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OCPP GEDSI Analysis: Belize

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Acronyms and glossary

ALB	Arms' Length Bodies
ALDFG	Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear
CARICOM	Caribbean Community, a political and economic union
CEFAS	Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Scient
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CZMAI	Belize Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
EMS	Early Mortality Syndrome
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GICDR	Gender Inequality of Climate and Disaster Risk and the Cost of Inaction
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDB	Inter American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key informant interviews
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex, plus a range of other gender and sexual identities
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
OCPP	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disability
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
SDDirect	Social Development Direct
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
ToRs	Terms of Reference
VAC	Violence Against Children
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WRO	Women's Rights Organisations

Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings from a gender equality and social inclusion assessment focused on biodiversity, sustainable seafood and pollution in coastal areas of Belize. The findings will be used to inform the Ocean Country Partnership Programme, deepening understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented. Over a period of around two months, the research team conducted a document review and a small number of key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders that forms the basis of the report findings and recommendations.

Although the evidence base for this report was patchy, illustrating the general invisibility of marginalised groups from initiatives in the sector, findings nevertheless clearly point to the fact that coastal communities face widespread economic and environmental challenges. Fisher communities are most reliant on marine and coastal resources, whose degradation affects both men and women. Evidence suggests that women experience compounded barriers that heighten their risks and limit their rights, while other marginalised groups receive less focus in research and data. Although evidence on sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in Belize is lacking, our research suggests that power imbalances, gender inequality, and economic stress are all linked to different types of GBV evident in these communities and related places of work.

A wide range of stakeholders are already working in the "GEDSI and environment" space, presenting a valuable set of partnership options. There are also several important sources of country-level GEDSI data that OCPP can tap into. However, overall, the inadequacy of available data to provide a disaggregated picture of the ways in which environmental degradation is affecting different groups is a barrier to inclusive programming. Gender was the only factor given any attention in relevant datasets identified in this study.

The study makes a number of high-level recommendations that are likely to be applicable for the next phase of OCPP programming, regardless of the specific focus of the work (the latter being outside the scope of the assessment):

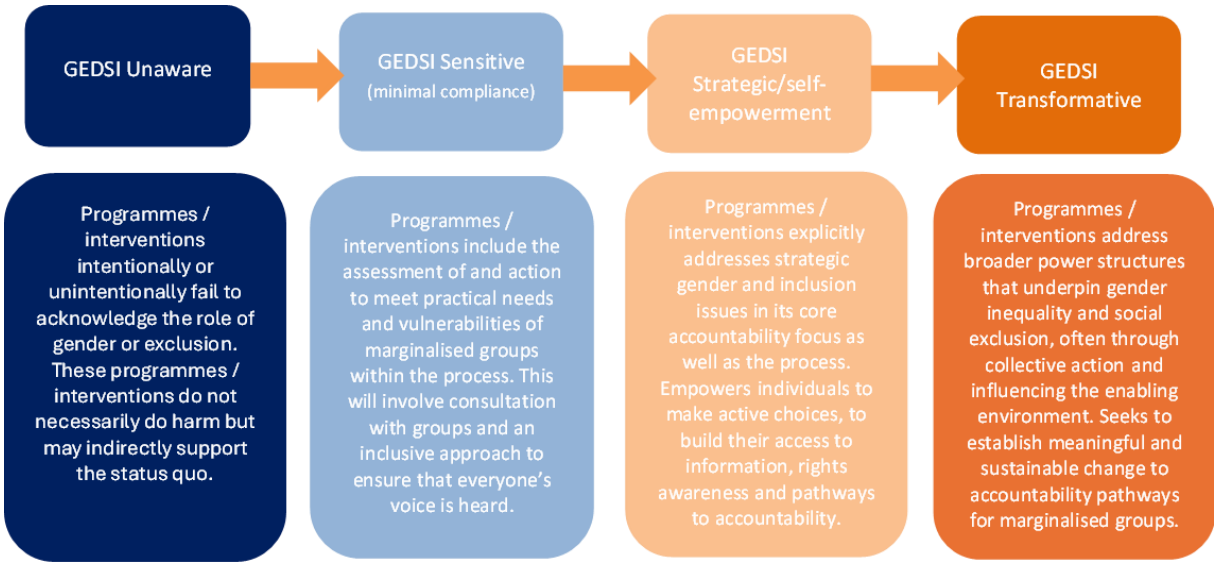
- **Recommendations on GEDSI include the importance of demonstrating a strong commitment to GEDSI within the OCPP** - for example, considering how to promote a more inclusive process, consultation and dialogue; leveraging relationships with local authorities to promote women's engagement; mainstreaming GEDSI into theories of change, programme and project design; supporting research that explicitly considers marginalised groups; and making sure to consider social and livelihood impacts for communities when designing climate initiatives.
- **Recommendations on addressing safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme focus on ensuring that OCPP partners have adequate**

safeguarding policies and procedures in order to prevent and respond to SEAH. This includes reviewing what safeguarding procedures are in place; conducting risk assessments of high-risk activities for the programme; reviewing the impact of sexual harassment across all programme activities and staff and take appropriate action to address these; endorsing the CAPSEAH commitment and work towards compliance; taking a broad approach to understanding safety for those linked to OCPP initiatives, and applying a holistic understanding of risk throughout the value chain.

1. Introduction and overview of the analysis

1.1. Purpose and objectives

Following an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in November 2023, where the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) was assessed as unaware on the Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Responsiveness Continuum, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support their ambition to better integrate GEDSI responsive approaches in OCPP. This continuum is a framework used to assess and guide programmes, policies, and initiatives in terms of their approach to GEDSI, helping organisations and practitioners understand how their work either reinforces or challenges existing inequalities. Along the continuum, programmes or interventions can range from being GEDSI Unaware, GEDSI Sensitive, Strategic or Self-Empowering, or GEDSI Transformative, as shown in Diagram 1 below[1]. ICAI's assessment of OCPP was deemed to be GEDSI unaware.



In order to meet the objectives of the International Development Act, international commitments to 'do no harm' as part of the SDGs, and DEFRA's own minimum standards on gender and social inclusion, the OCPP must reduce poverty in places it is working and improve conditions for poor people and the most marginalised in this world. It must also ensure this is done in a way that addresses GEDSI and substantially improves the wellbeing of these lives, alongside ensuring that programmes are free from risks associated with sexual exploitation, abuse and

[1] This framework has been adapted and updated by SDDirect from the Moser Framework. It aligns with the GESI Policy for DEFRA ODA Programmes, and while some of the language used varies, the concepts and approach are similar.

harassment (SEAH) which may be inherent in programming within fragile states characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality. As such, on behalf of all the arms' length bodies (ALB) involved in OCPP, CEFAS has contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support the OCPP's ambition to becoming more GEDSI Sensitive, and where possible, GEDSI Empowering. These analyses have been undertaken in Ghana, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Belize. This report focuses on Belize.

Objectives: this assignment is intended to further OCPP's understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented in Belize. This assignment will enable CEFAS to adapt interventions to become more GEDSI sensitive and address those needs. It will achieve this by providing an intersectional assessment and analysis of the social and economic context in coastal areas of Belize and identifying key SEAH and GEDSI risks that can be quickly addressed and mitigated.

Scope: this analysis will focus on the key themes for OCPP programme – pollution, seafood, and biodiversity.

Terminology

Gender equality is the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender in opportunities, in the allocation of resources or benefits or in the access to services, such that all individuals can enjoy equal standards of well-being. It is the full and equal exercise by women, men, boys, girls and people of other gender identities of their human rights: in this situation, women, men, girls and boys have equal rights and equal access to socially and economically valued goods, resources, opportunities and benefits; the different gender roles are valued equally and do not constitute an obstacle to their wellbeing and finally; the fulfilment of their potential as responsible members of society is possible.

Social inclusion is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individual and groups to development opportunities. These barriers may be formal (written laws on spousal property for instance), or they may be informal (e.g. time village girls spend carrying water instead of attending school). In short, social inclusion is about levelling the playing field by making the 'rules of the game' fairer.

Disability, according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others'" (UN CRPD, 2006).

Safeguarding means preventing harm abuse and neglect perpetrated by staff, contractors and as a result of programmes that are being implemented. An important component of that is SEAH being perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors targeted. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people (usually men) in

positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is often a form of **gender-based violence** (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children.

1.2. Overview of the report

After the introduction to the report, the second section of the report details the methodology employed, including the literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and data analysis processes, as well as the methodological limitations. Section 3 presents the findings in response to each of the research questions (as outlined in the Inception Report). This section also includes a stakeholder mapping, and lessons learned. Sections 4 and 5 present conclusions and recommendations respectively.

2. Methodology

2.1. Methodology

The GEDSI analysis has been conducted through a mix of secondary literature review and a small number of KIIs. Below we set out the detailed approach to each of these phases.

For the literature review we reviewed external documents available from Google Scholar and relevant electronic databases and identified using key search terms as well as governmental and other grey literature documents. Online literature was identified using key search terms such as:

- GEDSI; women; gender; girls; disability; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex + (LGBTQI+) Intersectionality; vulnerable/alit; marginalised; poor/ poverty; leave no one behind, do no harm, religion, ethnicity, age
- SEAH; safeguarding; child safeguarding; child labour; gender-based violence (GBV) / gender-based violence; violence against children (VAC); interpersonal violence, sexual violence; sexual harassment; sexual exploitation
- Fishing; Aquaculture; fishermen / women, fishers, fisherfolk; overfishing,' pollution; aquatic animal health; climate change; coast; seafood; marine; coastal livelihoods; blue economy, coastal communities, waste / litter picking; marine litter; Ghost fishing gear /Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG).

