

Torri Gunderson  
Grand Rapids Senior High,  
Grand Rapids MN  
Belize, education

### **Belize: An opportunity to do better**

“Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world.”

-Nelson Mandela

Although I always growl about having to go to school, I never realize how lucky I am. My grandparents recently traveled to Belize. Their experience inspired this paper. People in Belize are often lacking in education. Dropout rates increase after primary school. The average person makes 3.30 dollars an hour. The typical living cost is 2,256.69 dollars without rent. This makes it almost impossible for any family to survive without living in poverty. With further reading you will explore a solution to the education crisis.

Belize is geographically a very small country. Belize is on a coastline of the Caribbean Sea, and is a mix of rocky mountains, Jungle coast, mountains and Subtropical climate with a mostly dry season. A big part of Belize land is tropical rainforest. A major part of their food comes from the tropical fruits, nuts, and vegetables they plant and grow (1, Britannica). Due to the fact that people of Belize struggle with having enough money to have food, they will often go out to the forest and pick food from the trees. They only make 3 dollars and 30 cents an hour which is not enough for the average family. (10, Stotz Jon) Although Belize is Geographically a very small country the Population is very large at 405,000. Of which 55.2% is rural, and 44.8% is urban (1, britannica). They follow under the leadership power of the British Parliamentary system, however they do elect leaders in the villages (1, Britannica). The average farm size in Belize is 25 acres vs the USAs average farm size is 178 acres. Many people in Belize often struggle to afford farmland and often have no land except villages to grow and live on. Many people live in poverty and have no place to call home. Most of the farm land is cultivated under the Minutes. They are a major farm industry and often tax lots of money for people to import/export food. They do have lots of opportunities for importing with their massive amounts of roads, and oceans/seas (8, 75 Belize).

The Belize family life is very typical to 3rd world countries. In Belize it is very common for extended families to live together. It typically goes anywhere from 3-4 generations of families with 7-8 members per generation, while living in the same house. They usually live in a very small house, typically made of mud or natural resources like twigs, branches, wood, leaves or whatever is readily available to them. Most people of Belize follow the Roman-Catholic religion. (1, Britannica) They survive on whatever they can find. typically fruits from fruit trees, or the

staple of white rice or kidney beans. A lot of people eat traditional hispanic food like tortilla, eggs, mexican rice and much more. A lot of people in Belize are fishermen and eat a lot of what they catch from the Ocean like crab, seafood, and snails. (12, elearn) Most families struggle to make ends meet, while getting paid three dollars and 30 cents an hour. Most kids drop out of school in order to help their families with the many struggles they have to afford. The average family spends around 55 dollars and 50 cents per week on food. These expenses do not include things like clothing, electricity, schooling, transportation and many more (3, cost). They have poor sanitation. With most families not having any money to support their daily living things like electricity, sanitation and clean water to use or drink. Making proper hygiene not a huge priority and is often forgotten about. (13, Water)

There were lots of conflicts I could have written about in this paper, but the main issue I saw was the lack of education. The children of Belize are suffering with the lack of a strong educational system. Many children often do not have access to an affordable or free education. The schools of Belize are mostly Roman Catholic, but they have an agreement between the church and the Belizean government. In Belize students are required to purchase their own uniforms, school supplies, and technology if needed. If family members only make around 3 dollars and 30 cents a day and have to supply the basic necessities, it is almost impossible to afford all of the things they need. Education often is one of the least concerns for a family. In a recent study it showed that 1 in 3 children were enrolled in primary school. Meaning that most children don't even go to school. In the same article they talked about the Labor force and said that in a survey the total population of 14 years and older was 259,408 people. (4, Education). Most kids have to drop out in order to support their families. Many schools in Belize often require a computer or technology after primary schooling, This is nearly not an option for people. If they have huge families (which is custom in the country of Belize) they cannot afford to buy a computer for all of their children. The same study also showed that in some places of Belize educators do not have above high school education and are teaching other people (4, Education). Overall the people in Belize are having trouble staying in school. The high paying jobs in Belize require above high school education, typically university or masters. If kids drop out in primary school to help support their families, or if their families cannot afford to send them to school, the circle of poverty will continue. People are constantly living in poverty because it's all they have been able to accomplish. In certain poverty areas some money is better than no money. When you are desperate you do what you have to do.

