Ministry of Sustainable Development,
Climate Change & Disaster Risk Management

SDU
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT UNIT

STATISTICAL INSTITUTE
OF BELIZE

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

DATA ECOSYSTEM IN BELIZE
ASSESSMENT

2023

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
BNSS	Belize National Statistical System
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CEO	Chief Executive Officers
ESSAT	Environmental Self-Assessment Tool
GIS	Geographic Information System
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LFS	Labour Force Survey
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
M/D/A	Ministries, Departments, or Agencies
MoU	Memorandums of Understanding
N/A	Not Applicable
NSDS	National Strategies for the Development of Statistics
NSS	National Statistical System
ROPA	Representation of the People Act
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
UN	United Nations
VNR	Voluntary National Review Report

Introduction and Background

The 2030 Agenda and its promise to "leave no one behind" requires concerted, informed, and targeted interventions supported with genuine partnerships for its successful realization. Yet, assessing its progress remains a challenge in Belize, primarily due to the lack of timely and reliable data and statistics.

There is growing recognition that the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is highly dependent on the ability of governments to properly measure and monitor its progress - this is easier said than done. Measuring progress necessitates a starting point, periodic assessments to gauge accomplishments, areas needing improvement, and estimated time frames for goal attainment. This implies that quality data and statistics must be available and comparable over time. Moreover, given the breadth and complexity of the SDGs, many different types of data are required with varying levels of disaggregation. It is, therefore, essential to first gain a better understanding of the gaps and how best to address them.

Since the inception of Agenda 2030, Belize has generated a single Voluntary National Review Report (VNR) in 2017, encompassing just four SDGs and featuring predominantly qualitative data. Subsequent attempts to produce reports in 2020 and 2022 faced obstacles such as external factors

like the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and non-acceptance by the United Nations (UN) in 2023, resulting in their non-realization. Nevertheless, Belize has volunteered to present its second VNR in 2024, encompassing an evaluation of all seventeen SDGs.

Acknowledging the significance of data, as an initial step in determining the progress towards the realization of the SDGs in Belize, the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) has partnered with the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB). This collaboration aims to evaluate the status of each SDG indicator, including data availability, gap identification hindering its generation, providing an initial set of priority SDG indicators, and helping strengthen the existing data ecosystem. The first phase of this partnership involved identifying national data sources for each SDG indicator, conducting meetings with them to determine the status of the data, and highlighting the different capacity needs. The findings of this report will subsequently shape future actions that Belize can undertake to bridge data gaps and serve as a preliminary 'reality check' in terms of what SDG data is available and applicable to inform future policy interventions and actions. This report serves as an initial overview of Belize's position in terms of the SDG indicator production.

Purpose

The primary objective of this endeavor is to evaluate the availability of SDG data in Belize for reporting on the SDGs. It aims to map data sources for each indicator and identify gaps in both data and capacity. The main goal is to enhance evidence-based reporting structures and streamline the effectiveness and efficiency of the "follow-up and review" processes. Consequently, this assessment report will provide guidance for improving and strengthening the data ecosystem and management in Belize while advocating for the utilization of the Belize National Statistical System (BNSS) portal.

The Objectives of this exercise include:
1. Evaluate the available data for each SDG indicator to support national and international SDG reporting, particularly the Voluntary National Review Reports.
2. Identify and facilitate the capacity and infrastructure needed to improve collection, dissemination, and use of data.
3. Offer an initial set of priority SDG indicators for Belize.
4. Use the SDG inventory file, and this assessment to guide the development of an implementation plan for the National Statistical System (NSS) data-related priority areas of the SDGs in Belize and create a roadmap to improve partnerships to minimize the resource gaps.
5. Identify data nexuses and type of data needed from various data sources to ensure the continued scaling up and improvement of data coordination and collaboration.

6. Populate the BNSS portal with available SDG data to make them accessible and available for dissemination.

This assessment aims to answer the following questions:
- What data is available and its source? Can it be disaggregated?
- Do data sources possess the institutional capacities and infrastructure needed to collect and report on the data?
- What are the main challenges hindering the collection and production of the data?
- How can the challenges be addressed and are there any recommendations?

Methodology and Process

This exercise commenced in March 2022 with the formulation of the 2022-2023 SDU/SIB Joint Work Plan which served as the primary document guiding this exercise. Once it received approval, the initial phase involved crafting an enhanced preliminary list of potential and known data sources based on the 2020 SIB's list of national data sources.

The next step entailed the drafting of official data request letters, which were precisely crafted to serve a dual purpose. Firstly, to request the nomination of focal points. Secondly, request the SDG data. These letters were then dispatched by SIB to all identified data sources. The letters were addressed to Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) but sent to both the CEOs and known focal points of each organization. This approach evolved from the 2020 data collection process, where focal points received the request directly, resulting in limited responses. Results showed that involving the CEOs in the process significantly boosted responses and engagement from data sources.

After the nominations, the next step was to hold bilateral meetings with each institution. For organizations that did not acknowledge or respond to the initial request, follow-up emails were sent, followed by phone calls. In cases where a formal focal point nomination did not occur, the CEOs or Heads of Department nominated a technical person to participate in the meeting to discuss the exercise. During these meetings, a meeting minute template was used to guide the discussion which consisted of 3 main areas: name of the focal point, discussion of the status of each indicator, and conclusion and next steps.

In the first round of meetings held from July to November 2022, 42 letters were distributed, but only 36 received acknowledgement. Among these, 35 organizations appointed focal points, leading to 31 meetings being held. The Economic Development Council shared that they function as coordinators rather than data producers. As a result, they were removed as a data source. Nonetheless, new sources were identified, including the Belize Customs and Excise Department, Department of Youth Services, The Office of the Ombudsman, and the Mining Department, among others. Using the meeting minutes, an Excel file named "SDG Inventory" was created to comprehensively assess the status of each SDG indicator in Belize. This inventory, alongside the Environmental Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) and the 2018 Belize ESSAT Report, which guided

the assessment of SDG data in Belize, facilitated the development of the preliminary assessment report in December 2022. The primary objective of this preliminary report was to share the progress achieved up to October and gather further guidance, particularly from technical experts within SIB and SDU, as well as the UN.

In January 2023, the preliminary report, meeting templates, and the SDG inventory file were shared with technical experts who provided feedback during the months of January and February. Building on their recommendations, SDU and SIB scheduled a second round of meetings to focus on not only data availability but also gaps, capacity needs, and the recommended solutions. These meetings were guided by the modified minute template.

The second round of meetings took place from March to July 2023, with an additional meeting convened in February 2024, resulting in 44 meetings out of the now 47 data sources. This increase was mainly due to the identification of other relevant data sources during some focal point meetings. The findings from the second round of meetings have been integrated into this final report.

Following the conclusion of each meeting, meeting minutes were created and subsequently shared with the relevant focal points or individuals who participated in the meeting. Upon receiving feedback, the minutes were modified and then uploaded to the SDG inventory file for record keeping.

Lastly, the SDG inventory file will continue to be updated (it is a living document) to reflect any necessary changes and provide an up-to-date status of indicators in Belize. Additionally, it will highlight how SDG indicators are integrated into national, regional, and international frameworks, aiding the prioritization of SDGs in Belize. Besides supporting the SDGs monitoring, this file can also be used to contribute to the preparation of other international commitments the country has to meet with the UN or any other organization (such as Conventions ratified, Universal Periodic Review, etc.).
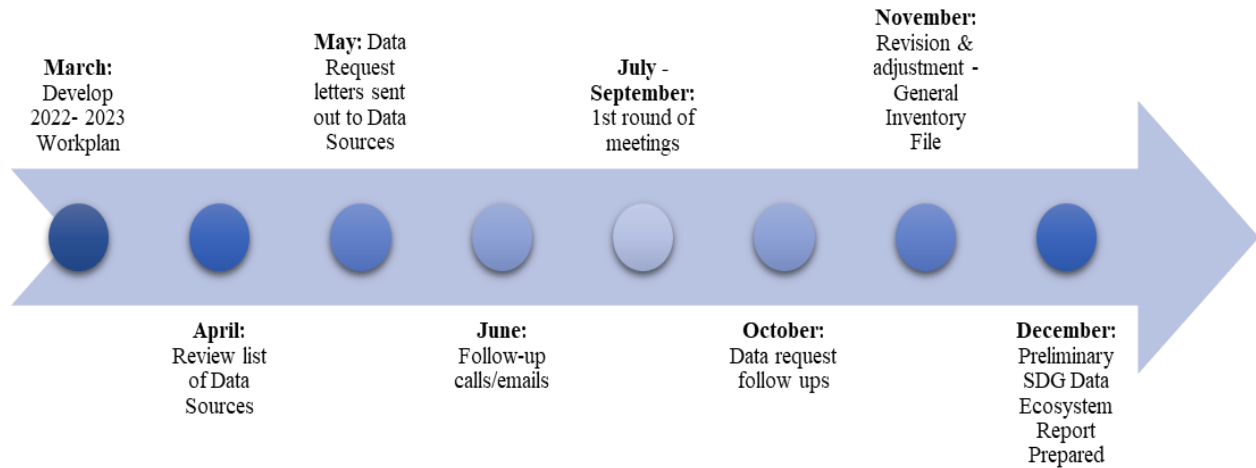
Figure 1 depicts a timeline towards the first round of meetings and results which occurred in 2022; this was the initiation of all rounds of meetings to discuss the indicators that data sources can or cannot provide. In March, the Work Plan 2022-23 was developed by Mrs. Darlene Haylock of SDU and Mr. Angel Perez of SIB. This work plan highlights preliminary steps towards successfully collecting the data for the SDG indicators. In the month of April, the list of possible data sources was reviewed and by May all letters had been sent requesting a meeting to discuss the indicators. Follow-up emails and calls were necessary to obtain a concrete response from the data sources; this was done in the month of June. The first round of meetings commenced in July and continued into September; in this first round of meetings, we were able to meet with 31 data sources to discuss the indicators and set a date for the submission of available data. This led to follow up requests/reminders for the submission of data in the month of October. The General Inventory File was revised and adjusted in the month of November. The General Inventory File includes the contact information of the focal points in each data source and the information gathered after the first round of meetings such as prioritization in the data collection, data availability, national focal point for each SDG indicator, and other important factors of the data. A preliminary SDG Data Ecosystem Report was created in the month of December.