Full detail of the search and inclusion criteria of external literature can be found in the inception report. The research team have endeavoured to identify and use more

recent literature from 2015-present. In some instances, older sources of literature have been cited in the absence of more recent data or information publicly available. Where possible we have attempted to corroborate this with more recent information revealed in KIIs.

A full explanation of criteria for search and inclusion of external literature can be found in the inception report.

Primary data was collected by interviewing seven key informants (KIs), from local and national governments, civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), recommended by OCPP as their key stakeholders, and others engaged in GEDSI within the OCPP focus areas of pollution, seafood and biodiversity. Data collection tools (including consent for and the data storage protocol) are included in the Inception Report and were slightly adapted to the Belize country and operational context. KIs are (anonymously) listed in Annex 1.

Documents and interview transcripts were coded in a coding matrix to highlight key findings and themes against the research questions.

2.2. Limitations

Limitations	Mitigations
Limited literature. There was limited literature available on marginalised groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) persons and persons with disabilities.	Efforts have been taken to consult the grey literature and speak with CSOs, including Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) to learn more the impacts on these groups. Where possible we have attempted to obtain country level data and make inferences as to risks for these groups.
The analyses did not review the OCPP programme activities in detail due to the complexity of the programme and the desire from the programme to focus on the national GEDSI context. As a result, the analysis does not address programme specific interventions.	The analysis instead focuses on the high-level themes that are being addressed including marine biodiversity, pollution, and seafood. It highlights relevant interventions being led by other actors, including government actors, in these domains of work to identify potential areas for synergy, or overlap with OCPP.
The examination of SEAH risks were based on our understanding of the GEDSI situation in each country and the broad thematic approach that the programme is taking in the country. The analysis was not able to identify specific SEAH risks related to the individual programme activities due to the limited	SEAH risks identified are generic *potentia*l risks, based on evidence from other countries, or international good practice and learning. They are intended to identify areas for the programme to explore further rather than as a definitive set of risks to be addressed and actively managed.

scope of programme review, as requested by CEFAS.	
Interviews were conducted remotely which impacted on the type of organisations we were able to access.	Efforts were made to accommodate a diverse range of stakeholders. The research team remained flexible to accommodate their availability for interviews. We have been able to access the national consultant's networks in country.
There was no budget to offer reasonable accommodation for key informants who may have required additional support to participate in the interviews.	Where possible we have endeavoured to speak to Organisations of Persons with Disability (OPDs), and WROs to obtain insights into the opportunities and challenges that arise within the fisheries sector for these groups.
Potential KII participants expressed unwillingness to participate in this review due to consultation fatigue and previous experiences of extractive consultations from donors in the marine space.	We provided information on OCPP and the benefits of participation to alleviate concerns. Several interviewees refused the interview, limiting the range of perspectives we could capture.
The data collection period coincided with national elections in Belize, reducing availability of government representatives.	We focused our interviews on people with lived experiences within coastal communities.

3. Research findings

3.1. Country context

Demographic and economic context

Belize is a middle-income country, one of three mainland countries belonging to the 15 Member **States in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).** It is the only English-speaking country in Central America, and represents a link between the Caribbean and Latin/Central America. With a population of around 400,000, the country's population density increased from 35 persons per square mile in 2008 to 50 persons per square mile in 2022, presenting important implications for land-use planning, access to services and resources, and demand for local infrastructure (Statistical Institute of Belize 2022).

Bordered by Mexico on the north, Guatemala on the south and west, and the Caribbean Sea to the east, Belize experiences substantial migration, marked by both incoming and outgoing movements. The country's population is comprised of a number of ethnic groups, including Creole, Garifuna, Mopan Maya, Q'eqchi' Maya, East Indian and individuals of European, Middle Eastern and Asian descent. Garifuna mainly live on the coast but are also very present in towns and villages. (Minority Rights Group, no date)

Belize's key economic activities include both primary production (e.g., agriculture and fishing) and services, particularly tourism. Whilst agriculture, forestry and fishing together account for around 8% (Trading Economic online, 2023 data), international tourism is estimated to make up 40% of Belize's economy (International Trade Administration 2024). Oceana's (2020) report cites data from the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) suggesting that in 2019, the tourism and seafood production sectors contribution had increased to 30 percent of Belize's GDP, however, the fishery sector accounted for only 1 percent of GDP (Oceana 2020).

Despite sharp decreases in poverty levels since 2021, overall poverty rates in Belize are high with particular geographies and risk factors facing certain populations (SIB 2023). In 2023, the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) presented the results of the country's first Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) study (data from 2021).[2] According to the study, 35.7% of the population lives in multigenerational poor households. Data reveals higher levels of poverty in rural communities and among households with unemployment, low education, large households and households with children, and male heads of household. Poverty rates vary widely in Belize: in 2024, the SIB reported that "Across the districts, Toledo continued to record the highest rate of multidimensional poverty at 67.9 percent of its population, while the Belize District continued to register the lowest at 9.5 percent in September 2024."[3]

From a fairly low starting point, Belize has recently made significant strides in its journey towards gender equality. This is evidenced by the approval of the Revised 2024-2030 National Gender Policy, which aims to achieve gender equity and end discrimination against women and girls. However, in 2021 the World Economic Forum ranked Belize 90th out of 156 countries in its Global Gender Gap Report, and among Latin American and Caribbean nations, Belize ranked fourth from last. Women remain underrepresented in the workforce with higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts: women's labour force participation rate is 49.9% compared to 90.6% for men (SIB, 2024). According to the World Bank: "Low levels of female labour force participation hamper poverty reduction and contribute to a tight labour market. Women and Mayans are more likely to be self-employed and poor,

[2] The MPI measures poverty across a range of indicators under the four categories of health, education, employment and living standards.

[3] The SIB database can be consulted for more detailed information about poverty levels in the different districts of the country. On the same website, the Multi Poverty Index (2024) notes that: "Across the districts, Toledo continued to record the highest rate of multidimensional poverty at 67.9 percent of its population, while the Belize District continued to register the lowest at 9.5 percent in September 2024. When compared to one year prior, Orange Walk, Stann Creek and Corozal saw the largest declines in the incidence of poverty, with reductions of 14.8 percentage points, 13.3 percentage points, and 8.4 percentage points, respectively. On the other hand, the Toledo and Belize districts saw increases in the incidence of poverty of 10.4 and 0.8 percentage points, respectively." P 1.

indicating a structural difference in employment and poverty outcomes". Further information of marginalised groups is presented in section 3.2.

3.2. Who are the most vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged people in coastal regions / communities in Belize? (RQ1)

This section summarises key factors of exclusion or marginalisation of people living in Belize in general, as well as drilling down into the particularities of disadvantage or exclusion within Belizean coastal communities where that information is available. Where we were unable to access data focusing on coastal communities and regions specifically, it is likely that many of the groups listed as vulnerable or marginalised across Belize as a whole (e.g. people with disabilities; LGBTQI+ community; people living with HIV; migrants; youth) would likely face many of the same barriers and challenges within coastal areas as they experience nationally. In coastal communities that are remote, isolated, hard to reach or relatively traditional in their values, attitudinal and infrastructural barriers and discrimination might well be compounded – no data should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of no marginalisation.

3.2.1. Cross cutting factors of vulnerability or marginalisation in coastal context

While this section outlines key vulnerabilities by population group, it is essential to recognize that these experiences are shaped by intersectionality. This means that while women and persons with disabilities may each face distinct forms of disadvantage, it is at the intersections of these identities—such as being both female and having disabilities —where the most acute forms of marginalization can occur. Additional factors like age, ethnicity, migration status, and geographic location (e.g., rural or remote areas) can compound exclusion, creating layered and often more severe barriers to inclusion.

Key informant interviews suggest that coastal communities in general are facing challenges around insecure livelihoods, poverty, lack of access to funding/ credit, and environmental degradation, amongst other issues. Men and women of all ages are implicated in these challenges, and one KII explicitly argued that this fundamental point needs to be understood to avoid creating tensions or factions of Belizeans competing with one another. This might be an important consideration for OCPP in terms of 'do no harm' principles, as it considers how best to reach marginalised groups.

Nevertheless, within this overarching context of marginalisation, certain groups evidently experience particular challenges and dependencies that deepen their vulnerability. TASA (2024) research on the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Belize identifies factors that contribute to vulnerability (in a relatively broad sense) and marginalisation:

- **Dependence on Marine Resources:** Communities heavily reliant on fishing and tourism related to marine resources are inherently vulnerable to environmental degradation.
- **Small-Scale Fishers:** These individuals often lack access to resources, technology, and alternative livelihood options, making them particularly susceptible to changes in fish stocks and regulations.
- **Low Education Levels:** Limited education can restrict access to diverse employment opportunities, increasing dependence on traditional, resource-based livelihoods.
- **Limited Access to Capital:** Lack of financial resources hinders the ability to invest in sustainable practices or alternative income-generating activities.
- **Geographic Isolation:** Remote coastal communities may face challenges related to infrastructure, access to services, and market opportunities.
- **Engagement in seasonal work:** Income insecurity of seasonal workers is referenced in the TASA 2024 study, without going into any detail, but clearly a factor that can contribute to exclusion when combined with other characteristics. As noted earlier, women are often engaged in seasonal work due to the specific norms that determine their roles within both the fishing and tourism industries.

3.2.2. Women in coastal communities

> "The study revealed that though the women in the sector are able and willing to participate in the fisheries value chain, they need training and capacity building. Otherwise, the predominance of men in leadership positions, even in households, will continue. Only the empowerment of women can make visible their leadership skills and potential" (Fuller 2020).

