

Building Climate Change Resilience and Social Integration of Displaced People in Western Belize

Belize | Duration: January 2022 - December 2024 | Implementing partners: Government of Belize's Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The Challenge

In Western Belize, six underserved mixed migrant settlements—originally formed in the aftermath of civil unrest in Central America—have steadily grown over time. These settlements, while offering refuge, remain highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards such as flooding, wildfires, and hurricanes. Many households in areas such as Billy White face annual flooding, while others experience chronic under-service in basic health, water, and sanitation infrastructure.

Despite government commitment and a basic framework for disaster response, these areas historically lacked adequate investment, technical oversight, and integration with national infrastructure systems. The displaced populations in these settlements had limited access to reliable services, safe housing, and formal governance mechanisms, leaving them exposed to both ongoing social marginalization and recurring climate-related risks.

The Solution

This project focused on strengthening resilience and social cohesion for displacement-affected populations in six communities of Western Belize. It addressed both service delivery and climate-related mobility risks by upgrading infrastructure, improving disaster preparedness, and embedding governance structures that connected national systems with local leadership.

The project's dual governance model – comprising a high-level Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and a Local Project Advisory Committee (LPAC) – was instrumental in ensuring alignment with national priorities while also facilitating strong community

What Made This a Promising Practice?

The project's multitiered approach—linking national policy frameworks with grassroots participation—resulted in durable, inclusive infrastructure tailored to local needs. The innovative governance structure facilitated smooth coordination between ministries and communities, while enabling timely troubleshooting, regulatory compliance, and adaptive design. The commitment of the Government of Belize, including the provision of supplemental funding to address inflation and global price fluctuations, underscored strong national ownership. Equally, integrating project outputs—such as shelters, water systems, and fire brigades—into national systems ensured long-term sustainability. This approach not only improved the wellbeing and social integration of displaced people but also enhanced local resilience to climate-related displacement risks, making it a standout example for other contexts.

The Response

The project faced significant operational challenges, including 25-50% increases in construction costs due to global events like the Russia-Ukraine war and inflation, plus bureaucratic delays that impacted timelines. These challenges were addressed through strong government partnership and flexible implementation. The Government of Belize provided supplemental funding of approximately \$375,000 BZD, demonstrating exceptional national ownership. The dual governance structure proved invaluable, with committees providing technical solutions and maintaining community engagement throughout delays. The project team adapted by coordinating closely with government ministries and leveraging specialized expertise to ensure infrastructure met national standards despite the challenges.

Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated that dual governance structures—linking national authorities through a Technical Advisory Committee and community leaders through a Local Project Advisory Committee—can ensure effective coordination and sustained engagement. This approach enabled strong local ownership and aligned interventions with both government plans and community needs.

It also highlighted the importance of contingency planning. Global price fluctuations and bureaucratic delays impacted delivery, reinforcing the need for financial buffers and flexible timelines in displacement contexts.

Technical integration played a crucial role in ensuring quality and sustainability. The involvement of ministries and IOM's project team guaranteed that infrastructure met national standards and was fit for long-term use.

Community-led maintenance systems enhanced sustainability by embedding management responsibilities at the local level and facilitating formal handovers to government departments. Multi-use infrastructure—such as shelters that served both emergency and community functions—maximized impact and strengthened community resilience.

Key Results

Integrated Service Delivery:

- Upgraded water systems for approximately 4,375 residents in Billy White, Los Tambos, and Santa Familia.
- Constructed a fully equipped polyclinic in Duck Run 1 to serve multiple settlements.
- Built three hurricane shelters and rehabilitated two schools for use as shelters, benefiting over 5,900 people.
- Trained 56 volunteers in shelter management and 47 community members in fire management.

Climate Resilience Infrastructure:

- Built 3 miles of drainage and culvert systems to protect 54 flood-prone households in Billy White and school-adjacent areas in Los Tambos.
- Equipped settlements with firefighting tools, including a water bowser that doubles as a community water delivery vehicle during dry seasons.

Governance and Community Engagement:

- Established a Technical Advisory Committee with key government ministries to ensure compliance with national standards and provide expert input.
- Formed a Local Project Advisory Committee including leaders from all six communities to monitor daily progress and ensure community feedback shaped decision-making.
- Conducted participatory design and site selection processes involving residents at multiple stages.



LiD Lives in Dignity GRANT FACILITY

The Lives in Dignity (LiD) Grant Facility was an EU-funded initiative managed by UNOPS that promoted development-oriented approaches in forced displacement settings. With €24 million allocated between 2021–2025, the Facility supported 14 innovative, multi-stakeholder projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its flexible funding model empowered local actors, strengthened partnerships, and fostered integrated programming across five key areas: livelihoods, service delivery, housing and spatial planning, protection, and disaster- and climate-related mobility. The Facility prioritized community-led solutions, localization, and social cohesion, advancing sustainable development for both displaced populations and host communities. **Find out more at** https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/lives-dignity-grant-facility_en