	n.a.	783	n.a.
TVET in high school	571	200 (35%)	411	n.a.	465	n.a.
Others	368	105 (28.5%)	451	n.a.	35	n.a.

n.a. = data not available.

Improving delivery and assessment of training

ITVETs follow a competency-based approach to education and training, focusing on concrete skills and desired learning outcomes. Programmes, therefore, result in an BzNVQ and/or CVQ award. Students enrolled in vocational programmes in high schools can sit the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) examination. CXC examinations are classroom-based and the NVQ and CVQ examinations are practical.

The quality of the ITVETs' programmes is generally considered to be low because instructors often have only the minimum qualifications required to teach the content of their courses. Programmes can provide only minimal teaching/learning materials, which are often outdated, and the curricula, although aligned with Regional Occupational Standards, do not reflect the skills demands of Belize's labour market. Moreover, there are no systems for coordination between ITVETs and enterprises.

The MOE is intervening continuously to improve the quality of programmes offered by ITVETs. For example, in 2018, 60 instructors (a significant proportion of the trainer population) were qualified at level 4 competency⁶ in competency-based education and training certification.

⁶ There are five levels of qualification for all trades: Level 1 – semi-skilled worker; Level 2 – skilled/independent worker; Level 3 – supervisor/technician/instructor; Level 4 – manager/entrepreneur; and Level 5 – executive professional.

Skills recognition and quality assurance

All ITVETs provide their students with access to the national qualification framework of Belize (BzNVQ), established by the MOE in 2006 to promote life-long learning and to create a quality-assured education and training system. Stakeholders embraced the NVQ framework because it provides better progression routes, ensures vocational and academic tracks are valued equally, and promotes transparency, transferability and recognition of skills and qualifications. The goal is, however, to transition to the CVQ, so that TVET exams in parity with academic exams, all carried out against the requirements of the regional qualifications framework. For this to happen, an ITVET must first have the requisite staff and classroom space and tools; it can then apply to the CXC to be certified as a training and testing centre. Currently, one of the major barriers to this happening is a shortage of qualified instructors. Another major limitation is that enterprises need to be more involved in the process, as external verifiers for the CVQ testing.

Social inclusion

TVET is not a popular choice for students. It appears that students and parents highly undervalue TVET. ITVETs mainly get the students who have dropped out of high school, or who just want something to do instead of staying home. Similarly, in high schools, many students who take TVET say that they do so because they have no other options, after failing to access higher education, and not because of the particular appeal of the courses. This is slowly changing at some institutions, but much work needs to be done. ITVETs can help lessen the social and economic inequality in the country by providing youths, especially those in rural and disadvantaged communities, with skills for gainful employment.

Accessing skills development

Technical high schools and ITVETs are strategically located throughout the country. Over the past 20 years, technical schools have been established in all districts⁷ to make TVET accessible to all students, including those from rural communities. Several informal programmes⁸ have also been established, targeting out-of-school youths who want to gain skills. To attract students, the cost of these programmes is minimal and transportation is provided.⁹ Despite all this, enrolment in ITVET programmes remains dismally low. Many factors account for this, including the negative reputation and low quality of programmes and their lack of accreditation, and the limited job opportunities after graduation. In the case of the ITVETs in Stann Creek, Toledo and Corozal districts, the locations of the schools are likely to be contributing to their low enrolment numbers.

⁷ Ladyville (1999) and Tubal (2001) in Belize district; Julian Cho in Toledo district (2000).

⁸ These programmes include the following: Skill Training Center, 4-H, Youth Cadet Corp, Gateway Youth Center, Youth Apprentice Program, and BTEC.

⁹ One of the objectives outlined in the NCTVET Strategic Plan 2017–2020 is to ‘build awareness of the value of TVETs with a view to increase enrolment and support for the sector.’

Supporting transitions to the labour market

The employability of graduates from TVET programmes is considered low, which is attributed to the curricula not fully matching market needs. Between 2013 and 2017, the unemployment rate among persons who had obtained a TVET qualification was 1–2 percentage points higher than the national unemployment rate. However, this trend changed in 2018, when national unemployment stood at 9.4 per cent and unemployment among TVET graduates was 9.1 per cent. To help young people in general to gain employment, the Government is continuously engaging youths, especially in Belize City, through programmes run by its various ministries. Despite some successes, these programmes face many challenges. Through the job placement exercise, all ITVETs' programmes provide a link between training and employment – after being trained on the job, some trainees find employment.