Whilst on paper, all fishers in Belize, both women and men, enjoy equal rights, in practice women face multiple barriers that expose them to greater risks and preclude them from accessing their rights. According to Fuller (2020), women use similar licences and operate in the same areas, according to the country's fisheries laws. However, the same report argues that without proper attention to power and discrimination, in reality women's agency is much reduced. TASA (2024) notes that wild seafood harvesting practices continue to exclude women from participation in marine activities, negatively impacting the economic resilience of households. Evidence suggests exclusion manifests at a decision making level also: a media report (Channel 5 2024) from Belize highlights that women feel excluded from management decisions regarding fisheries, as well as decisions that impact their livelihoods (e.g. in processing value added, marketing etc). This is further supported by KII participants, who noted that women are still invisible in the marine space due to lack of decision-making power and consultation.

The lack of collateral is referenced as a specific challenge for women. Channel 5's (2024) media report highlights that women associated with the Women in Fisheries Association are seeking better access to loans and grants, opportunities to be part of social protection/ retirement scheme (e.g. credit union). Land inheritance is typically patrilineal, and women are excluded from inheriting or owning land as a result of social norms and customary practices (rather than legislation[4]). As a result, they are often denied loans or access to financial services that would allow them to invest in farming or disaster resilience measures (TASA 2024). Women in coastal communities are often forced to turn to private lenders with high-interest rates, further deepening their financial vulnerability (EnGenDER, 2021). KIIs confirmed that fishers, especially women, face significant barriers accessing loans through lending institutions because of their lack of collateral (KII 3). In addition, small grassroots organisations may not have the right 'mechanisms' to access and manage very large grants (KII 5).

Women in coastal communities are also affected by sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). A media report by Earthjournalism (2024) makes reference to corruption within the fisheries' enforcement office whereby officers are bribed by illegal foreign fishermen working without a license, deploying women to provide sexual favours to the officers in order to avoid the relevant penalties (no details are provided of the women in question such as their marital or livelihood situation), and one KII also refers to sexual violence risks facing women fishers (KII 2). The impact of climate change and the sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment challenges faced in the marine space are further discussed in section 3.4.

3.2.3. Children and youth

Children in Belize face a range of challenges that expose them to particular risk. Violence, neglect and parenting remain key areas of concern (UNICEF 2019). Children from lower-income families often face challenges in accessing education beyond the primary level (see for example IDB 2023b; Naslund-Hadley et al 2021). Children often drop out of school at the primary/ secondary transition point, many of them taking up domestic chores (especially girls) and paid work (especially boys) to support their families. Child labour is widespread – including in the fisheries sector (US Bureau of International Labour Affairs 2020[5]). Our KIIs were unable to provide more detail on this directly, other than to note that children might be involved in the

[4] For example, the 2000 Married Women's Property Act ensures that married women can acquire, hold, and dispose of property independently, just like men.

[5] From the same source: "With the exception of some work categories that allow employment at age 14, the country's minimum age for work is 12 and does not meet international standards. In addition, the country lacks prohibitions against the use of children in illicit activities and does not appear to have programs to address child labour in agriculture, fisheries, or construction". According to the National Child Labour and Policy Strategy 2022-2025, the vast majority of working children are victims of child labour, both by virtue of their age and their involvement in hazardous work.

fishing sector during the school summer holidays to boost income generation for the household.

Youth are another group that, at a national level, are considered to be facing severe challenges and marginalisation. There is widespread acknowledgment of the highly detrimental impact of high violence rates on young people, whether through direct involvement (both as perpetrators and victims/ survivors) or more indirectly as a result of the extremely high prevalence of violence in their surroundings, from domestic level as well as in the wider eco-system in which they live and move (e.g. in schools, neighbourhoods, social circles, places of work etc). UNICEF's website highlights that "countless Belizean children have been traumatised by gang violence, crime and domestic violence, losing loved ones to murder, road traffic accidents and illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and HIV/ AIDs".

Sexual exploitation of children and trafficking are also known phenomena in Belize. An ILO (2022) report provides substantial evidence that children in Belize are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. According to this report, there are documented instances where children, particularly vulnerable girls and migrant minors from neighbouring countries, are exploited through human trafficking and sexual exploitation by older men. The report underscores that sexual exploitation often occurs in tourist-heavy areas and locations associated with informal employment sectors, where regulatory oversight is limited. Again, we were not able to get any specific data or insights into particular patterns or risks facing these youth in coastal areas.

3.2.4. People with disabilities

Services for people with disabilities are limited, and many areas lack adequate accessibility. Children with disabilities may face abuse, neglect, and social stigma. While the Belize Labour Force Survey (2020) does not report labour force participation by disability status, it is likely that - like other contexts - it is lower relative to persons without disabilities or special needs. We found no data specific to persons with disabilities in coastal communities.

3.2.5. LGBTQI+ community

Despite legal advancements, the LGBTQI+ community in Belize continues to face societal challenges. Since 2016, consensual same-sex intercourse is no longer a criminal offence, and discrimination is prohibited by law. In 2018, Belize accepted international recommendations to address discrimination, violence, and hate crimes against LGBTQI+ individuals and ensure access to appropriate HIV treatment. Nevertheless, ILGA reports that laws in Belize do not offer comprehensive protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics systemic inequalities and attitudinal discrimination persist. KII data points to the total invisibilisation of this community in Belize, including within the fishing community (KII 4). We found no secondary data specific to LGBTQI+ persons in coastal communities in Belize.

Discrimination and stigma are barriers to inclusion for LGBTQI+ persons in the context of marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution. While there may be LGBTQI+ people in fishing fleets, for example, they may not feel safe to share their identity. There is very little understanding of safeguarding LBTQI+ persons in the marine space, who face high risks of violence, and LGBTQI+ protections are rarely included at the policy level (KII 4).

Due to barriers to inclusion in formal work such as discrimination and stigma, many LGBTQI+ persons engage in informal work such as sex work. A key informant who works as a social justice advocate reported that transgender persons are unable to get legal acceptance of their identity are forced to use their 'deadnames'[6] in formal work, often "having to accept substandard jobs because of stigma and discrimination" (KII 4). In coastal communities, it is common for LGBTQI+ persons to engage in sex work due to the prevalence of the tourism and hospitality industries (ibid). The social justice advocate noted that there are many concerns about the safety of LGBTQI+ persons engaging in sex work in coastal communities, as they are vulnerable to violence and there are very few health clinics that provide inclusive sexual and reproductive health services. (ibid).

3.2.6. People living with HIV

Belize has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in Central America at 1.3%, with key populations such as men who have sex with men (MSM) and young people facing heightened vulnerability (UN 2024). While new infections have declined, AIDS-related deaths have increased by 14% since 2010, particularly among men aged 20-49, highlighting gaps in early diagnosis, treatment retention, and healthcare access (ibid). Stigma, discrimination, and legal barriers continue to hinder services, particularly for marginalised groups, despite progress such as the elimination of mother-to-child transmission and decriminalisation of HIV transmission (ibid). We found no data specific to people living with HIV in coastal communities.

3.2.7. Indigenous communities – Garifuna and Maya

Maya and Garifuna indigenous communities in Belize face systemic societal exclusion, including racial stereotypes stemming from colonisation and institutional racism. A KII participant whose work focuses on indigenous communities, cultural anthropology and biodiversity reported in coastal communities in particular, indigenous Garifuna and Maya communities have inadequate education and economic resources, which contributes to their vulnerability. There have been instances whereby the "coastal lands belonging to the Garifuna people have been taken away and encroached upon for developmental reasons without just and proper

[6] The name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning (Merriam-Webster)

processes" (KII 7). Both Maya and Garifuna are consistently being excluded from access to natural resources and are forced to assimilate to mainstream culture (ibid).

3.3. How are those most dependent on Belize's marine and coastal resources at risk from future environmental degradation?

3.3.1. Who is most dependent on marine and coastal resources in Belize?

Fisher folk

Fishers rely heavily on wild seafood harvesting for their livelihood, with 84% earning their income primarily from full-time fishing (TASA 2024). Some fishers supplement their income with part-time work in tourism or other industries, with about 31% engaging in such activities. Notably, fishers tend to be older, which may affect their capacity and willingness to explore alternative employment opportunities.

Women's work in the fishing industry appears to be hidden and unrecognised, but cuts across many different areas (e.g. cleaning, preparing equipment etc). Fuller (2020) finds that women are involved in the seafood industry in Belize through harvesting molluscs (conch), crustaceans (lobster) and finfish in the intertidal zones, shallow waters and reefs for subsistence and export. In addition, women are employed in fish-processing activities; many were employed in shrimp trawling and farming before the early mortality syndrome (EMS) hit vannamei shrimp farming in Belize[7].

Women fishers

Women's levels of dependency on marine and coastal resources are exacerbated by harmful social norms and practices (TASA 2024). The TASA study found that whilst women may *also* have a range of tasks associated with domestic labour, their income tends to be heavily dependent on marine resources just like their male counterparts – but they may rely on male 'gatekeepers' to access opportunities:

"The study found that workers in the tourism industry, fishers, and household respondents have varying levels of income generation. […] the experience of generating income from the sale of seafood harvests is not equal or equitable for all despite the quantity of harvest results and the products on offer. Although given fishing licenses, women report that they may be challenged to sell their products at the going rates unless they are under the "protection" of a fisherman – spouse or male companion. This discrepancy limits women's economic independence and diminishes their earning capacities. In the FGD with women, one participant shared

[7] However, the same report also notes that only three per cent of licensed fishers are women, and that as of September 2020, there were 2,953 registered commercial fisherfolk in Belize, of whom only 72 are women.

that her income from seafood harvesting would be negatively affected if she operated independently from a fisherman." (p 49)

Women's roles within the fishing industry may be seasonal. For example, at the processing plant of the National Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd, women work as "cleaners, packers and secretaries" (Fuller 2020). This description tallies with media articles (see section 3.2.2) that point to women's frustration at the lack of opportunities in management and governance roles. In addition to women's involvement in the fishing industry, women are also involved in the hospitality trade through their responsibility for and engagement with homestays, hosting tourists visiting Belize (often for fish tours, where women may also be involved in cleaning, cooking and associated tasks) (Fuller 2020).