Figure 2: Timeline towards 2nd round of Meetings/Results, 2023

January – February:
Develop 2023- 2024 Workplan

August:
Review of minutes of meetings and data cleaning

October:
Final draft of SDG Data Ecosystem Report Prepared

March - July:
2nd round of meetings

*One meeting was held in February 2024

September:
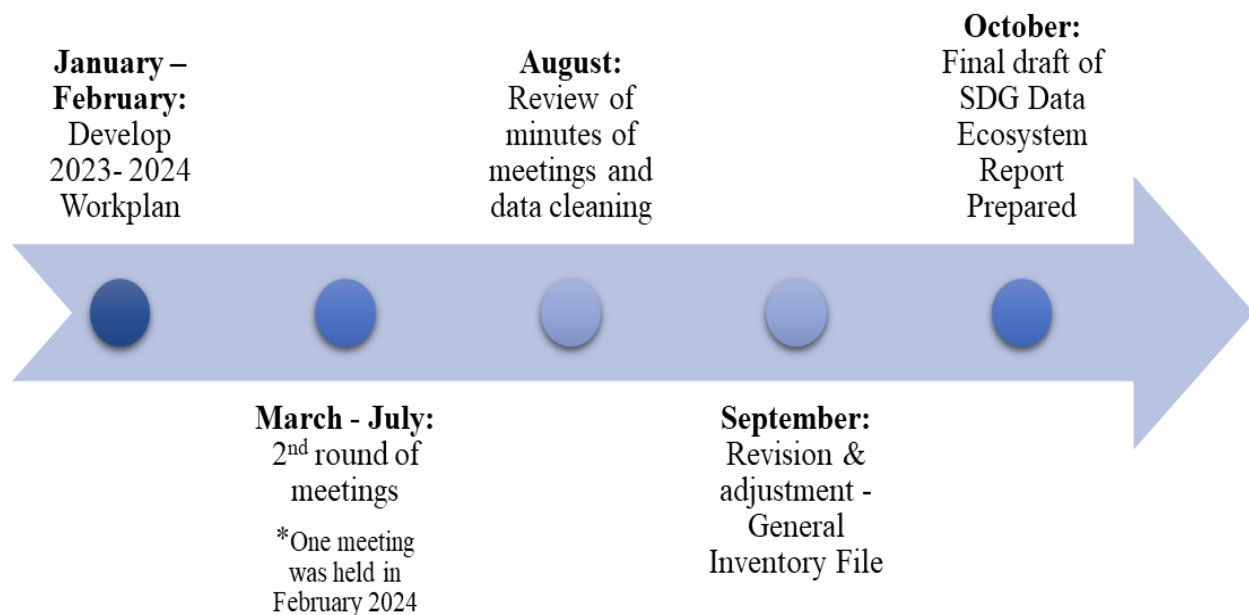Revision & adjustment - General Inventory File

Figure 2 depicts the timeline towards the 2nd round of meetings and results in 2023. A Work Plan 2023-24 was jointly developed between SIB and SDU. A total of 44 scheduled meetings took place in the months March to July, with an additional meeting convened in February 2024, with the first-round data sources and with newly identified data sources; minutes of the meeting were created to gather the information about the indicators from each data source. Revision and data cleaning of the minutes were done in the month of August which led to the adjustment and update of the General Inventory File in the month of September. This is the final draft of the SDG Data Ecosystem Report to be presented at the Validation Session, this report highlights all information gathered from data sources.

Assessment of SDG in Belize

Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a global blueprint for people and the planet to live in dignity, peace, and prosperity now and in the future. The SDGs consist of 17 Goals, 247 Indicators of which 231 are unique. Unique indicators are those that do not recur in the list, and if repetition occurs, they are considered only once. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

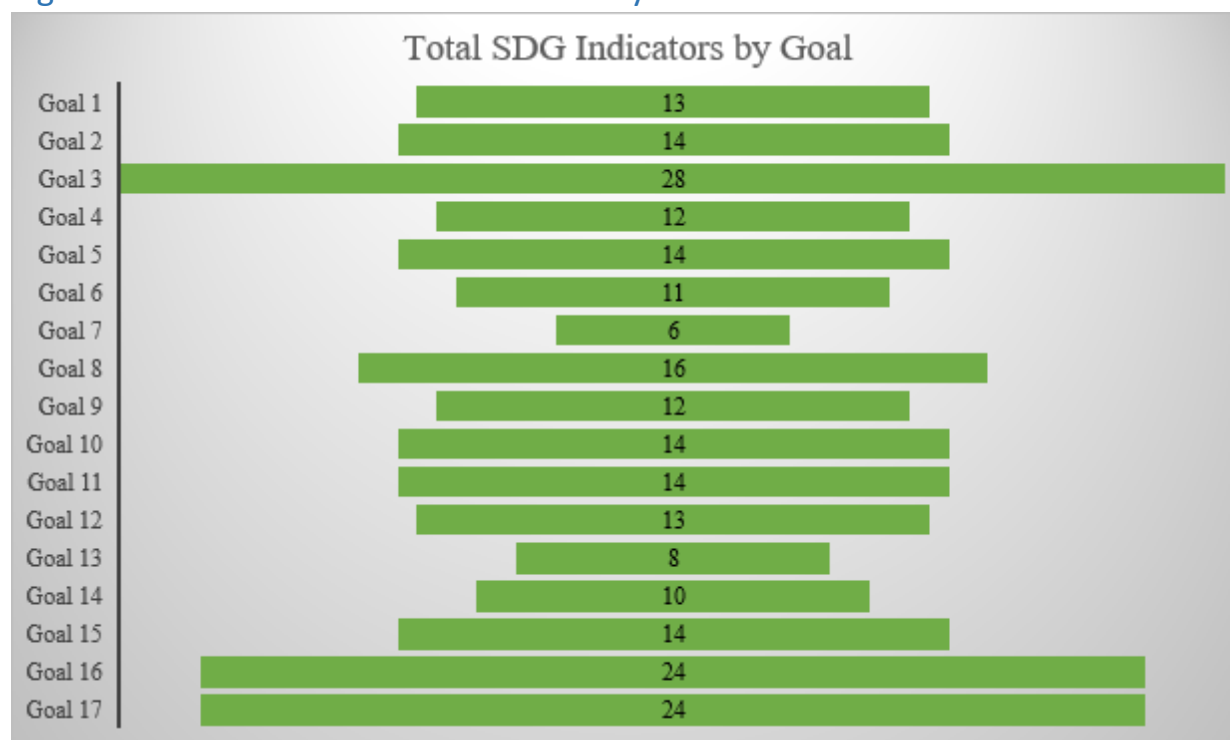Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Figure 3 Displays the number of SDG indicators across their respective goals.

Classification of SDG indicators

To facilitate the implementation of the global indicator framework, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators categorizes all indicators into three tiers based on their level of methodological development and global data availability, as follows:

Tier 1 Indicator is conceptually clear, having an internationally established methodology and standards available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 percent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.

Tier II Indicator is conceptually clear, having an internationally established methodology and standards available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.

Tier III Indicator that has no internationally established methodology or standards available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. (As of the 51st session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the global indicator framework does not contain any Tier III indicators).

For this exercise, in Belize, the SDG indicators were further categorized to indicate the degree of efforts and resources that would be required for improving data availability. These categories include:

Table 1: Data Availability Definition

Data Availability Status	Description
Available	Those indicators for which data is being produced
Partially Available	This applies to indicators with two or more sub-questions and where data is available for portions of the indicator and requires coordination among one or more data producers
Not Available	Those indicators for which data is not available and would require significant effort to establish the adequate data collection.
Need to Discuss with Other Departments	Further discussion is needed within the data source/s to determine the availability of the data or the possibility of collecting the data.
Not Applicable	The indicator does not apply to Belize.
Unanswered	The availability status of the indicator was left unanswered by the data source.

Priority Status

The following table describes the description with definition of the status of the indicators regarding priority. Note, the priority status of the indicator does not directly determine whether data is available or being collected.

Table 2: Priority Status Definition

Priority Status	Definition
Priority	The collection of the data for this indicator is important to the data source.
Not a Priority	The collection of data for this indicator is not held in the highest of interest to the data source or the data is already being collected and there is no need to prioritize efforts towards the collection of the data.
Need to Discuss with Other Departments	Discussion needs to take place within the data source to determine the priority status for the indicator.
Not Applicable	The indicator is not applicable to Belize.
Unanswered	The priority status for the indicator was left unanswered by the focal point.
Not Discussed	This is an indicator which, due to time, was not

	discussed in the meeting.

Findings

The SIB, in collaboration with the SDU, met with 44 out of the 47 identified data sources, conducting a total of 75 meetings (31 in the initial round and 44 in the second round). The purpose was to discuss relevant SDG indicators and collect the available data for those indicators. These sessions involved 77 participants, representing 44 departments from 23 Ministries. On average, each meeting lasted approximately 1 ½ hours, accumulating to approximately 66 hours across 44 meetings. Beyond the meeting duration, additional time was dedicated to meeting preparation and follow up, as well as preparing and disseminating meeting minutes to relevant stakeholders, updating the SDG Inventory File, uploading data to the BNSS portal and drafting the SDG Data Ecosystem Report. This assessment covered 234 out of the 247 SDG indicators, with 219 of them being unique SDG indicators.