There are plans to improve and expand the placement programme, replacing it with an industry attachment. In other cases, graduates are recruited for employment during their participation in an open day or job fair.¹⁰

¹⁰. Open Day is a day when a school shares with the public the work of its students.

An analysis of a tracer study carried out in 2015 showed that approximately 22.5 per cent of graduates from technical programmes were still unemployed six months after completing their training. To overcome this challenge, more students with the right aptitude and academic background must be recruited to TVET programmes, and the programmes must involve strong collaborative partnerships with industries, so that the skills taught are those required by employers. Each TVET student should have a career guidance counsellor to help them transition to the labour market.



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Key challenges

Despite continuous governmental efforts, ITVETs face considerable challenges, such as low enrolment, limited finance, questionable labour market relevance of programmes and uncertain skills demand by industries.

1 Weak partnership between ITVETs and enterprises.

There is a partnership between ITVETs and the private sector, but this relationship needs to be strengthened so that ITVET programmes better cater to the needs of the workforce. There are no systems for coordination between ITVETs and enterprises. As a result, ITVETs' programmes need to be more demand-driven, both to attract more students and to ensure that graduates will be able to find meaningful employment in a timely manner. A strong partnership can also promote job creation.

Given the demand for technicians in the labour market and the high level of unemployment among youths, the ITVET system is a missed opportunity for providing successful options for entry into and upward mobility within the labour market. It is also a missed opportunity for helping to overcome the high levels of poverty.

2 **Uncertainty of skills demand.**

A lack of information about labour demand means that ITVETs are unable to determine accurately what programmes they should offer. Furthermore, the ITVETs are not conducting tracer surveys on a regular basis, for example to assess how quickly graduates find employment after graduation and how long they remain employed. The relationship between ITVETs and the business community needs to be closer, so that the business community knows and influences what courses and programmes are offered at ITVETs. A related limitation is the lack of job creation.

3 **Low enrolment in ITVET programmes.**

The low enrolment in programmes in Corozal, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo districts is attributed mainly to the ITVETs not offering programmes/curricula that are demanded by the local labour market. Some programmes have fewer than five students, rendering them financially unsustainable.

4 Funding.

ITVETs have insufficient funding to offer attractive salaries for teachers or to purchase the teaching/learning materials and equipment required to run their programmes properly.



The way forward

The Government of Belize has increased access to TVET over the past 15 years through the opening of six ITVET centres, one in each district. These institutions are intended to facilitate life-long learning opportunities, to give youths the skills they need to gain employment, and to reduce poverty, especially among disadvantage groups. To overcome the challenges in achieving these goals, the following must be considered.





1 Maintaining an integrated and regional system of skills anticipation.

To be relevant and sustainable, ITVETs must know the skill needs of the communities they serve. The most recent labour market information (LMI) study (2015) recommended that further LMI studies are carried out at regular intervals (every two years), each covering a single, well-defined sector (with agreed-on definitions of occupations). These could be done by the MOE and the Ministry of Labour, with priority given to skills foresight and emerging trends data. The aim would be to establish a framework for the human resources needs of the country. This would benefit not only ITVETs, but all of the country's secondary schools, colleges and universities, which also face challenges in terms of the relevance of some of their programmes for employment.

2 Increasing the accountability of the ITVET system.

To increase the effectiveness of the ITVET system, the Government must hold the ITVETs accountable for engaging the business community. ITVETs need to know the needs of businesses, and businesses need to know what the ITVETs can offer. The business community should be an integral partner in the design and offering of programmes. Businesses need to provide opportunities for experiential learning, which enhances the relevance of training and, in many cases, leads to the immediate employment of trainees.

3 Increasing the financial autonomy of the ITVET system.

Funding should be cost shared between government and the social partners in order to generate adequate funds for the ITVETs to meet their financial obligations.



4 Improving the quality of the courses and programmes.

ITVETs will need to examine how they can increase the quality and relevance of the instruction they provide. Programme development should be informed by labour market information. In addition, TVET instructors must be qualified in their technical subject areas and pedagogy.

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