> "Fishing remains a male-dominated sector, and some practices continue to exclude women from the economic benefits of marine activities. The persistence of these practices is detrimental to the economic resilience of households in these communities of this study. Additionally, the seasonality of work remains a challenge for fishers and diversification initiatives with low barriers to entry are needed to address this issue". (TASA 2024 p 50)

Subsistence fishing

Subsistence fishing plays a vital role in providing a primary source of protein for many Belizeans, particularly those living along the coast. Over 50 percent of Belizeans live along the coast, and households in many of these communities rely on subsistence fishing for their primary source of protein (Oceana 2020)[8].

3.3.2. In what ways are these communities/ populations at risk from future environmental degradation?

Environmental degradation in coastal areas of Belize

Belize's marine ecosystems and coastal communities are threatened by a range of environmental challenges such as habitat degradation, extensive fishing, pollution, and the impacts of climate change. The latter includes rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and more frequent and intense storms. TASA (2024) highlights that "tourist-driven coastal development and urbanisation have also contributed to habitat losses and fragmentation, disrupting critical ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass beds. Additionally, runoff, sewage, and pollution from

[8] Oceana (2020) cites a report by Seas Around Us (SAU), estimating that "21.3 percent of fish catch in 2014 was classified as subsistence catch, which includes catch taken home for consumption and locally traded or bartered (SAU 2016)" (p 17. The same report highlights that "country-level statistics likely mask regional dynamics within Belize, wherein small-scale fishing communities are heavily reliant on seafood for food security" (p 18). We were not able to find more up to date data.

marine debris have degraded water quality, stifled coral reefs, and impacted the populations of marine life".

According to the TASA (2024) report, the major risks to those dependent on marine and coastal resources are as follows (a more detailed presentation of these risks, and their social and economic impact, is presented in Annex 2):

- **Decline in Fish Stocks**: Overfishing, habitat destruction, and climate change can lead to reduced fish populations, impacting livelihoods and food security.
- **Damage to Coastal Ecosystems**: Degradation of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds reduces their ability to support fisheries, tourism, and coastal protection.
- **Damage to coastal infrastructure, communities, and ecosystems**. Sea-level rise, increased storm intensity, ocean acidification and coastal erosion[9] pose significant threats to both communities and the natural environment.
- **Degradation of water quality and harm to marine life**: Pollution from land-based sources, including agricultural runoff and sewage, can degrade water quality and harm marine life. Karlsson et al's 2015 study of one southern Belize community finds that "Deforestation and the use of pesticides, chemicals, and nutrients associated with upstream plantations are the principle causes for depleted fish stocks, according to fishers and tour guides in the village".

Who is affected and in what ways?

The above forms of environmental degradation affect those most dependent on coastal and marine resources in a number of ways. These include risks for communities as a whole, as well as for more specific populations – for example, the gendered impacts of natural hazards and climate change in Belize are also referenced in the literature. Studies examining the differentiated impacts of climate change and natural hazards on men and women highlight the importance of acknowledging the various roles, responsibilities, and socio-cultural contexts that influence their exposure to risk. According to a study on the Gender Inequality of Climate and Disaster Risk and the Cost of Inaction (GICDR), both policy and service delivery have often failed to address these differences adequately. The GICDR study revealed that there is a lack of sector-wide policies in Belize that promote the equal participation and representation of women and men in combatting climate change and disaster risks (EnGenDER 2021). Vulnerable groups, including financially and

[9] Much of the literature on coastal erosion in Belize tends to focus on the effects on settlements and on economic and infrastructural vulnerabilities; the importance of the tourism sector means that loss of livelihoods linked to tourist overnight stays has been given most attention (Simpson et al 2012; Scott et al 2012).

legally isolated women, are often excluded from decision-making processes, which exacerbates gender inequalities in the face of climate change.

The following is a (non exhaustive) 'snapshot' of some of the ways in which coastal communities, and particular sub-sections of these populations, are affected by some of the forms of environmental degradation listed above. Unfortunately, beyond a focus on gender, the literature and our KIIs made very little reference to marginalised groups, even though it seems likely that certain groups – such as people with disabilities – would be likely to experience the impact more forcefully.

- **Loss of properties and infrastructure linked to coastal erosion affecting communities that are located in geographically vulnerable areas**. Over the past 20 years, soil erosion has grown exponentially, causing land to disappear which has impacted both landowners and public lands which have cultural significance (KII 6). Global evidence shows that infrastructure loss can be particularly challenging for people with disabilities who already face particular challenges (and costs) in navigating roads to access services, something that is exacerbated when roads and streets are flooded or blocked (see for example Human Rights Watch 2022). In Belize, people affected by climate change may become displaced[10].
- **Livelihoods implications such as reduced tourism attractiveness and thus future livelihood insecurity for those involved in tourism/fishing** (Karlsson et al 2015). Many community members in these locations may have very few alternative livelihood options to replace tourism or fishing – and KIIs repeatedly suggest that the 'alternative livelihood' concept is something that some community members consider to be the colonisation of social-cultural traditions and not something that they welcome. "Environmental degradation from habitat loss, pollution, and climate change, pose significant challenges to fishermen in Belize. Degrading marine habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves can reduce fish and biodiversity stocks, affecting fisher's catch and income" (TASA 2024).
- **The shift from agriculture to tourism, particularly arts and crafts among women and tour operations among men, has reshaped the local economy**. Although women constitute 46% of the tourism workforce along the coast (UNCTAD 2018), they are predominantly employed in lower-paying, less visible roles, while men dominate higher-paying positions such as tour guides and operators (EnGenDER 2021). Moreover, men have greater access to the necessary equipment for these high-profile activities, such as coral reef tours

[10] The International Organization for Migration worked with the Government of Belize through the NEXUS project to improve the management of internal migration caused by climate change, enhancing its capacities, evidence, and policy planning.

and sport fishing. In 2017, only 2.6% of licensed fishers in Belize were women (ibid).

- **Reduced wellbeing and loss of identity**. Beyond livelihoods, Karlsson et al (2015) highlight how coastal erosion in Belize is impacting on people's lives in other, equally profound ways. Their study of a single village in southern Belize highlights how villagers are experiencing the impacts of coastal change (linked to diverting of river water for agricultural purposes, resulting in reduction of sediment), and what the resulting risks and losses mean for the socioeconomic stability of the village. The study argues that coastal retreat and river pollution have resulted in alteration of social activities and the loss of properties and that the "the totality of impacts bear consequences to the village's continued viability, which adds uncertainty to the lives of local residents" (p 1). KIIs also link soil erosion to the loss of cultural heritage (KII 6).
- **Beach erosion, high sea levels, and over-development have wiped out turtle and crocodile nesting habitats, forcing crocodiles to nest in urban areas and changing the interactions between humans and wildlife**. High water temperatures, lack of mangroves, and lack of prey sources has caused increased attacks to pets and humans and leading to increased fear of wildlife among communities. Indigenous communities such as the Maya and the Garifuna used to revere crocodiles, but assimilation, lack of education, and lack of opportunity to preserve traditional environmental management processes has led to a loss of cultural heritage. (KII 7).
- **Water scarcity, exacerbated by rising temperatures, is another significant challenge in Belize**. The 2015-2020 Business Plan for Belize Water Services lacks a gender-inclusive strategy, despite the disproportionate burden that water collection places on women, particularly in rural areas. As freshwater resources decline, women are required to travel longer distances to collect clean water, which impacts their time, health, and livelihoods. Additionally, inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure exacerbates challenges for women and girls, particularly during menstrual cycles. Furthermore, men dominate decision-making roles in water management, resulting in gender-blind hazard-proofing strategies that fail to consider the needs and vulnerabilities of women (EnGenDER 2021).
- **The adoption of coping mechanisms linked to the socio-economic impacts of environmental degradation**. The socio-economic impacts of climate-related hazards in Belize are particularly severe for women and marginalised groups. As discussed above, women most commonly are employed in fish-processing activities or other downstream market activities. One key informant noted that "climate change has severely affected us and the way we have built a livelihood from marine space", requiring coastal communities to be adaptive (KII 1). Stakeholders have identified a range of

coping mechanisms that often involve compromising personal, familial, and economic well-being. These include engaging in sex work, withdrawing children from school, selling livestock or assets, migrating, and experiencing increased gender-based violence (GBV) (EnGenDER 2021). Such coping strategies highlight the urgent need for gender-sensitive climate and disaster risk resilience policies that address both immediate and long-term vulnerabilities.

Case Study: Climate Impacts on Seaweed Processing

There has been an increase in women participating in seaweed farming and drying processes in coastal communities in Belize, particularly in Placencia. Seaweed drying, which can be done in the home, allows women to have a reliable and flexible income balanced with family and household responsibilities. Seaweed farming has been promoted as alternative livelihoods, as it contributes to the marine ecosystem, provides oxygen, serves as a nursery for lobsters and fishes, and decreases localised ocean acidification. Seaweed has brought many economic benefits to women in coastal communities, but climate change poses a threat to this livelihood, as seaweed is temperature sensitive making it susceptible to climate change phenomena. The shift in rain patterns and heat cause some of the crop to die, requiring farms to identify strains that survived beef up that stock-supplies of climate-resistant strains. In 2024, major storms destroyed 90% of crops and damaged drying houses, which directly affected the women who rely on harvesting and drying for income. (KII 1).

