UNDP and KOICA sign a USD$3.4 million Grant Arrangement to Expand and Upgrade Belize's Statistical System in Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals

Belmopan City, Cayo, March 12, 2024 – Today, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an arrangement with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) to strengthen Belize's national infrastructure and institutional capacity for data and statistical management. With a total project budget of USD$3.4 million, the "Enabling of Belize's Statistical System" project, which is part of a larger Record of Discussion Arrangement with the Government of Belize, will be implemented from 2024 to 2027 and is a joint initiative involving six (6) Government ministries and five (5) United Nations (UN) agencies with coordination support from the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator.

According to the World Bank, Belize's statistical capacity score is ranked at 58.9. In developing countries like Belize, lack of data can be a significant obstacle that impedes the ability of the Government and partners to develop informed policies and responsive plans. Thus, the goal is to improve the capacity of Belize's system to provide relevant, accurate, and timely data to support evidence-based solutions.

The project also aligns with the Government's PlanBelize Medium-Term Development Strategy calling for the strengthening of national data management systems and processes in the pursuit of "evidence-based decision-making on policy, investment, and programmatic priorities."

"All our Ministries are acutely aware that accurate data and robust statistical reporting are essential for engaging in international dialogue, collaborating with development partners, and demonstrating progress towards shared goals," said Hon. John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize. "Strengthening and enabling our statistical reporting system will help us to make evidence-based decisions and assist in monitoring Belize's progress towards our development goals. It will help my Ministry which is responsible for finance to effectively allocate resources."

Similarly, enhancing a country's data system directly influences the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fosters a national enabling environment.

"The United Nations recognizes the importance of data," said Ian King, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative. "It is seen as a development enabler that can empower governments and communities to enhance their National Statistical System (NSS) to be adaptive and resilient. Our UNDP Country Programme 2022-2026 also treats the quality and availability of data as a strategic innovation that guides development planning by facilitating data-driven decision-making while ensuring that no one is left behind."

UN Resident Coordinator for Belize and El Salvador, Raul Salazar, also underscored the message of the UN Secretary General in the recent 2023 SDG Report emphasizing the vital role of investing in data for accelerating SDG progress.

"The five (5) UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes will leverage collective efforts through the programme in partnership with the Government of Belize to contribute to advancing the generation of critical data to support the advancement of Belize's development targets," said Salazar. "By harnessing the power of data, we can gain

valuable insights and drive effective evidence-based policies and actions towards realizing the SDGs in Belize by 2030."

The UN agencies engaging in joint implementation include the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Food Programme (WFP), the project will work closely with the Government of Belize, specifically the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) of the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Judiciary of Belize and the Attorney General's Ministry of Belize, to:

- Improve and upgrade Belize's Statistical infrastructure;
- Strengthen the data governance architecture;
- Strengthen both SIB and its data nodes;
- Expand SIB's and National Statistical System (NSS) capabilities to respond to increasing demand for data/statistics.

"The project is the largest such grant ever received by the SIB and represents for us a significant step forward in our efforts to modernize the Institute, as well as build a well-coordinated and robust NSS," shared Diana Castillo-Trejo, Director-General of the Statistical Institute of Belize. "One that is up to the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of our data users and supporting evidence-based decision making."

Through this multi-agency collaboration, Belize can be transformed into a nation that is inclusive, competitive, and sustainable for all Belizeans with a Government guided by data.

"I am delighted to be here today to set the cornerstone of our first bilateral project," expressed Sohui Cho, Country Director at KOICA in El Salvador. "This is the result of joint and continued efforts from the Belizean government, the United Nations, and the Korean government through KOICA to strive for the sustainable development of Belize. Partnership will be pivotal in the accomplishment of the objective of this project, thanks to which Belize will count on a strengthened statistical system and the adequate human capacity to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals in a resilient way."

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