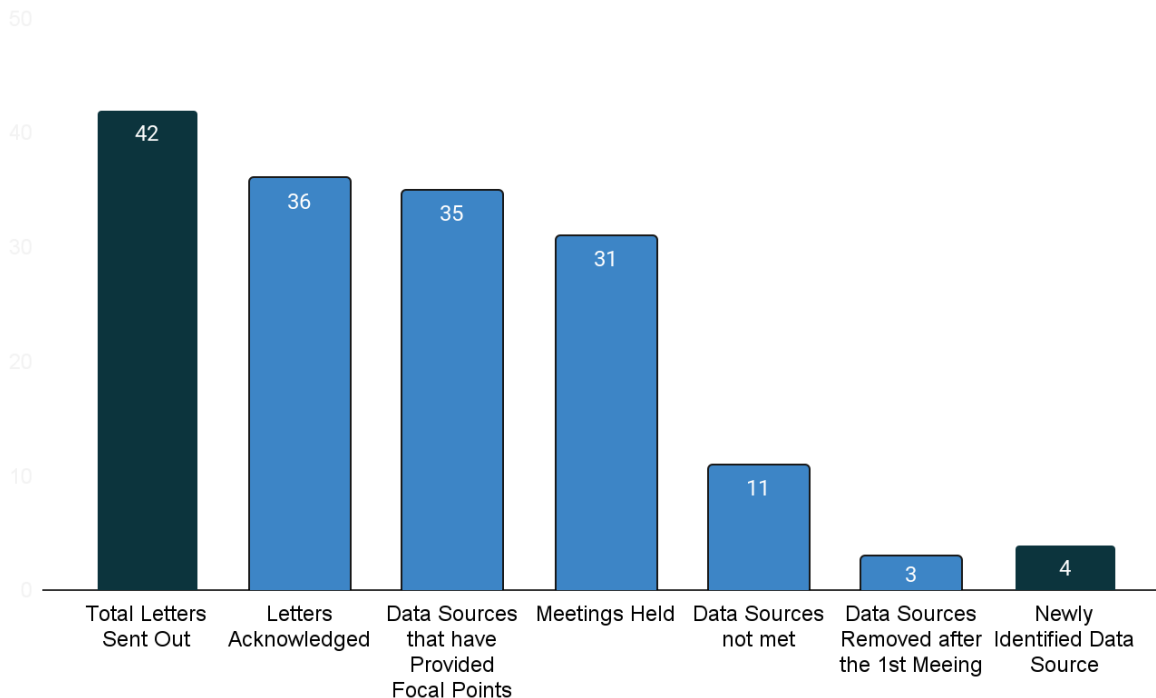Figure 4: Data sources engagement during the first round of meetings

Figure 4 illustrates the total engagement from the 42 letters sent out to data sources for the first round of meetings. From this request, 36 data sources acknowledged the letter and 35 provided focal points; focal points are the persons in direct communication with the SIB and SDU for the

data collection. Throughout this process, a total of 31 meetings were conducted, and three data sources were removed from the list as they are not responsible for collecting the required data for SDG indicators—these sources being the Economic Development Council, Ministry of Housing, and Ministry of Tourism. Conversely, there were 4 newly identified data sources (listed in Table 3) during the first-round meetings which brought the total number of data sources to 43.

Table 3: Data Sources with pending meetings after the first round and the newly identified data sources during the meetings.

Data Sources - Meeting Pending	Newly Identified Data Sources
1. NEMO	1. Belize Customs & Excise
2. Ministry of Finance	2. Department of Youth Services
3. Public Utility Commission	3. Office of Ombudsman
4. Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing	4. Mining Department
5. The Belize Department of Civil Aviation	
6. Department of Border Management & Immigration Services	
7. Department of Transport	
8. Ministry of Tourism	
9. Central Bank of Belize	
10. BELTRAIDE	
11. Belize Tourism Board	

Figure 5 shows a total number of 47 data sources since another 4 new data sources were identified during the course of the second round of meetings. A total of 44 meetings were held with 3 meetings still pending. It also shows that the number of focal points nominated from data sources stands at 36.

Table 4: Indicates the data sources whose meetings are still pending and the newly identified data sources during the second round of meetings.

Pending Data Sources	Newly Identified Data Sources
1. BELTRAIDE	1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2. Ministry of Finance	2. National Institute of Culture and History
3. Belize Port Authority	3. Belize Human Rights Commission
	4. Belize Port Authority

Figure 6: Total Indicators discussed by National Custodian

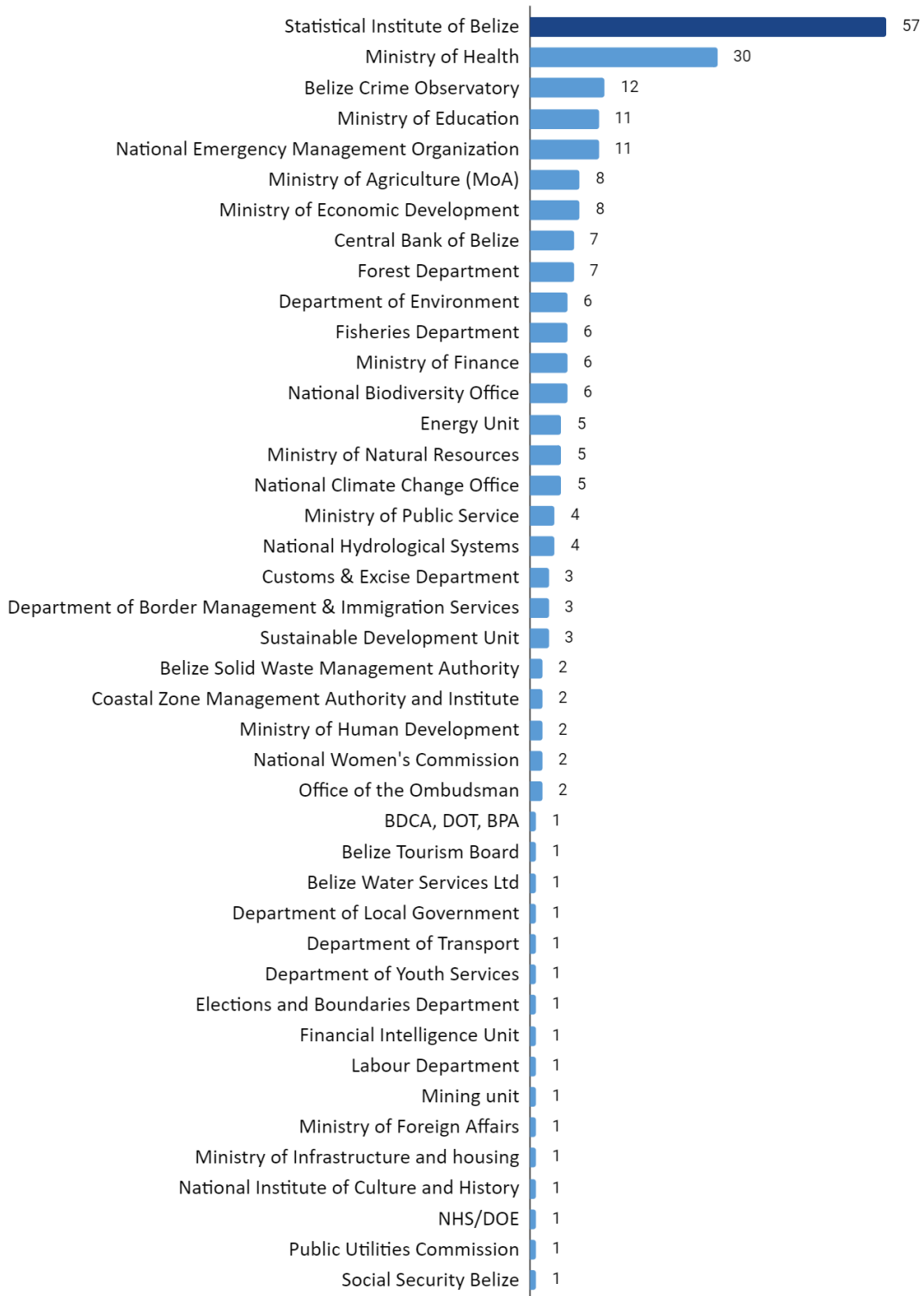| National Custodian	Total Indicators
Statistical Institute of Belize	57
Ministry of Health	30
Belize Crime Observatory	12
Ministry of Education	11
National Emergency Management Organization	11
Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)	8
Ministry of Economic Development	8
Central Bank of Belize	7
Forest Department	7
Department of Environment	6
Fisheries Department	6
Ministry of Finance	6
National Biodiversity Office	6
Energy Unit	5
Ministry of Natural Resources	5
National Climate Change Office	5
Ministry of Public Service	4
National Hydrological Systems	4
Customs & Excise Department	3
Department of Border Management & Immigration Services	3
Sustainable Development Unit	3
Belize Solid Waste Management Authority	2
Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute	2
Ministry of Human Development	2
National Women's Commission	2
Office of the Ombudsman	2
BDCA, DOT, BPA	1
Belize Tourism Board	1
Belize Water Services Ltd	1
Department of Local Government	1
Department of Transport	1
Department of Youth Services	1
Elections and Boundaries Department	1
Financial Intelligence Unit	1
Labour Department	1
Mining unit	1
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1
Ministry of Infrastructure and housing	1
National Institute of Culture and History	1
NHS/DOE	1
Public Utilities Commission	1
Social Security Belize	1