3.3.3. Impact of Conservation Initiatives on Coastal Communities

While the Belize government has taken concrete action to protect the environment and biodiversity, address climate change, and reduce marine pollution, these initiatives can have an unintended negative impact on coastal and fisher communities. KII participants reported that government initiatives to ban certain types of fishing and nets or to limit fishing areas may have had a positive impact from the perspective of biodiversity and the natural environment, but have had a detrimental *livelihood or broader social impact* on coastal communities, particularly by banning or steering communities away from fishing approaches that are vital to indigenous traditional practices.

In 2020, the Belize government enacted a gillnet ban to preserve its marine ecosystems and ensure the sustainability of local fisheries. This ban, which applies to all of Belize's marine waters, prohibits the use and possession of gillnets, a fishing gear known for causing overfishing and the accidental capture of non-target species, including endangered marine life (Government of Belize Press Office). The ban is the result of a collaborative effort between the government, local stakeholders, and conservation groups, including Oceana and the Coalition for Sustainable Fisheries, and is intended to safeguard fish stocks for future generations (Oceana

2020). Through this measure, the government also supports affected fishers by offering alternative livelihoods, such as transitioning to more sustainable fishing practices. The gillnet ban is seen as a crucial step in protecting Belize's biodiversity, benefiting not only fishers but also tourism-dependent industries like fishing guides and hotel owners.

Nevertheless, while the gillnet ban has been seen as successful in the marine space, many members of coastal communities perceive it to be detrimental to their livelihoods and wellbeing (KIIs). KIIs explained that this is because the gillnet ban has had a significant financial impact on coastal communities in Belize, particularly for fishers who relied on these nets, especially during hurricane season. Many fishers used gillnets seasonally, pulling them up during storms to protect both their livelihoods and marine life. With the ban now in place, they face unpredictable weather patterns and the gamble of going out to sea with no guaranteed return. This has led to financial instability, as fishers struggle to make up for losses, especially given the difficulty in securing loans due to mistrust, particularly for women in the fishing industry. Many fishers feel that the campaign led by Oceana against gillnets, which they perceived as being disrespectful and underhanded, hurt their image and income, leaving them without the necessary support to counter the policy. The abruptness of the ban and the lack of alternatives have left some feeling unjustly treated, as gillnets were not just a tool for fishing, but a safety measure during unpredictable weather, making the policy feel even more damaging to their way of life (KII 3). Gillnets are also an ancient and traditional form of fishing particular to the indigenous communities (KII 7).

Foreign influence in Belize’s coastal communities has raised concerns, particularly in areas like Placencia, where international interest in resources like seaweed threatens local control. According to KIIs, foreigners often have greater economic power and access to funding, leaving local Belizeans, especially those with fewer educational resources, at a disadvantage. This power dynamic has made it harder for local businesses to compete and maintain their livelihoods. There is a recognition that foreign investments may lead to a loss of control over valuable marine resources. The fear is that, without proper support, Belizeans may not be able to capitalise on opportunities like the growing seaweed market, which could otherwise be an asset for local fishermen and women. The situation highlights the need for a stronger local presence in these industries to prevent foreign interests from dominating, ensuring that Belizeans retain control over their natural resources. (KII 2 and 3).

Alternative livelihood programmes in coastal communities often struggle due to the narrow rules governing grant support and lack of appropriateness of the proposed alternative livelihood. KIIs emphasised how many fishers, especially those in the south, find it difficult to access funding to support switching to alternative livelihoods, with grant applications that are complex and not tailored to their needs.

For example, fishers who rely on deep slope fishing are unable to benefit from grants due to rigid requirements, such as boat size. As one fisherwoman mentioned, “I needed equipment and I could not get it because my boat was small, I could not benefit with those types of rules” (KII 3). Furthermore, these programmes often fail to consider the cultural and traditional value of fishing livelihoods. Fishers may not be interested in alternative occupations like sewing, cooking, or building, which are often the focus of these programmes (KII 3, KII 5). As the fisherwoman pointed out, “We want to stay on the sea, not learn something else” (KII 3).

Programmes to support coastal communities should provide appropriate funding, training, and opportunities that align with the values and interests of the fishers rather than only promoting alternative livelihoods. A key informant from the Women Seaweed Farmer’s Association stated that if organisations or governments want to support fisherfolk, they should give them financial assistance to meet the standards required by regulations, such as funding for bigger engines to fish deeper at sea, rather than pushing fisherfolk into livelihoods that are not sustainable or aligned with cultural traditions. The key informant stated that forcing fisherfolk away from traditional fishing methods is “a colonial way of stomping out our traditions” (KII 5). Solutions should be found that both protect the environment and marine life as well as preserving traditions that are vital to coastal community cultures.

Although women in coastal communities are deeply involved in the fishing industry and other marine-based livelihoods, many women struggle with limited access to funding and resources that could help them adapt to changing fishing methods or weather conditions (IDB 2023a). Women are also particularly affected by rising costs, such as fuel for fishing (KII 2, KII 5), which can be a heavy financial burden, especially for those who are the primary breadwinners in their families. There is a sense of frustration that funding from NGOs and grants often does not translate into tangible support, with consultations and discussions failing to provide real, direct benefits (KII 1). Moreover, while women are increasingly leading businesses, such as dive stores, and playing crucial roles in their communities, they also face risks, including the threat of sexual harassment and abuse (KII 2). This underscores the need for a supportive environment that recognises their hard work, addresses the gender-based challenges they face, and promotes sustainable livelihoods that empower women to continue their vital work in the community. (KII 2 and 3).

Consultations for new projects, regulations, or action plans do not adequately account for the needs of women to enable meaningful participation. A KII participant who works on people-centred solutions to respond to flooding, soil erosion, and other climate related extreme events explained that while strides have been made to include women leaders in the marine space, the groups holding consultations do not account for childcare needs or pay for travel to get to the

consultation meetings. This means that in practice, while women would like to participate and have their views accounted for in consultations on new policies and regulations, they are often unable to participate due to systemic barriers. Further, while there are many female leaders in the marine conservation space in Belize, there is a gender disparity in government leadership roles, which also contributes to gaps in including women in stakeholder engagement (KII 6).

3.4. What are the key issues in terms of SEAH[11] for OCPP to be aware of in Belize that are flagged through GEDSI analysis? (RQ3)

Country specific literature on SEAH within Belize has proven challenging to find. To date there has been limited research conducted specifically on SEAH, but there is wide acknowledgment in the sector that SEAH in Belize is likely very common yet goes underreported. It is important to note that just because there is little prevalence data available does not mean that this form of harm does not exist.

3.4.1. Legislation and policy regarding GBV and SEAH

Belize has made strides in addressing GBV and sexual exploitation through legislative and policy frameworks. The country has enacted laws such as the Domestic Violence Act, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, and the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, which strengthen protections against abuse, trafficking, and sexual offenses. Additionally, Belize is a signatory to international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, reinforcing its commitment to gender equality and anti-violence measures. See Annex 3 for more details.

Despite these legal provisions, challenges remain in implementation due to limited resources, social stigma, and gaps in law enforcement. GBV and sexual exploitation persist, with women and marginalised groups being most affected. Efforts such as the National Gender-Based Violence Action Plan and collaborations with civil society aim to improve prevention, support services, and legal enforcement. However, systemic barriers, including underreporting, inadequate victim/ survivor protection, and cultural norms, hinder progress. (Caribbean Regional Fishing Mechanisms, 2020; KII 2). See Annex 2 for more details.

3.4.2. SEAH risks

There are several key factors contributing to the risk of SEAH in Belize, including power imbalances, gender inequality, and economic stress. Both literature and KIIs (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, 2020; KII 2 and 3) describe unequal power dynamics within communities, such as those between government bodies, NGOs, and local stakeholders like tourism operators/ resort managers, creating opportunities for exploitation and abuse. Traditional gender roles

[11] See section 1 for definition of SEAH and safeguarding.

restrict women's access to resources, decision-making, and alternative livelihoods, as outlined above, making them more vulnerable to SEAH. One KII described how economic stress, driven by environmental degradation and loss of income, can exacerbate social tensions and increases the risk of abuse.

Domestic violence is prevalent, compounded by barriers to accessing support—survivors often face difficulties in reporting abuse due to stigma, lack of confidentiality, and the threat of retaliation from abusers. This is particularly problematic in tight-knit communities, where gossip and social scrutiny further isolate survivors. In fishing communities, women face added pressure from gendered expectations, with failure to meet traditional roles often resulting in abuse. These factors converge to create a climate of fear and silence, where SEAH is likely to remain underreported and unaddressed. (ibid, KII 2 and 3)

These challenges are particularly difficult in southern coastal communities, where there are no shelters or support available for women who experience domestic abuse (KII 2). While there has been some improvement in police response, the police often get frustrated when they investigate concerns, but victims/ survivors go back to abusers due to lack of other options (KII 2). While there are regulations and laws against GBV and sexual harassment, it is difficult to enforce.

The tourism industry also has instances of sexual harassment, but due to the power and standing resorts have in coastal communities, it often goes unaddressed (KII 2). One KII participant cited a case where a tour guide was investigated for sexual harassment. The Belize Tourism Board suspended his permit to work, but he is still operating as there is little enforcement. The KII participant also provided an example of a tourist resort in a coastal community that is known for "being untouchable for sexual harassment," even after multiple female staff came forward with complaints of being touched inappropriately. Local residents around the resort know not to work there, which has meant that most of the staff at the resort are migrants who are vulnerable and often unable to speak out against abuses (ibid).