In the United States we have a federal program named Trio. The common name in Minnesota is Upward Bound. Upward Bound is a program where they offer low income students an opportunity to go to school and are allowed a stipend while learning. It's mostly a summer time program. Students are offered food for families, housing for the students during class time, scholarships for college, earn college credit, and stay in school. All of this while getting paid to help support themselves and their families. By having this program they have encouraged so many people to stay in school. Due to this program many people have gone to college and many people have gotten their highschool degree. (6, project Borgen) I would make this

possible through the Education International Foundation. This is a Collation of 30 million professionals in education. Their goal is to promote quality education, and equality. They challenge various kinds of bias based on gender, race, sexual orientation, economic status and much more. (6, project Borgen) This organization will be a great help because they can offer stipends for children to stay in school and target the bias based on social classes.

I also believe that the country of Belize would greatly benefit from an Agricultural Educational Program. I believe that offering an Agriculture program in Belize would be very beneficial to this country. The country of Belize has amazing agricultural land. With fertile land there are so many incredible opportunities. There is lots of land in rural areas that could be used to help feed people. By offering this program, we would be able to show how to grow food, check soil temperature, what plants need sunlight vs shade, and how to get food they consume. 7.60 people per population are malnourished. There is a significant amount of children. If they have access to clean, fresh food (that an agricultural program could provide) they could grow food. I strongly believe that it is very important for people of any age to know what they are putting in their body and how to make healthy decisions. In the United States, and some territories we offer a program called FFA. FFA offers kids a wide range of experiences ranging from travel, career development, lifelong friendships, public speaking and so much more. One great thing about this program is that it offers a wide variety of diversity. The national FFA organization is the largest student led organization, so it will also improve independence. FFA is truly for everyone. This can give everyone an opportunity to be a part of a team, make some friends, and truly be a leader. This organization will also provide the opportunity to become a more skilled interviewer, which might help them get a more high paying job. There are several development theories that point to the importance that adults, and peers can serve children as role models. Adolescents who do not have such relationships or may be left unsupervised are more likely to do drugs or alcohol. This contributes negatively towards childhood development (2, Clubs) By offering an agricultural educational system we will be giving children the opportunity to live to their fullest potential. This opportunity can also be provided by the Education International program, if they bring in an agricultural education teacher.

Once we have a strong educational system in place, I believe we also need to focus on the lack of food people are getting. If the country of Belize has an agricultural educational program in place, they will have the opportunity to know how to grow and make food. Belize is one of the best countries from growing food. "They are undoubtedly blessed with perfect growing land. Belize has a great water source with the country neighboring on the Caribbean sea, Unleased land owned by the government, land routes for easy shipments." (9, Simion, Leif) Belize has an amazing opportunity to dig themselves and their people out of poverty. The issue is not with lack of land, it is with affordable land. People in Belize face low income. They barely make enough money to put food on the table, have a roof over their head, have access to electricity, and more. That is why I propose that the government gives a couple of acres of unused land to start a community garden. If the country of Belize has a community garden. This will give people an opportunity to have clean fresh food. A community garden offers many people an opportunity to

grow their own food. They will also have control over what they put in their body, what they eat, and access to the food. I believe that this is something the people of Belize need to survive. The amount of poverty and malnutrition is going down, but we have the opportunity to make it go down even further. There is also a study that states growing your own food elevates mood and creates happy hormones. "Soil contains a bacteria called Mycobacterium Vaccae which gets absorbed through our fingers and palms and triggers a release of serotonin (or the happy hormone) in our brain" (5, Nuallain, Fiann). This solution helps reach Maslow's hierarchy of needs which states that a person must meet the requirements of happiness before their physical needs so self actualization can be met. By offering a community garden we are not only offering food to the people of Belize but also a mood enhancement to all.