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of SDG Indicators discussed among the data sources. Notably, SIB leads with 24.4% of the total number of indicators discussed, followed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness with 12.8% of the indicators. Additionally, it shows that several data sources had only one indicator under their custodianship. It's important to note that there are instances where multiple agencies are involved in monitoring an indicator; this graph, however, focuses solely on the leading data source for each indicator.
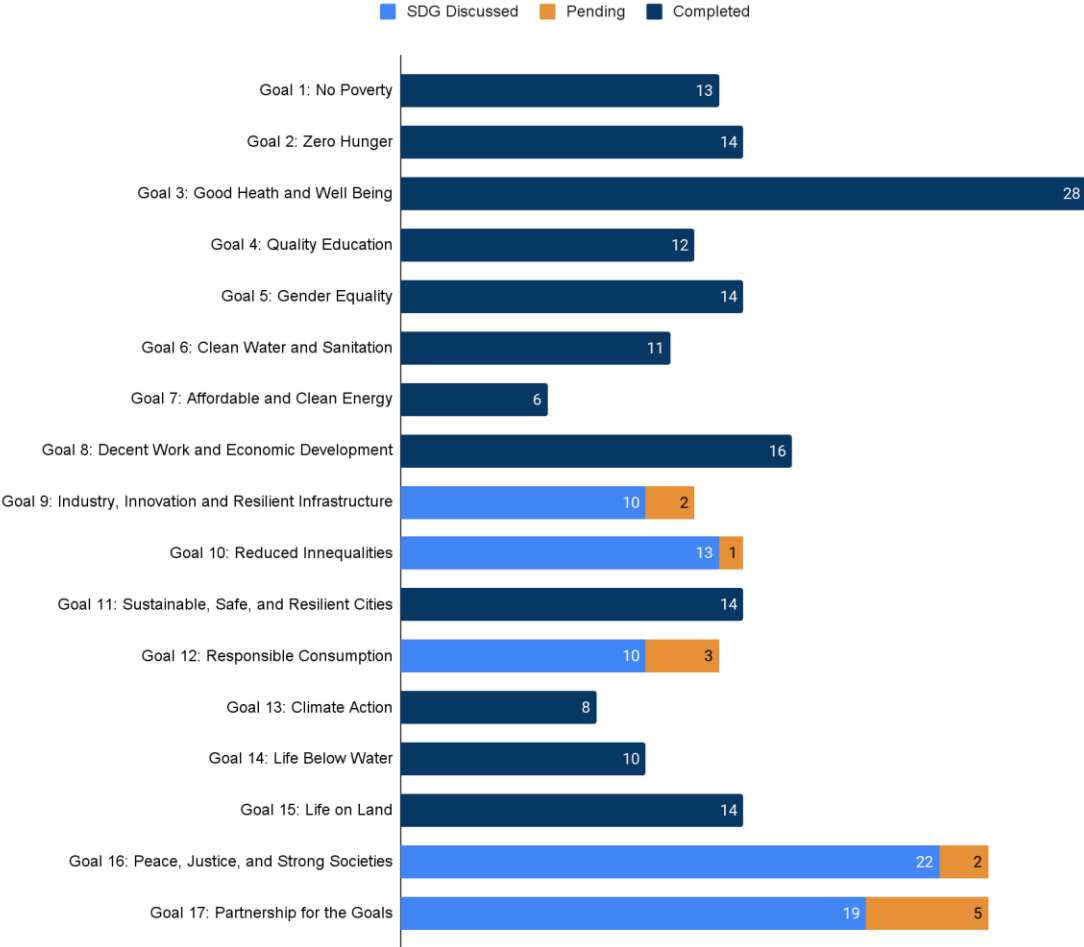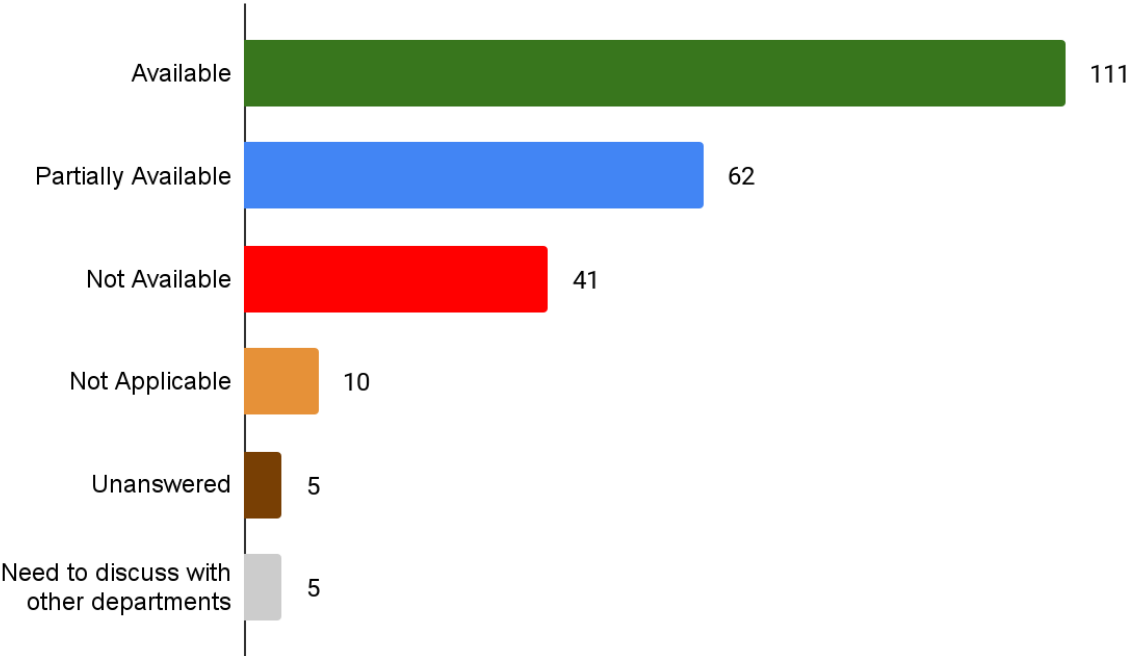
Figure 7: SDG Indicators discussed by Goal

Figure 7 illustrates the total indicators discussed for each SDG Goal. It can be noticed that all SDG indicators for Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14 and 15 were discussed. In contrast, Goal 17 exhibited the highest number of undiscussed SDG indicators (5), with the remaining SDG goals having at most 3 undiscussed.

Refer to Table 1 for the description.

According to the findings in Figure 8, there is data available for 47.4% out of the 234 SDG indicators discussed. Additionally, partial data exists for 26.5% of the indicators, while 17.5% are recorded as not available. Indicators categorized as needing discussion with other departments, not applicable, or unanswered from 8.5% of the discussed indicators.

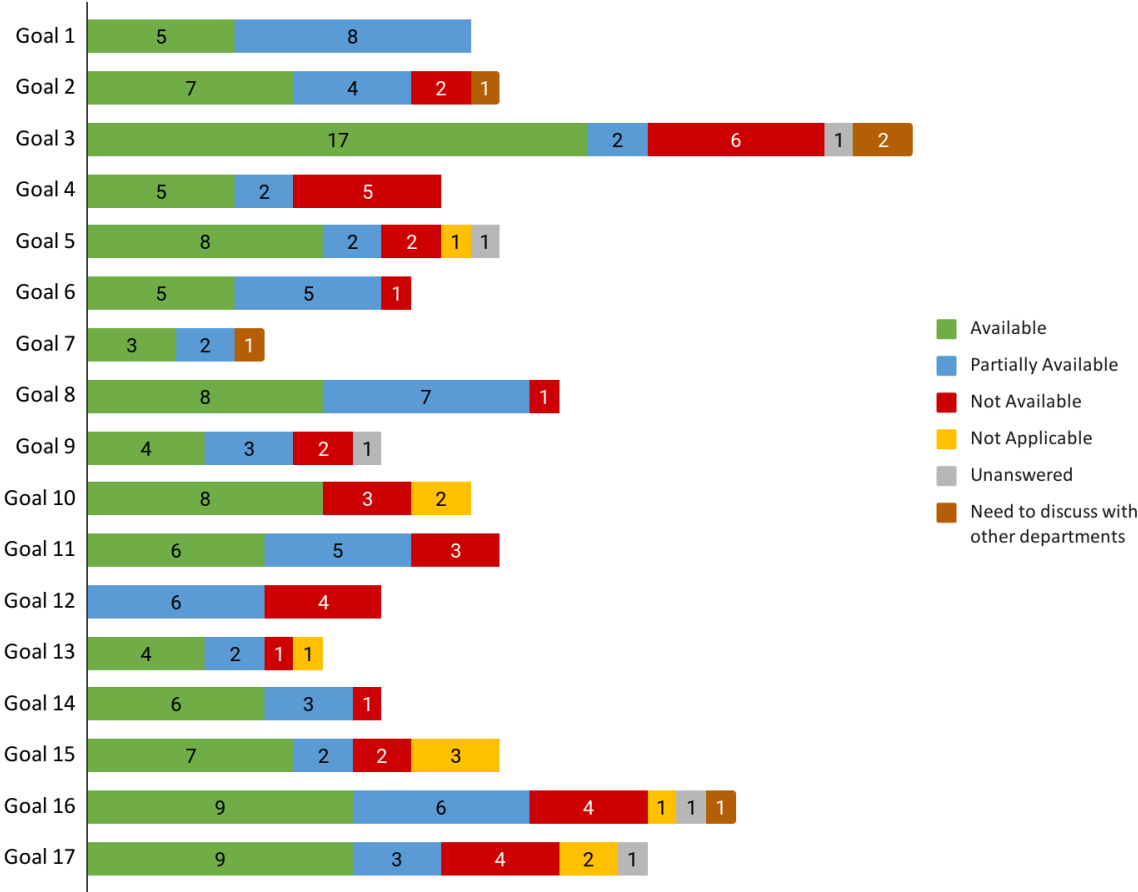## Figure 9: Overview of the data Status by SDG Goal

Figure 9 demonstrates the status of data availability for SDG indicators discussed in each Goal.

Among the goals with data available or partially available for their indicators in relation to its indicators, Goal 1 stands out with all of its indicators falling in this category. Additionally, Goal 2, Goal 6, Goal 7, Goal 8, Goal 11, Goal 13, and Goal 14 have at least 75% of their indicators in this category, while all remaining goals have at least 58%.

Considering data not available in each goal in relation to all of its indicators, Goal 4 has the highest percentage of its indicators in this category at 41.7%. Goal 12 follows at 40% and the remaining 13 goals range from 6% to 23% of its indicators with data not available.

Lastly, there were some indicators that were labeled as not applicable to our country, some unanswered due to unknown current availability status, and some needed to be discussed with other departments to determine their availability status. Considering these three categories combined, Goal 15 has the highest percentage at 21% (all of these indicators labeled as not applicable), this is followed by Goal 7 at 17% (1 indicator needs to be discussed with other departments), and thirdly Goal 17 at 16% (2 indicators labeled as not applicable and 1

unanswered). The 7 remaining goals have indicators labeled in either of these categories ranging from 7% to 15% of its total indicators, with Goal 2 having the least percentage.