Women in fishing communities often face a range of social stigmas that increase their vulnerability to violence. Research participants have reported that women who participate in fishing activities are frequently subjected to discriminatory attitudes. This includes gossip from both women and men on shore, with assumptions that women are onboard vessels for sexual purposes or that they are neglecting their children by choosing to work at sea. Such discriminatory practices can lead to significant social stigma, causing emotional distress and tension in household relationships, which may escalate into intimate partner violence (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, 2020). A KII participant reported that men make sexual comments about fisherwomen on fishing boats, but women are often unable to report the sexual harassment due to fear of retaliation or being labelled as a troublemaker (KII 5).

Complications can also arise for women who remain on land. In these cases, they may become targets of harmful rumours regarding potential extramarital affairs while their husbands are away fishing. This kind of social scrutiny not only damages personal reputations but also places additional stress on intimate partner relationships, which can lead to violence (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, 2020). Several stakeholders have also highlighted instances of GBV associated with alcohol consumption among male fishers, and women near fish landing sites are frequently subjected to verbal and sexual harassment (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, 2020).

Women also face real risks of SEAH while at sea. Due to limitations on where fishing is allowed, fishers are forced to fish further out at sea, which puts them at greater risk of violence from pirates. Two KIIs (2 and 3) reported risk of violence at sea – for example, a female boat captain reported that her boat has been followed by pirates at sea, presenting a significant risk of sexual assault (KII 2). As previously referenced in this report, there is also evidence of sexual exploitation linked to corruption within the fisheries governance structures (Earthjournalism 2024).

This illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of GBV violence in fishing communities, driven by unreliable access to resources, strict gender divisions, harmful social norms, and the economic vulnerabilities faced by women. These factors converge to create environments where women's safety and wellbeing are compromised.

3.5. Who are the key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why? What work is already going on to address poverty and vulnerability and empower groups across OCPP areas (those interacting or dealing with pollution, seafood and biodiversity loss)? What lessons can be learned from this? (RQ5)

3.5.1. Stakeholder mapping

The table below highlights some key organisations engaged on GEDSI issues in the marine space – but is not comprehensive. Aware that OCPP has already undertaken a Belize stakeholder mapping that covers the broad range of organisations and agencies working in the marine space, the table below highlights only those stakeholders working in the marine space with particular interest, engagement or relevance for GEDSI issues. Different types of stakeholders offer different opportunities for partnership or engagement[12] - as OCPP's future direction

[12] For example, TASA (2024) report, key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI include: Community Leaders (to promote awareness and address social norms that contribute to inequality and vulnerability); Women's Groups (to ensure that women's voices are heard and their needs are addressed in marine resource management); Fisheries Cooperatives (to promote equitable access to

becomes clear, the list may be helpful in both scoping as well as delivery of any interventions.

The table loosely groups stakeholders into categories, but noting that an organisation may fall into more than one category. The categories we have used for OCPP ease are:

- **Associations and Cooperatives** encompass various organised groups that may have an interest in the OCPP's activities and target groups, including vulnerable populations like women, youth and members of indigenous communities etc. These organisations may thus be considered potential beneficiaries of the Programme.
- **Support Organisations** are key drivers of value chains within the fisheries/marine sector; they play a crucial role in processing, distributing, trading, and marketing products.
- **Conservation Support Organisation** are key drivers in the preservation of marine biodiversity via programmes geared towards conservation and livelihood restoration.
- **Institutions** comprise formal (often but not exclusively governmental) organisations directly connected to the Programme, including ministries, coastal zone management, port authorities, tourism, and both public and private maritime transport.
- **Social Partners** are entities who are closely linked to various other stakeholder groups, and relevant for their ability to conduct socio-economic studies and / or support livelihood strategies for coastal communities.

resources and opportunities for all members; tourism Operators (to implement responsible tourism practices that benefit local communities and minimise social and environmental impacts; MPA Management Authorities (to integrate GEDSI considerations into MPA management plans and activities); NGOs (to support community-based initiatives that address poverty, vulnerability, and gender inequality).

Stakeholder	Description	Rationale for Engagement/ Ongoing work on GEDSI
Associations and Cooperatives		
National Garifuna Council	The NGC focuses on preserving the Garifuna culture through its language, music, food, dances, crafts, art and rituals as well as generating economic development for Garinagu.13 Another objective is to seek education and training opportunities for Garinagu, especially youth. One of the main activities is to initiate projects that will strengthen the Garifuna culture while improving the living conditions of Garinagu.	The Garinagu people are identified as an indigenous ethnic group in Belize, they occupy much of the southern coastal communities where there are deep socio-cultural and livelihood ties to the marine space. Important to capture their unique positionality as they navigate their survival amidst climate change, environmental degradation and birth of “alternative livelihoods”
Belize Federation of Fishers	The Belize Federation of Fishers (BFF) is a non-profit organisation of and for all commercial fishers.	This group encompasses a wide range of fishing associations in Belize. Representatives can provide insight into unique socio-economic challenges fishers now face in an effort to compete and generate steady income.
Women in Maritime Association- Belize Chapter	The Women in Maritime Association Caribbean (WiMAC), is a regional group of female maritime professionals committed to increasing the performance, participation and contribution of women in the maritime sector.	Women belonging to this association provide a fresh perspective of navigating professional/technical marine workspace dominated by men accompanied by unique solutions for equitable participation

13 Garifuna in plural is Garinagu.

Women in Fisheries Association	Association was formed to create an equitable and active space for women to share their concerns and issues regarding the fisheries sector.	Newly formed women led association, they propose to be active participants in consultations to raise awareness of concerns relating to women in fisheries.
Conservation organisations		
Wildlife Conservation Society- Belize	WCS has long been at the forefront of marine conservation in Belize with a history of providing technical and scientific support since 1981 The whole idea started in that women wanted this space for them to be able to share their concerns and their issues regarding a sector that they're not fully recognised in as being an active participant	Organisation has led many efforts in marine conservation and can provide a historical timeline to trends and patterns of GEDSI in the marine space.
International Institute for Sustainable Development	Canada-based organisation dealing with climate-change issues	Reports suggest that the I.I.S.D. has an innovation fund supporting different women group and underrepresented groups with funds for nature-based solutions for adaptation project that they have within their communities
Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association (TASA)	TASA oversees the day-to-day management of the Turneffe Atoll plays a critical role in implementing sustainable management practices, enforcing conservation laws, and advocating for policies that support the long-term health and vitality of the marine reserve.	While TASA's programs primarily centre on environmental stewardship, they also incorporate elements that promote social inclusion within local communities. Their 2024 report on the *Socioeconomic Baseline Assessment of Coastal Communities Dependent on Five Marine Protected Areas in Belize*. (see reference list) includes important data, and could be a very

		useful data source for OCPP to further interrogate.
Fragments of Hope	Fragments of Hope is a not-for-profit community-based organisation registered in 2013 in Placencia Village, Belize. Focusing primarily on the challenge of coral reef restoration and advocacy for the sustainable management of associated habitats, FoH is a partner with the Belize Fisheries Department, Healthy Reefs Initiative, the Smithsonian Institute and a member of the newly formed regional Coral Restoration Coalition.	As explained in interviews, key documents have been produced by members of FOH concerning community engagement and nature-based solutions to climate change. Engaging with key members can lead to important context pertaining community engagement in coastal communities
Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)	TIDE has grown to manage four Protected Areas and employs over 35 full time staff and many community stakeholders. TIDE hopes to advance community participation in conservation for the benefit of all Belizeans and the region. Currently manages 3 marine reserves and has two marine related projects.	TIDE has a number of Education and Outreach Programmes that may be of interest to OCPP, e.g. engaging youth through summer camps and conservation competitions, providing scholarships and educational opportunities. These initiatives aim to empower young individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering community stewardship and reducing pressure on natural resources.
Southern Environmental Association	SEA is a non-governmental organisation, developed when two longstanding conservation organisations, Friends of Nature (FON) and the Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE). SEA comanaged two important marine protected areas in southern Belize: Gladden Spit & Silk Cayes Marine	They have an Education & Outreach Programme which is tasked to keep stakeholder update with relevant information about the marine protected areas, fisherfolk focus groups etc. This can prove useful in collaborating to organise fisherfolks in southern Belize.