The country of Belize is struggling with the lack of education. It is our responsibility to offer guidance on how to help our brothers and sisters out of trouble. The way I envision this happening is a 15 year step program. The country of Belize would start in the first three years creating the trio program. As I stated earlier in my paper Trio is a program that pays students to go to school. By implementing this program first students will have an important incentive to stay in school. Then after three years of the trio program we would then move onto the next step which would be to implement an agricultural educational program within the seven years of starting the program. An agricultural education experience will provide the knowledge to grow their own food, be knowledgeable about what areas to plant in and harvest, and even learn the leadership responsibilities of growing a farm. Then in the final five years of this program we will start the community gardens. If people join FFA in high school, five years allows them to settle down, take care of their families for a while and perhaps search for a new job. If we implement this system it will also allow the gardeners to research further about the land types and areas surrounding Belize. With a fifteen year program we can also be very conscious of budgeting. This will give opportunities to cycle the money and ensure that money will come in instead of constantly going out. The education system in Belize is lacking severely. This will overall promote happiness and hope. Something the country of Belize needs right now. It is not a want but more of a need. Children need to be in school, they need a stable routine, they need food to nourish their bodies. They need a stronger agricultural educational program to be able to survive. This isn't just about what the children need, however their families need their children to have an education to help them learn how to grow better food and where they should grow it and get better jobs not only for the sake of their families and village people but also their whole country. Not only will giving a proper and better education for people in Belize this program will also support the country as a whole if more people are educated fully more jobs can be built up and more industries and exports will be produced the whole country will benefit from this 15 year plan I truly believe this program would help everyone if it came into place and I hope in the future the country of Belize and other nations around them will step up to help out in their educational crisis.

## Bibliography:

1. "Belize." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belize>.
2. Clubs - Club Participation, Why Participation Is Expected to Benefit Youth, Benefits of Participation in Clubs." StateUniversity.com, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1838/Clubs.html>.
3. "Cost of Living in Belize." . Prices in Belize. Updated Mar 2022, [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country\\_result.jsp?country](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_result.jsp?country)
4. "Education in Belize – Overview of Educational System and Institutions." Complete Guide to Belize | Central America – Belize.com, <https://belize.com/education-in-belize/>.
5. Nualláin, Fiann Ó. "Growing Your Own Food Elevates Mood and Creates Happy Hormones." Irish Examiner, 10 Sept. 2016, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/property/homeandgardens/arid-20420417>
6. Project, Borgen. "7 Organizations Supporting Global Education." *The Borgen Project*, Borgen Project  
[https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/The\\_Borgen\\_Project\\_Logo\\_small.Jpg](https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/The_Borgen_Project_Logo_small.Jpg), 30 July 2014, <https://borgenproject.org/7-organizations-supporting-global-education/>.
7. Project, Borgen. "Path to Improvement: Top 10 Facts about Poverty in Belize." The Borgen Project, Borgen Project  
[https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/The\\_Borgen\\_Project\\_Logo\\_small.Jpg](https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/The_Borgen_Project_Logo_small.Jpg), 8 Jan. 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/path-to-improvement-top-10-facts-about-poverty-in-belize/>.
8. 75. "Belize - Import Tariffs." International Trade Administration | Trade.gov, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/belize-import>

9. Simon, Lief. "Belize Is a Top Choice for Agricultural Investment." Live and Invest Overseas, 6 Oct. 2020, <https://www.liveandinvestoverseas.com/investing/belize-top-choice-agricultural-investment/>.
10. Stotz, Jon, et al. "Average and Minimum Salary in Belize." Check in Price, 3 Dec. 2020, <https://checkinprice.com/average-minimum-salary-belize/>.
11. Untitled document, [Belize Farms and Acreages for Sale | Point2 \(point2homes.com\)](#)
12. Untitled Document, <https://elearn.fiu.edu/e-dev/WorldExplorer/continents/northamerica/belize/belize.html>.
13. "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (W.A.S.H)." UNICEF Belize, <https://www.unicef.org/belize/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash>.