Missing Statistics by Main Reason Classification

Using the ESSAT definition as a guide, the missing data (not available) has been classified into the following categories:

    i.   Resource Constraints,
    ii.   Methodological difficulty in data collection,
    iii.   Lack of data sources setup/coordination,
    iv.   Legislation/Policy Constraints
    v.   Other difficulties in data collection,

Definitions

A short description of each reason is outlined below.

    i.   **Resource Constraints**
        Both financial and staff resource constraints within the data sources and/or in partner agencies involved in the production of the SDG indicator.

    ii.   **Methodological Constraints**
        Difficulty in collecting the data for methodological reasons (i.e., lack of methodologies understanding including concepts, methods, or classifications).

    iii.   **Lack of data sources setup/coordination**
        Institutional barriers could present difficulties in accessing and utilizing relevant primary data sets. This box should be checked if the collaboration among the necessary data sources is not sufficient to grant an adequate sharing of data sets.

    iv.   **Legislation/Policy Constraints**
        This includes the current policies or legislations with limitations on collecting data by disaggregation and to collect the relevant SDG indicators.

    v.   **Other Constraints**
        Difficulties other than those described under the previous headings should be included.

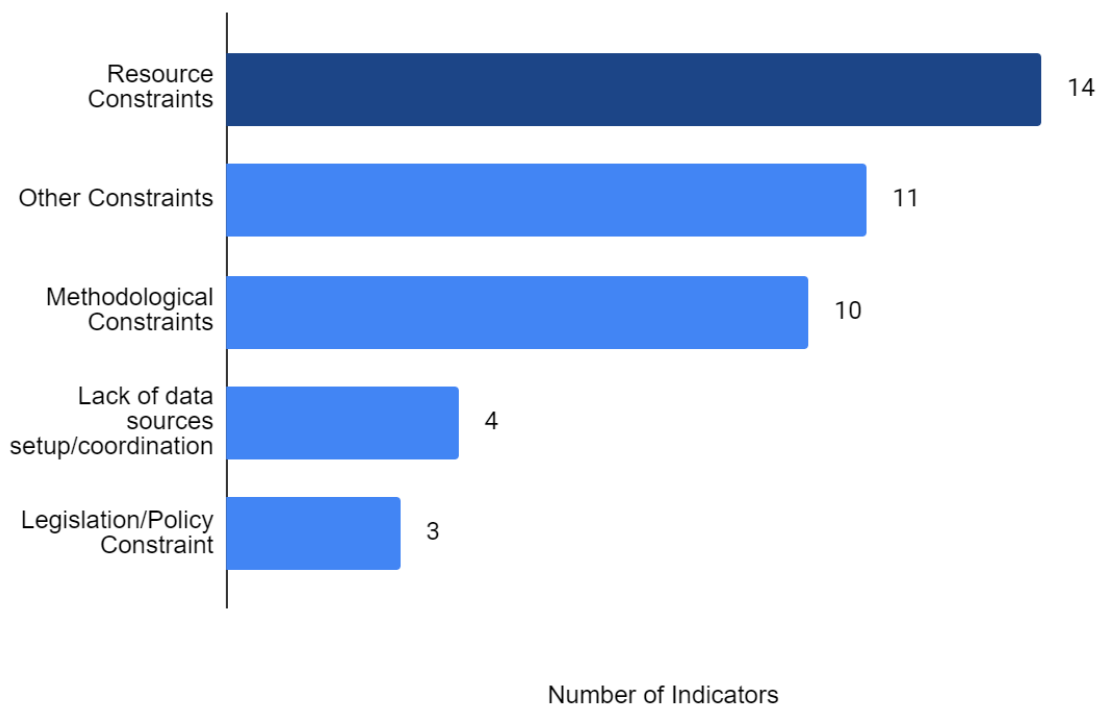## Figure 10: Factors Contributing to Unavailable Data

Figure 10 provides insights into the underlying reasons where data sources indicated no available data. Among the 42 indicators, 33.3 % of those are attributed to resource constraints, suggesting potential areas for increased investment and resource allocation.

Other constraints, which are used for describing data that is not being collected/reported currently due to varying factors apart from the ones mentioned in Figure 10, affected 26.2% of the indicators. Methodological constraints were cited as the hindrance for 23.8% of the indicators, underlining the importance of refining data collection methodologies.

Additionally, 9.5% of the indicators faced challenges related to lack of data sources setup or coordination, showing an opportunity to improve data infrastructure and coordination among relevant data sources for these indicators. Lastly, 7.1% of the indicators cited legislation and policy constraints pointing to a need for potential policy reforms or adjustments to facilitate data collection and reporting.

Figure 11: SDG Indicators by Priority Status
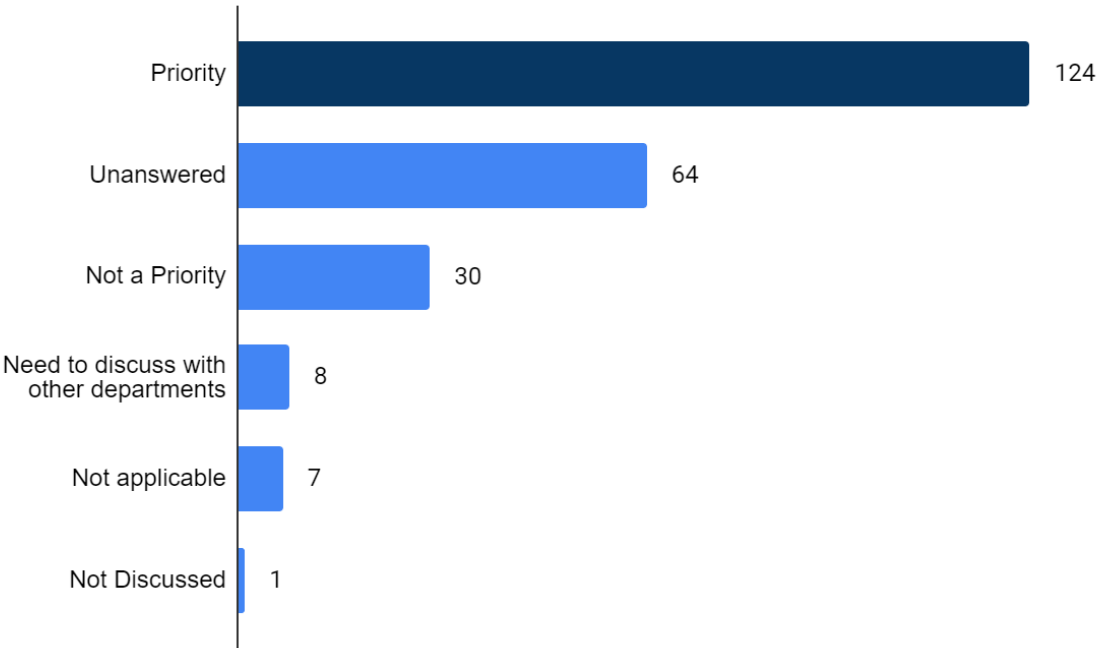
In the analysis of Figure 11, it's observed that out of the 234 indicators discussed, 53.0% were identified as priority indicators, 12.8% were categorized as not a priority, and 27.4% remained unanswered. Additionally, 3.4% of the indicators required further discussion with other departments for classification. Moreover, 3.0% of the indicators were deemed not applicable, while a mere 0.4% were not discussed. It's crucial to emphasize that the difference in the "not applicable" count compared to Figure 8, arises from national custodians providing responses for the priority status despite the indicators being labeled as not applicable on the data availability.

As previously stated, this assessment not only focused on the availability of data for the SDG Indicators but also aimed to determine whether data sources have access to an Information System and Monitoring and Evaluation personnel.