	Reserve (GSSCMR) and Laughing Bird Caye National Park (LBCNP).	
Crocodile Research Coalition	Seeks to preserve crocodiles and their environments throughout Central America and the Caribbean to ensure the long-term sustainability of biodiversity in the region.	CRC works with indigenous communities to re-establish the balance of humans and nature. The organisation highlights the importance of creating enabling environments for indigenous groups to be gatekeepers and natural resource managers. Can provide key information for social inclusion.
Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development	A non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to promoting the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, ensuring their benefits for present and future generations. SACD operates from Sarteneja, a traditional fishing village situated in the Corozal District of northeastern Belize. As the co-management partner for the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS), SACD collaborates closely with the Forestry Department, actively participating in the preservation and management of this vital ecosystem.	They engage and educate stakeholders on the importance of conservation and the impact they can make. Could be a valuable stakeholder for outreach in Northern coastal communities – no particular gender focus, however. Collaborate with the Northern Maya Association who also occupy Sarteneja village (fishing village) as they navigate their survival amidst issues relating to climatic shocks and “Alternative livelihoods”
Wildtracks	**Wildtracks Belize** is a well-established conservation organisation dedicated to protecting and rehabilitating endangered species, particularly manatees and primates. Wildtracks has an established and collaborative relationship with Belize's Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries Dept. Over the past	The organisation embraces multi-sectoral, participatory input from stakeholders in identifying solutions to balance conservation and sustainable development. By involving diverse community members in conservation planning and decision-making processes, Wildtracks ensures that the needs and perspectives of all groups are

	three decades, Wildtracks has worked closely with the Fisheries Department to develop the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Atlas. This resource serves as a tool for government decision-makers, tour guides, and fishers to enhance awareness and understanding of marine conservation efforts.	considered, fostering social inclusion. This approach might be interesting for OCPP to explore, given tensions experienced by other initiatives in combining biodiversity and community development objectives.
Support Organisations		
Belize Women's Seaweed Farmers Association	Building an equitable Belizean Seaweed Mariculture Industry through farming and value adding	Belize Women's Seaweed Farmers Association has a unique outlook on intricacies of value adding marine products highlighting issues of social inclusion with possible solutions.
Belize Blue Nutrients	Belize Blue Nutrients is a company that develops value-added products from sustainably produced, ocean-based crops such as seaweed. Their products, including artisanal Belizean sea moss, are designed to offer natural and plant-based nutrition for optimal absorption	A key organisation in understanding what and how social inclusion can look like in marine value adding businesses. Seaweed processing is an area where women are well represented.
Ikooma	A company that develops hairstyling products from sustainably produced seaweed.	Local company that sources seaweed from Women's Seaweed Farmers Association. Can offer useful insights into financial inclusion for women and other marginalised groups.
Social Partners		
Oceana	OCEANA is an international organisation which has been working in ocean conservation. In Belize, they have led campaigns to ban gill nets, single use plastics, bottom trawling and offshore	There is widespread discontent among coastal communities regarding Oceana's initiation of fishing moratoriums and restrictions without proper consultation. Gathering more information

	oil exploration. Much of its work is to advocate for science-based fishery management and restoring the world's oceans.	from Oceana regarding methodologies and follow up processes when engaging stakeholders could yield important lessons for OCPP about navigating environmental and social interests.
World Wildlife Fund	WWF collaborates with local communities to conserve the natural resources they depend on and build a future in which people and nature thrive. Together with partners at all levels, they transform markets and policies toward sustainability, tackle the threats driving the climate crisis, and protect and restore wildlife and their habitats.	They have an ongoing project Resilient Bold Belize. Which aims to secure the long-term conservation and resilience of Belize´s marine and coastal ecosystems, promoting nature-based livelihoods and the wellbeing of Belizeans They are in possession of key documents relating to socio-economic profiles, livelihood and Gender assessments done in coastal communities across the country.
MAR Alliance	MAR Alliance has 24 years of experience working with large fish, turtles, fisheries, and the tourism sector in Belize. They have a "multi-pronged approach" to big fish conservation that integrates fisheries-dependent and independent research, tourism, outreach and education, capacity building, and policy support.	MAR Alliance can provide general context of socio-economic conditions of coastal communities. The organisation actively promotes gender equality and social inclusion through various initiatives: for example: Women-Led Team: MarAlliance boasts a women-led team, exemplifying the transformative power of inclusion in research and conservation efforts. Empowering Women in Conservation: The organisation emphasises the vital role of women in conservation and economic diversification. For instance, they highlight how indigenous women's participation can lead to innovative approaches to conservation and sustainable livelihoods, as demonstrated in the Guna Yala community.

Humana People to People BZE	Organisation implements community development projects that empower families and communities to reduce poverty through local actions. They are currently the social partner for a collaboration between WWF and SEA to develop socio-economic community profiles, stakeholder mapping and alternative livelihood for 7 coastal communities in Southern Belize.	Currently undertaking research to build socio-economic community profiles for traditional fishing coastal communities. This information can shed light on gaps in understanding the gendered impacts of climate change, such as how women and other marginalised groups are disproportionately affected by environmental changes, economic opportunities and decision-making processes.
Institutions		
Belize Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI)	The CZMAI is leading the sustainable use and planned development of Belize's coastal resources through increased knowledge and building of alliances for the benefit of all Belizeans and the global community.	In collaboration with the Fisheries Department, CZMAI developed a Gender Responsive Engagement Strategy and Action Plan. This plan aims to ensure inclusive climate change adaptation planning by integrating traditionally underrepresented groups into decision-making processes and the implementation of adaptation actions. Also, as part of the "Promoting Sustainable Growth in the Blue Economy" initiative, CZMAI participated in a Gender and Diversity Assessment. This assessment aimed to integrate gender considerations into coastal and fisheries sector programs, ensuring that women and marginalised groups have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation	The Ministry of Blue Economy aims to increase Belize's gross domestic product through a thriving Blue Economy development pathway. The Ministry is the key collaborating agency in the marine space. Specifically, the Fisheries Department plays a crucial role in managing Belize's marine resources, including overseeing marine protected areas and implementing sustainable fisheries practices.	Specifically on GEDSI, the Ministry actively promotes gender equality and social inclusion through various initiatives. • In August 2022, the **Fisheries Department,** in collaboration with the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI), developed a Gender-Responsive Engagement Strategy and Action Plan. This initiative was part of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) readiness project titled "Enhancing Adaptation Planning and Increasing Climate Resilience in Belize's Coastal Zone and Fisheries Sector." The strategy aimed to: Conduct a gender analysis to identify and analyse gender issues relevant to the fisheries and coastal zone program; Develop a gender strategy and action plan; Establish a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation framework. • **Gender Training Workshops:** Supported by the Inter-American Development Bank and Compete Caribbean, the Ministry conducted gender training workshops for its staff. These workshops facilitated discussions on gender analysis within the blue economy.

		• **National Climate Change Gender Action Plan (NCCGAP) 2022-2027:** the Ministry contributed to the development of the NCCGAP, aiming to foster policy coherence on gender equality & social inclusion across government agencies. • **Climate Resilience Forum:** In 2024, the Ministry hosted a two-day Climate Resilience Forum, including panel discussions on the role of vulnerable groups and women's participation in the blue economy sector. This event aimed to raise awareness of the environmental and social impacts of climate change There are a range of entry points OCPP could use to engage in discussions on GEDSI with this critical stakeholder.
Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA)	BTIA is the leading national private sector tourism association, representing a unified voice which advocates for issues that benefit its members, influences tourism policy, legislation and marketing for the sustainable development of the industry and improved quality	The National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan states that our marine and barrier reef system is one of our major categories of assets. Climate change, littering and pollution, destructive tourism development and overfishing have devastating effects on our marine resources and tourism product. Can provide key information relating to the importance of integrating environmental considerations into sustainable tourism planning.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)	From 2019- 2022, worked with the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO), within the Belizean Government, on the NEXUS project. The objective of the NEXUS project is to improve the management of internal migration caused by climate change. The project focused on capacity building, evidence, and policy planning.	Displaced coastal communities are highly vulnerable, and thus an important group to consider when thinking about the OCPP GEDSI lens. Whilst information about the project impact was not accessible, IOM could be well placed to advise OCPP regarding displacement risks, and who in particular is at risk.

3.5.2. Lessons and implications

The lessons presented here, and associated implications for OCPP, relate to what can be learnt from the engagement of different organisations in the environmental or marine sector. Lessons are drawn from both literature and KIIs, representing views expressed by community members themselves as well as from organisations working on marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood, pollution and/ or social inclusion. These lessons highlight the need for local empowerment, equitable access to resources, support for marginalised groups, and attention to safety and social inclusion.

The importance of approaches that empower local communities and ensure resource control. Foreign interests in marine resources, particularly in sectors like seaweed, pose a threat to local livelihoods. Foreign businesses often have more access to funding and resources, leaving local fishers and small business owners at a disadvantage. Policies that protect local communities' control over their resources should be prioritised, including providing training, funding, and technical support to help local entrepreneurs, especially women, compete effectively. Ensuring that marine resources remain in local hands will reduce the vulnerability of Belizeans to economic displacement and will promote the long-term sustainability of these resources.

Technical programming needs to integrate a focus on social exclusion and gender equality to avoid causing harm and exacerbating exclusion. Social exclusion in coastal areas is particularly evident among women and marginalised groups, who often face barriers such as limited access to funding, socio-cultural perceptions, and gender-based discrimination. For instance, women in the fishing industry are often overlooked, with their contributions underestimated and their access to cooperative membership restricted. Inclusive programmes should promote gender equality by recognising women as equal participants in marine industries, supporting their leadership roles, and ensuring access to resources and funding. Achieving change will also require challenging cultural norms and institutional barriers that limit women’s full participation in the marine sector.

Programme design needs to carefully consider the barriers that marginalised groups face in accessing funding and support services: Access to grants and financial resources remains a significant barrier for many fishers, particularly those in southern Belize. Fishermen and women often struggle with navigating complex grant applications and face strict eligibility requirements that do not align with their needs. To overcome these challenges, programmes should simplify access to financial support for local fishers, ensuring that the programmes are tailored to the realities of the communities they serve. This includes offering grants that directly support marine-based livelihoods and ensuring that women and marginalised groups have the tools to succeed in these industries.

Safety remains a key concern for both men and women in Belize's coastal industries. Coastal workers, including those in marine tourism and fishing, face risks like piracy and workplace harassment, yet safety measures and legal protections are often inadequate. Improving safety measures at sea, including better monitoring by the Coast Guard and increased patrols to deter piracy should be prioritised. Projects working with coastal communities and fisherfolk should include awareness raising on protection from SEAH (PSEAH) and sexual harassment.