Figure 12: Information System in Place
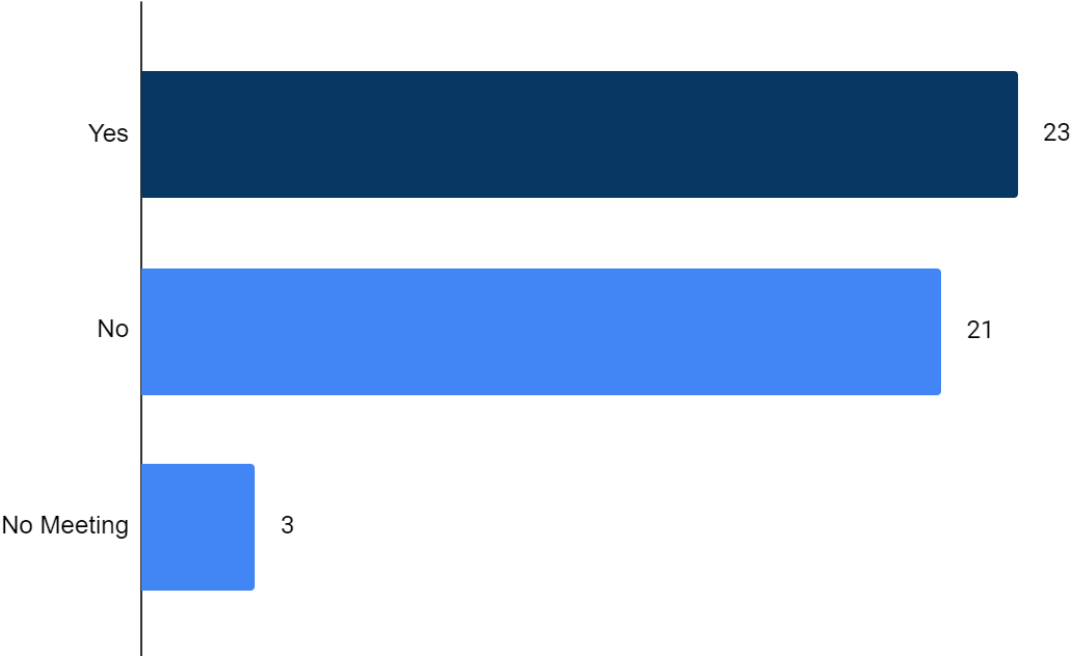
According to Figure 12, out of the 47 national custodians responsible for the SDG Indicators, our team managed to engage 44, leaving 3 unaccounted for. The graph illustrates that among these 44 national custodians, 48.9% have access to an information system for sharing and storing data, while 44.7% do not possess such access. This data underscores the varying levels of infrastructural support among national custodians, emphasizing the need for equitable resources to ensure comprehensive and consistent data reporting.
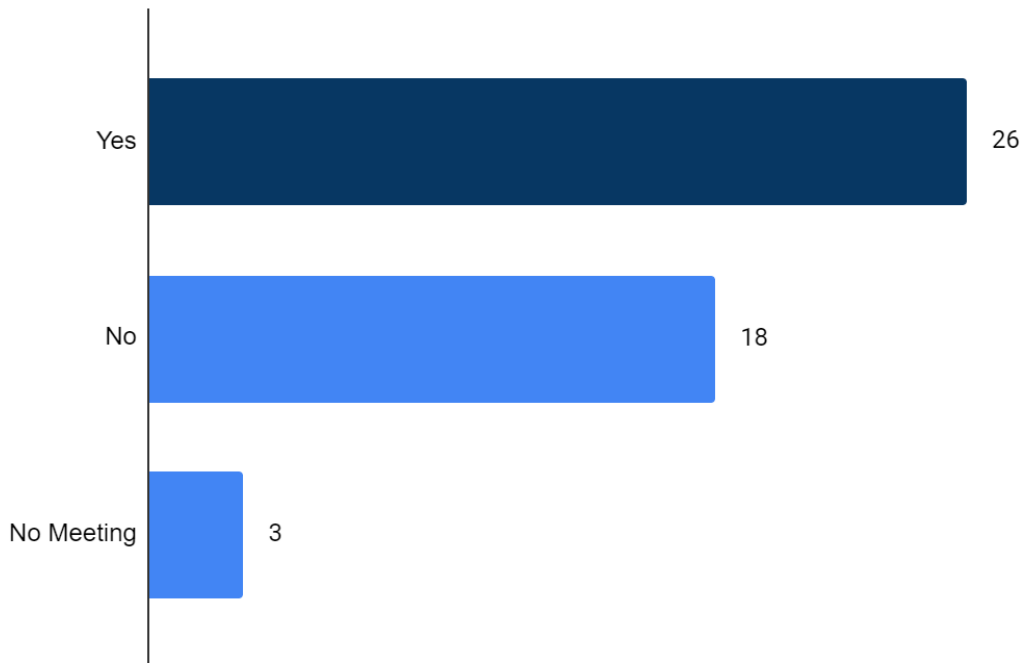
In examining Figure 13, it is noted that 38.3% of National Custodians don't have access to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) personnel, while 55.3% national custodians do. These include those with formal or informal training. However, the contrast between the two groups also suggests there is substantial work to be done and training that is lacking. While progress has been made, the existing gaps underscore the need for further efforts to ensure equitable access to M&E resources and training across all data sources.
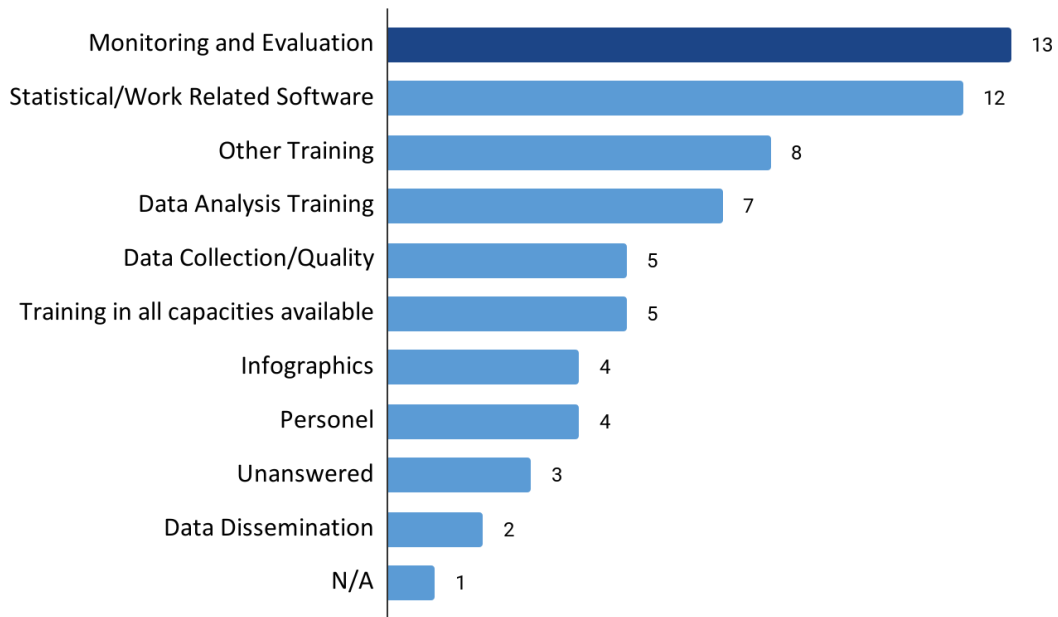
Figure 14 illustrates the training required to build capacities for data collection by the 44 data sources. Note that a data source may have more than one training need.

The greatest need primarily revolves around data, particularly in monitoring and evaluation, which is requested from 29.5% of data sources. This need includes training in three key aspects: data collection, analysis, and infographics. Additionally, 27.3% require training in statistical software or software related to their field of work. Other training needs include general knowledge of SDG's, work-related equipment, statistical systems and basic computer skills were indicated by 18% of the data sources.

Some data sources also requested capacity training in specific areas of statistics: 15.9% for data analysis, 11.4% for data collection quality, 9.1% for infographics, and 4.5% for data dissemination. Also, 11.4% of data sources expressed interest in any capacity training that may be offered. 9.1% indicated a need for additional personnel, including an M&E officer, data collection personnel, and a software developer. Finally, 6.8% left the question unanswered, and 1 data source answered but their response is not applicable.

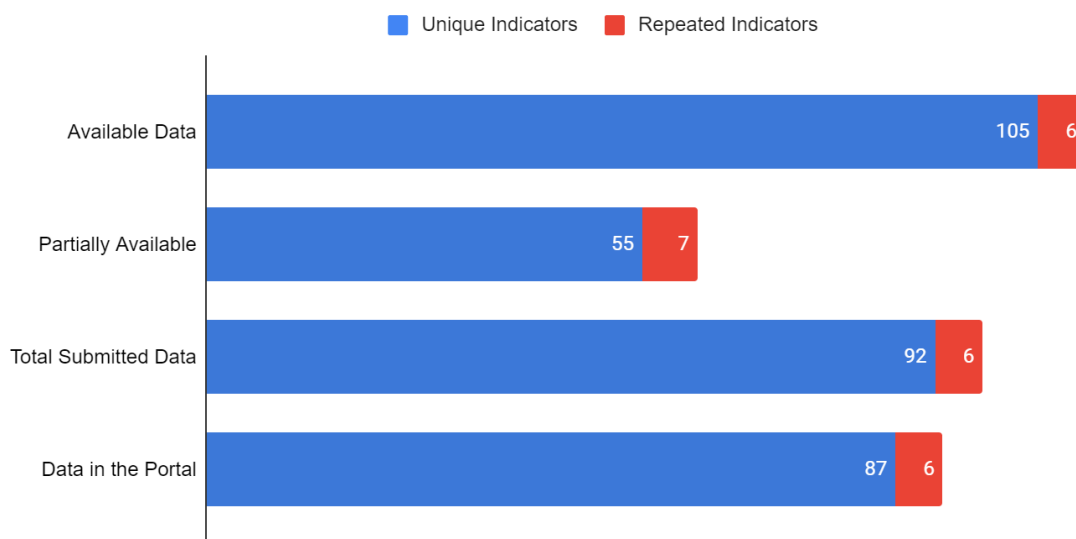Figure 15, Data Submitted/Uploaded to the BNSS Portal

Figure 15 illustrates the total data submitted by the data sources out of the 234 indicators discussed. As shown in Figure 8, there are 111 indicators with available data, 6 of which are repeated, and 62 with partially available data, 7 of which are repeated. Out of the 173 indicators identified as available or partially available, data has been submitted for 56.6% of the indicators, of which 92 are unique and 6 are repeated. 94.9% of the data submitted has been uploaded to the BNSS portal.

Gaps, Challenges and Limitations:

1. Resources Limitations for Data Management:
   The absence of the adequate financial resources necessary for the establishment of a robust data collection and management infrastructure is one of the main reasons for the lack of adequate, relevant, and timely data in Belize. Funding constraints can hamper the establishment of data collection infrastructure, training of personnel, and procurement of necessary tools and technologies. As a result, the entities responsible for gathering, processing, and analyzing data face significant challenges in collection and production of the relevant and timely data.

2. Limited Human Capacity and Skills
   Another notable challenge within Belize's data management endeavors is the lack of personnel exclusively dedicated to handling data-related tasks or the inadequate training and expertise among those responsible for data production and analysis. Additionally, some of these officers are tasked with additional duties and that diminishes the time that can be devoted to data management. The limited number of data submissions or feedback on the BNSS meeting minutes during this exercise supports this observation. When following up

via email or telephone calls, many of the data sources cited conflicting priorities that restricted time and availability for reviewing the minutes and submitting the available data. From figure 12, it can also be seen that only 25 data sources have M&E personnel from the 44.

3. Inadequate Data Infrastructure:
    In some cases, the necessary data infrastructure, including hardware and software, is either insufficient or entirely absent. This deficiency hampers the ability to effectively collect, process, store, and disseminate data. Additionally, in some of the instances the existing systems may not be compatible with each other, further complicating data coordination, sharing, and dissemination efforts. For example, the Ministry of Immigration currently faces challenges as it operates three separate information systems for each of its departments, and these systems lack connectivity between them.

4. The Perceived Importance of Data:
    A significant hurdle that needs to be addressed is the inadequate appreciation of the important role that data plays—a deficiency in improving the data-driven culture. The failure to underscore the crucial role of data and statistics as vital assets for strategic planning, informed decision-making, and effective governance is a key factor contributing to the potential neglect of data collection and production. When data is not given due importance, it can lead to a situation where there is insufficient commitment to investing in robust data infrastructure and capacity development, ultimately resulting in limited or absent support and involvement in data-related initiatives.

5. Insufficient Understanding of SDG Indicators and Metadata:
    There is insufficient knowledge of, use, and interpretation of some of the SDG indicators, leading to gaps in understanding how the indicators are defined, calculated, and reported. For most of these indicators, this knowledge gap is not limited to the data sources but also affects the lead bodies responsible for data collection and SDG coordination in Belize such as the Statistical Institute of Belize and the Sustainable Development Unit. Despite efforts to comprehend the metadata through additional research, online resources for these indicators are scarce. For instance, there is a lack of clarity regarding the reporting requirements for certain qualitative indicators.

6. Lack of Data Collection Standards:
    Data is often collected using different standards, leading to a lack of consistency in the data. When data is collected using various standards, integrating data from different sources becomes complex. Organizations often need to invest significant time and resources in data transformation and cleansing to ensure compatibility, which can slow

down data processing and analysis. Consequently, this disparity in data standards impedes data sharing and the timely and precise generation of reports.

7. <u>SDG Indicators Prioritization:</u>
SDG indicators have not been systematically prioritized or reviewed to assess their relevance and applicability within the context of Belize. Reporting on all SDG indicators is challenging for Belize due to issues of relevance and limited resources. Belize has not conducted a thorough review and prioritization of SDG indicators to identify those that align most closely with its national development goals and challenges. This prioritization process is critical to ensure that the allocation of limited resources is directed towards data collection that enhances the effectiveness of policy making and drives the national sustainable development initiatives while ensuring that no one is left behind.

8. <u>Data Deficiency Due to Legislation or Policy in Place:</u>
The absence of data due to a lack of legislation or policy is a significant barrier to evidence-based decision-making and can hinder progress in various domains. In many cases, data collection requires a legal and policy framework that defines what data can be collected, who can collect it, how it can be used, and how privacy and security concerns will be addressed. Without such guidelines, collecting data can be ethically and legally problematic. For instance, in accordance with Chapter 9 of the ROPA regulations, the Election and Boundaries department does not mandate the collection of data related to sex and disability status, information that builds on much needed disaggregated data.

9. <u>Limited Disaggregation of Data:</u>
Belize faces limitations in disaggregated data for several reasons, and it is important to address this gap to make informed decision-making, and guide policy development, and targeted interventions. For example, many of the SDG indicators lack disaggregation by key dimensions such as sex, age, and geographical territory. Even when disaggregated data exists, it is often not made readily accessible or disseminated.

10. <u>Lack of Awareness of the Belize National Statistical System:</u>
Some data producers are not aware of the Belize National Statistical System and its corresponding portal, which affects their ability to collaborate effectively. When data producers are not actively engaged with the BNSS, there may be delays in data sharing and dissemination, hindering timely access to information. Limited awareness of the BNSS can also result in reduced data accessibility for users who rely on this data for decision-making, research, or policy formulation or simply reporting.

11. <u>Ineffective Coordination among Data Sources:</u>

An important issue that was highlighted is the inadequate coordination among diverse data sources, which poses a considerable challenge. This lack of coordination leads to isolated initiatives, redundant tasks, and discrepancies in the quality of data. What contributes to this problem is the tendency to establish new data coordination mechanisms instead of integrating or merging them into existing ones. Furthermore, data sources expressed concerns about the burden of sharing data with one or more entities requesting the same data. This occurs especially when dealing with indicators that span multiple domains and should ideally be streamlined for better efficiency. Additionally, certain indicators relied on inputs from multiple sources to establish priority, thus the absence of a mechanism leaves their status uncertain. Some indicators rely on administrative data, posing further challenges as this type of data may be defined differently by each entity.

12. In the initial round of meetings with focal points, certain crucial questions related to obstacles in data collection and resource availability were not addressed, as the focus was primarily on data availability. After reflecting on these initial meetings and subsequent discussions with the SDU and SIB, it was decided to conduct a more comprehensive assessment. Additional guiding questions were introduced, and changes were made to the original "SDG Inventory File" to query and subsequently attempt to provide a more holistic evaluation of the data landscape. However, in the second round of meetings, not all the focal points from the first round were available, and this led to the added questions being unanswered.

13. Changes occurred in the leadership positions within organizations, involving the replacement of either the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or focal points for some of the ministries. There were some instances when a CEO had initially assigned a focal point, but that CEO no longer led a particular ministry. This caused some time loss and confusion as the incoming CEO designated a different focal point who needed to be brought up to speed with the ongoing process. Furthermore, some focal points had vacated their positions within the organization, and the appointment of a replacement was still pending. In most cases, these changes were not communicated to the SIB or SDU, resulting in the second meeting not taking place due to no response. To address this issue in the subsequent round of meetings, the importance of submitting not only focal point names but also alternates was underscored.

14. During some of the meetings with focal points, there was the need for further clarification regarding the indicator metadata. This necessity was particularly evident when engaging with focal points who lacked prior knowledge of the SDGs and their reporting. However, it is also important to highlight that even the representatives from the Statistical Institute of Belize and the SDU had limited expertise in certain SDGs metadata, which, at times, led to confusion or required additional time for research and learning about the indicator. This

sometimes led to queries by the custodians not being fully addressed in the strategically planned- short meeting. Both the SIB and SDU representatives had other competing responsibilities that restricted their availability for this exercise. Furthermore, the absence of guidelines or prior national sample added to the time constraint, as some of the allocated time had to be dedicated to researching and grasping the most effective approach to conducting this exercise.

15. The examination within this report centers on the data gathered during meetings with the data sources, primarily in the form of meeting minutes. These minutes were circulated to the data sources to confirm their accuracy and to gather supplementary information for any unanswered questions. Based on the findings, it was observed that the data sources had a low response rate, which limited the availability of additional data and consequently impacted the results included in the findings section

Recommendations

1. <u>Increase Resources to Strengthened Data Management</u>
   Invest in enhancing data management by providing adequate resources, financial and human, to institutions where statistical or technical capacities are weak or non-existent. The findings of this assessment should serve as the initial step, providing a baseline understanding of the existing landscape within the SDG data sources in Belize and where the investments should be made. For instance, using the findings to address training needs for personnel handling/managing data and statistics within these data sources, and ensuring resources and opportunities are in place to have these needs met. Additionally, given that the SIB serves as the national data coordinating body and the SDU plays a vital role in SDG reporting and will eventually also be supporting the #PlanBelize reporting, allocating the much-needed human and financial resources to both organizations to fulfill their mandates of enhancing Belize's overall data ecosystems and management is essential.

2. <u>Undergo a National SDG Prioritize Exercise.</u>
   As a subsequent step in evaluating the relevance of SDG indicators in Belize, it is crucial to conduct further assessment and validation of the results of this exercise. This process, which offers a preliminary prioritization and applicability of SDGs in Belize, requires further assessment, particularly because some indicators labeled as 'not a priority' may have resulted from existing data collection efforts rather than a lack of significance for the country. Additionally, these initial findings also considered the alignment with Belize's national plans, #PlanBelize, and various regional and global frameworks, including but not limited to the CARICOM Core Indicators and the Paris Agreement. However, as previously mentioned, these findings are only preliminary and thus require further assessment and validation.

3. Invest in Data Infrastructure Development

   Allocate financial resources for the enhancement and modernization of data infrastructure, including both hardware and software elements. The enhanced infrastructure should not only meet our needs but also incorporate interoperability features for seamless integration with existing systems, particularly the Belize National Statistical System, and remain flexible to accommodate future data needs. Furthermore, provide funding for the adoption of new data collection technologies, such as drones and Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, while concurrently optimizing data sharing and storage capabilities. For instance, consider investments in kiosks at entry points where various entities, such as the Belize Tourism Board, the Immigration Department, Customs and Excise Department, and Belize Agriculture Health Authority, collect and compile data. These entities could benefit from automated systems located at these proposed kiosks; investment in modernizing infrastructure can enhance data sharing, improve services, and increase transparency.

4. Establish a National Data Coordinating Mechanism

   The SIB is responsible for gathering and distributing national data and statistics and has established frameworks to facilitate these activities. Currently they are developing a new National Strategy for Statistical Development (NSDS), which, among other objectives, seeks to strengthen and establish governance and coordination mechanisms for the National Statistical System (NSS). Within the context of the NSDS review, the existing mechanisms and their associated structures are currently undergoing evaluation and adjustments to ensure enhanced coordination and data reporting. Some of the recommendations gathered during consultation sessions include a consensus that the SIB should take the lead in coordination with the support of the entire NSS, formalizing partnerships through agreements like Memorandums of Understanding, setting up hubs or working groups for the main sectors, and improving communication and data sharing channels among data producers. Capitalizing on the opportunities presented in this revision, use the recommended mechanism as the national data coordinating mechanism.

5. SDG Data-Costing Plan

   This assessment plays a crucial role as the initial step in the larger process of developing a comprehensive financial plan for Belize's SDG-related data initiatives. The primary objective is to create a detailed estimate of the financial resources necessary to address data gaps and secure funding for data and statistical efforts in Belize. The plan will also help understand the financial implications of these initiatives and allows for proper planning and budgeting of resources in an efficient and effective manner.

6. Modernize Legislation related to Data and Statistics

   Review and enhance the existing national regulatory framework, specifically the Statistical Institute of Belize Act, to strengthen the data ecosystem while addressing concerns like privacy and human rights, but at the same time eliminating barriers and establishing

systems to encourage the data revolution. Moreover, harmonize legislation associated with data gathering, dissemination, and administration in Belize, including the Public Sector Data Act and other sector-specific data-related statutes, to address challenges such as coordination obstacles, resource limitations, and the necessity for detailed data. As an example, modifying the Peoples' Constitution Act to enable the collection of gender-specific data.

7. Fostering partnerships

Promote and cultivate collaboration with the SIB, the University of Belize, Galen University, and other academic institutions to offer suitable training and courses to enhance that will contribute to Belize's data collection and management initiatives. Concerning academic institutions, explore opportunities to expand their curriculum or introduce new programs focused on statistics, data collection, data analysis including spatial data analysis, or related fields. Furthermore, under this partnership, there is also an opportunity to improve the data collection efforts, particularly for the environmental dimension. This could involve establishing internship programs for students majoring in Natural Resources Management or related fields and/or signing agreements with the Environmental Research Institute's to provide support for the data collection efforts. In the context of the SIB, in addition to delivering training for data collection and analysis, they can aid public organizations not just by amassing data but also by formalizing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to utilize the SIB's tablets.

8. Increase the UN Support and Guidance

The UN can increase technical assistance and capacity-building support to member states in the field of data management. This can be accomplished through training programs and workshops designed to strengthen the capabilities of government officials, statisticians and other stakeholders involved in SDG data reporting. Additionally, the UN has some great data tools, platforms, and repositories, such as online databases and dashboards, which can be incorporated within the training but also be added to the metadata sheets or official UN data websites. Lastly, the UN can undertake a review process of the SDG metadata to enhance clarity to improve the guidance to member countries and thus increase the availability and reporting of such data.

9. Develop and Launch an NSS Awareness Campaign

Launch statistical advocacy and awareness campaigns to ensure policymakers and the public are aware of the existence of the BNSS and all other data systems and structures to ensure data users and other stakeholders are more cognizant of the value of data, how they can contribute and how to access and use the data. Initiatives aimed at increasing awareness among data producers can lead to more efficient data management, improved collaboration,

and enhanced accessibility of data, ultimately benefiting the nation's development efforts and evidence-based decision-making.

10. <u>Adding Modules to the LFS Survey</u>

Following discussions with the SIB and because of some of the discussion with the data sources, the following proposal has been suggested. That data sources identify the SDG indicators that are suitable for inclusion in surveys, namely the Labour Force Survey. SIB, in turn, will contribute their technical expertise and, to minimize additional costs, integrate these questions as a module into the biannual LFS. However, effective planning and coordination are essential, considering that only a limited number of questions (up to 15) can be added to a given module. Moreover, when feasible, it is recommended that the data sources collaborate with each other to secure support and funding, particularly for indicators where more than one data source contributes to the data.

11. <u>Use of Administrative Data</u>

Using existing administrative data is a cost-effective solution which can help bridge data gaps in areas where conventional surveys and censuses are insufficient or expensive. Additionally, administrative data is often readily available, which is vital for real-time monitoring of national plans and the broader SDGs. When properly integrated with other datasets and systems, it provides timely and relevant data to inform policies. For instance, if relevant administrative data is gathered across diverse sectors like education, healthcare, labor, and social security, it can provide a comprehensive view of the social protection endeavors currently underway in Belize.

Conclusion/Next Steps

In summary, while Belize has not reached the desired level of data readiness, there has been a rising engagement from various stakeholders. This current report not only symbolizes an unprecedented attempt to assess each SDG indicator, offering a comprehensive view of all 231 unique SDG indicators in Belize but also reflects the growing interest and support from relevant stakeholders. Belize is cognizant of the significance of not only improving the data culture for reporting to the UN but also recognizes the critical role of timely, adequate, and reliable data in guiding decision-making.

Due to time constraints, limited human resources with the SDU and SIB, and challenges in confirming focal points for some of the identified data sources, not all SDG indicators were reviewed under this exercise. As of the end of February 2024 when the last BNSS meeting was held, a total of 44 were held with the identified data sources.

The SDG Data Inventory File, summarizing the comprehensive findings and mapping, reveals that Belize has the capacity to monitor and report on most of the SDGs. Although there is not a coordinated and standardized system, data sources exhibit distinct capabilities, procedures,

regulations, and systems, especially in the economic and social domains, if they are in place, that allows for this monitoring and reporting to take place. Additionally, this trend aligns with the data collection methods utilized by the SIB, including surveys, census, and administrative data, which provide reliable data for most economic and social indicators. However, there is room for improvement in the environmental aspect, at the data sources level and even within the SIB. Nevertheless, this assessment has tried to highlight the areas and has also presented potential opportunities and recommendations to address and improve some of the data-related challenges.

Utilizing the information presented in this report, in conjunction with the other supporting documents, suggests that one of the initial recommended steps is to capitalize on existing or forthcoming initiatives. One notable example of such an initiative that can fully leverage the results of this exercise is the ongoing revision of the NSDS. This revision has highlighted the recognition, appreciation and the importance of comprehensive stakeholder consultation and engagement, given that a significant number of relevant data sources have been consulted through this exercise. Additionally, there has been a notable increase in awareness and momentum within the realm of data, cultivating greater interest and support among data sources and stakeholders. Most importantly, the findings contained in this report can offer invaluable guidance for enhancing this revised NSDS.

Another critical recommended step is to confirm the accuracy of the findings in this report by conducting a national stakeholder workshop. Once again, we can leverage ongoing initiatives such as the KOICA Project, the preparation for the 2024 VNR, or any other suitable initiative for this purpose. Within the scope of this national workshop, the validation and finalization of the SDG inventory file will also be undertaken.

As previously mentioned, the SDG inventory file is very robust, offering a comprehensive overview not only of status of most of the SDG indicators in Belize but also presenting a preliminary list of priority SDG indicators while also mapping them to various frameworks. Given the extensive nature of this inventory, the validation process requires technical and policy expertise to ensure its accuracy, usability, and presentation. This implies that the workshop should invite not only data sources but also policy makers.

Once the validation is successfully completed, Belize will not only possess a prioritized list of SDG indicators but will also possess a valuable tool that can assist other national counterparts in their data-related endeavors. This assessment report can lay the groundwork for the development of an SDG data roadmap, provide valuable input for the VNRs and national reports, and offer a comprehensive overview of the availability of SDG data and the data ecosystem in Belize. At a later stage it can influence and/or promote the creation of interdisciplinary sub-groups to the production of indicators in different areas (example: social protection statistics). For that reason, it has been agreed that the report along with the SDG inventory file be shared with all the data sources and other national partners who can benefit from this information. These entities may include the National Biodiversity Office, the National Committee for Families and Children, the

National Women's Commission, among others, as they are all engaged in ongoing data collection and reporting activities.

Additionally, another significant but often overlooked step is the establishment of adequate communication channels with each data source through designated focal points. Sometimes, the challenge may not be the lack of interest or data availability but rather issues related to miscommunication or the individual receiving the request. Throughout this process, 44 data sources established formal lines of communication by identifying focal points and their alternates. While this may not be the sole solution, particularly considering that some of the nominated individuals may have since left their positions, there has been noticeable improvement by the end of this exercise. Hence, it is advisable for those data sources that have not yet designated a focal point and an alternative to proceed to do so.

Once again, it's worth noting that the SDG inventory file includes the contact information of these focal points, which can be utilized by other entities seeking data from the same organization. Using this approach will not only streamline the data request process and improve coordination but will also reduce the data request burden on the data sources. However, establishing these designated focal points remains an ongoing effort that the SDU, in collaboration with the SIB, will continue to develop and support.

Belize has made notable progress in addressing data challenges, particularly in enhancing the national statistical system. Despite these advancements, there remains room for further improvement, particularly in the areas of data governance and partnerships. As mentioned earlier, the ongoing initiatives, such as the NSDS and this report, offer a great opportunity to address and implement the enhancements. While the government holds the ultimate responsibility for leading and managing the national data resources, it is crucial for civil society, the private sector, academia, and all other stakeholders to actively support national efforts aimed at establishing open, inclusive, and participatory national statistical systems. Through collaborative efforts, including capacity-building initiatives, partnerships, and the promotion of innovative approaches, all data stakeholders can contribute to the realization of progress toward achieving the SDGs in Belize and improving the lives of its citizens.

Acronyms of National Custodians

Acronym	National Custodian
BCO	Belize Crime Observatory
BDCA	The Belize Department of Civil Aviation
BELTRAIDE	Belize Trade and Investment Development Service
BPA	Belize Port Authority
BSWMA	Belize Solid Waste Management Authority
BTB	Belize Tourism Board
BWSLl	Belize Water Services Ltd
CBB	Central Bank of Belize
CED	Customs & Excise Department
CZMAI	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
DBMIS	Department of Border Management & Immigration Services
DLG	Department of Local Government
DOE	Department of Environment
DOT	Department of Transport
DYS	Department of Youth Services
EBD	Elections and Boundaries Department
Energy Unit	Energy Unit
FD	Forest Department
Fisheries	Fisheries Department
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit
HR	Human Rights
JOB	Judiciary of Belize(Supreme Court Registry)
LD	Labour Department
MED	Policy and Planning Unit
MHD	Ministry of Human Development
MIDH	Ministry of Infrastructure and housing
MNR	Ministry of Natural Resources
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOHW	Ministry of Health

MPS	Ministry of Public Service
MRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MU	Mining unit
NBIO	National Biodiversity Office
NCCO	National Climate Change Office
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organization
NHS	National Hydrological Systems
NICH	National Institute of Culture and History
NWC	National Women's Commission
OO	Office of the Ombudsman
PUC	Public Utilities Commission
SDU	Sustainable Development Unit
SSB	Social Security Belize
VSU	Vital Statistics Unit

Appendix

Meeting Held for the 1st Round	Meetings Held for the 2nd Round
Belize Crime Observatory	The Belize Department of Civil Aviation
Belize Solid Waste Management Authority	Statistical Institute of Belize
Belize Water Services Ltd	Department of Environment
Central Bank of Belize	Department of Youth Services
Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute	Ministry of Human Development
Department of Local Government	Ministry of Natural Resources
Department of Environment	National Emergency Management Organization
Elections and Boundaries Department	Department of Local Government
Energy Unit	Ministry of Health
Forest Department	Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)
Fisheries Department	Ministry of Education
Financial Intelligence Unit	Belize Crime Observatory
Labour Department	National Women's Commission
Policy and Planning Unit	Elections and Boundaries Department
Ministry of Human Development	Belize Water Services Ltd
Ministry of Natural Resources	Public Utilities Commission
Ministry of Agriculture	National Hydrological Systems
Ministry of Education	Forest Department
Judiciary of Belize	Energy Unit
Ministry of Health	Policy and Planning Unit
Ministry of Public Service	Social Security Belize
National Biodiversity Office	Labour Department
National Climate Change Office	Central Bank of Belize
National Hydrological Systems	Ministry of Infrastructure and housing
National Women's Commission	National Climate Change Office
Sustainable Development Unit	Department of Border Management & Immigration Services
Statistical Institute of Belize	Department of Transport
Social Security Board	Belize Solid Waste Management Authority
Economic Development Council (No Longer a Custodian)	Sustainable Development Unit

Vital Statistics Unit	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
	Fisheries Department
	National Biodiversity Office
	Judiciary of Belize(Supreme Court Registry)
	Financial Intelligence Unit
	Ministry of Public Service
	Vital Statistics Unit
	Belize Tourism Board
	Ministry of Rural Development
	Office of the Ombudsman
	Customs & Excise Department
	Mining unit
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
	National Institute of Culture and History