Any livelihood diversification initiatives must be aligned with the interests and needs of the community, while ensuring that women have equal access to funding and resources. As climate change continues to disrupt marine industries, there is a growing need for alternative or agile livelihoods, as well as adaptations that can support people within their traditional livelihoods. Coastal communities, especially women who serve as breadwinners, often struggle with financial instability due to unpredictable weather patterns and changes in fishing methods. Programmes should focus on diversifying livelihoods by offering training in other sustainable sectors, such as eco-tourism, aquaculture, or sustainable harvesting practices. However, it is essential to recognise that many fishers, especially women, are not interested in alternative livelihoods like crafts or cooking—they want support to continue their work on the sea.

The lack of collaboration between NGOs, government agencies, and local communities, especially in the context of the gillnet ban, has led to frustration and a breakdown in trust. Community members feel marginalised from the decision-making process, and their voices silenced. To ensure community buy in and increase positive social impact, programming or interventions must work with a wide range of stakeholders, such as the Belize Federation of Fishers, WCS, and other local organisations, to design policies that are inclusive and fair. Additionally, programmes should take a holistic approach to marine management, addressing the concerns of all stakeholders, and avoiding top-down policies that fail to consider local knowledge and expertise.

An understanding of GBV should be built into the design and scoping phase of any programme or intervention, which will enable integration of GBV prevention and response mechanisms. GBV and harassment continue to be significant issues in coastal communities. Women, in particular, face not only domestic abuse but also threats of sexual assault in the workplace and at sea. Ensuring that there are adequate support services for victims/ survivors, such as safe shelters and legal protection, is important. Additionally, organisations and programmes should aim to reduce the tolerance for violence in these close-knit communities by fostering (and role modelling) a culture of respect and accountability.

Organisations in the sector should work together to share findings to avoid unnecessary or duplicative research (ensuring that consent forms are suitably

adapted). Research fatigue appears widespread. At present, communities feel that consultation results in no tangible benefits, leading to widespread frustration. Consultation remains essential, but needs to be meaningful, with feedback loops properly built in so that people can clearly see how the consultation is making a difference.

3.6. What data is available in-country that can be used for GEDSI analysis and what are the data gaps? (RQ6)

Prioritising the collection, analysis, and sharing of disaggregated data is crucial for highlighting the challenges, priorities, and perspectives of women and girls, indigenous people, migrant groups, youth and people with disabilities living in coastal communities. This data is relevant for all three area of OCPP focus – pollution, seafood, and biodiversity. Our study found that both literature and primary data tended to merge these three areas together in discussions around GEDSI – there is inadequate data to disaggregate according to each of the sectors – with pollution the least considered of the three.

In the context of fisheries, gathering socioeconomic data broken down by gender can help identify, monitor, evaluate, and address the impacts—both positive and negative—that policies, projects, and initiatives may have on women, men, and youth. Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of the fisheries sector, including the number of people involved at every stage of the value chain, helps maximise available human resources by recognising that everyone plays a role in creating innovative solutions. For instance, collecting data on fishers and fisherfolk beyond just harvesters and including all stages of the value chain in fisheries surveys or censuses provides a more complete picture of the sector. This includes data on those who supply inputs, process, and market catches. It also reveals the multiple roles one person may have in the value chain—for example, a boat owner or worker may also engage in processing and selling the “catch”, but they are often only listed as owners, leading to inaccurate data about other roles.

The lack of data has a negative impact on marginalised people in coastal communities. For example, surveys and censuses carried out by Fisheries department currently exclude processors and vendors as fishers or fail to update the data, which affects the ability of fisherfolk (especially women) to access services like finances, resources, and other general support available to registered fishers. The omission of processors and vendors in data collection, or the lack of updated information, reinforces the marginalisation of their work—often performed by women and other disadvantaged groups—in sector assessments and evaluations. Furthermore, not collecting socioeconomic data on registered fishers (harvesters) limits understanding of the broader factors influencing their work within households, coastal communities, and the industry.

Along with collecting disaggregated socioeconomic data in fisheries, it is important to understand how social and cultural norms affect the opportunities, resources, and services available to the marginalised groups in the sector. This knowledge helps design policies, projects, and initiatives that address the specific needs and priorities of Belizean Coastal Communities while ensuring that practices are culturally relevant and sensitive enough to address social issues that could serve as barriers to equitable outcomes. Without data on how and why both women and men across different ages, races, ethnicities, and abilities use or benefit from resources of specific coastal communities, efforts to mitigate the negative effects of restricted access may unintentionally have a disproportionate impact on specific marginalised groups.

Examples of specific (quantitative and qualitative) data gaps that our study identified are as follows. In each case, we found a lack of disaggregation according to disability, age, migrant status, indigenous or other ethnicity, so these should be taken as universally applicable gaps to the below. Gender was the single characteristic that received any attention in the data, whether official data sources or in the KIIs.

- Lack of data about how different groups (as listed above) are involved in the formal or informal labour markets within fishing, fish processing, and trade.
- Information on the income generated from various fishery activities across the value chain.
- Inadequate information on alternative livelihood options adopted by individuals in coastal communities.
- Lack of information on division of labour within the fisheries workforce, communities, and households, including both paid and unpaid work such as household maintenance and caregiving for children and the elderly.
- Gender-specific issues and the impacts of climate change on the fisheries workforce and households, with a focus on the adaptability and resilience of those working in the sector.
- Information about how any of the above listed groups are specifically affected by environmental degradation.

The table below sets out several relevant data sources on GEDSI that may be of help to OCPP. These are the *in-country* data sources, that can be supplemented by global datasets and indicators such as Human Development Reports (UNDP), Country Profiles in the Gender and climate tracker, Country Rankings in the ND-GAIN Country Index rankings, etc. We have also included two IDB studies that, although they do not represent important data sources per se, can be considered as useful analyses of some of the SIB's data.

Source	Available Data	Data gaps
Statistical Unit of Belize	Census 2022 – includes data points on migration, disability, marital status etc. Multidimensional Poverty Index Labour Force Survey (unemployment, underemployment, working age population, employment rate, labour force participation rates by district, age, sex, potential labour force rates) SIB Labour Force Survey Dashboard The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey captures basic demographic information, household characteristics, literacy and educational attainment, sanitation and hygiene products, attitudes towards, gender equality, domestic violence, access to healthcare, safety, child development, HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour and access to technology.	Lack of detailed data on wage gaps between men and women particularly in informal sectors, gaps in data regarding gender identity beyond binary. Insufficient data on Socio-economic profiles on coastal communities. MICS 7 data has not yet been processed
Ministry of Education, BEMIS	Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025, and the underpinning education data sets. Employability study. Includes: completion/transition rates, truancy rates, participation rate in labour force by education level and gender, employment rate by education level and gender, unemployment	Insufficient data on differences in access to education and skills training especially in rural and remote areas of Belize, Data gaps on the impact of gender norms on educational choices especially those related to industries such as fisheries, agriculture, STEM Insufficient data/tracking mechanisms on vulnerable groups:

	rate by education level and gender, average monthly income by education level and gender, average monthly income by education level and industry	Indigenous communities, Children with special education needs and Migrants
Ministry of Health /PAHO/ IDB	Belize Family Health Survey - Covers gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, HIV, family planning, and access to health services. Intersection of health, gender, and inclusion; also includes rural vs urban breakdowns.	
Belize Crime Observatory	Gender Based Violence Reports	Insufficient/lack of data including sexual harassment and trafficking, insufficient data on the intersectionality of GBV (how it affects individuals based on race, class, sexual orientation, disability etc.)
National Women's Commission	Range of data is available, including on Gender-Based Research and Statistics Policy briefs and baseline data on women's economic participation, education, and violence prevention. Gender-specific; some focus on rural/indigenous women and socio-economic challenges.	
National AIDS Commission	Situation analysis and progress reports.	

	Quantitative data on HIV prevalence, testing, access to services among key populations (LGBTQ+, youth, rural). Inclusion-focused, often covers vulnerable and marginalised groups.	
IDB (2023c)	Gender and Diversity Assessment: promoting Sustainable Growth in the Blue Economy. An analysis by ethnicity that includes a relatively small amount of new primary qualitative data, as well as making use of existing quantitative data from SIB. The analysis identifies and quantifies primary barriers that youth, women, indigenous people, and afro descendants may face in terms of economic development in the marine fishery sector and proposes gender and diversity responsive interventions for improving and optimising value chain benefits and opportunities to women and diverse populations	Improved need for national level data collection to develop gender sensitive fisheries and policies and programmes Insufficient, reliable data on experiences of other marginalised groups in the fisheries sector beyond the binary Lack of gender disaggregated datasets that consider women's participation across fisheries value chain Lack of evidence on women's engagement in small-scale fisheries governance policies and gender dimensions in climate adaptation and associated livelihood interventions Lack of data in Gendered adaptation to climate shocks and stressors
IDB (2020)	Skills to shape the future: employability in Belize – uses census and labour force data, examines women's skills and skill gaps.	Not explicitly focused on marine / coastal sector, but a useful GEDSI lens that can be a foundation for considering women's skills and employability in the marine sector.

Belize Fisheries Department or at the Ministry of Blue Economy & Marine Conservation.	–	The data provided does not facilitate disaggregate data by ethnicity, details on license or any additional insights into expertise, types of fishing. Quantitative studies on pre-post-harvest fisheries sector Type and number of traditional fish processing technologies vs improved technologies in use by men and women fish processors Need for a management framework for locally consumed fisheries

4. Conclusions

The evidence base for this report was patchy, illustrating the general invisibility of marginalised groups from initiatives in the sector. The majority of the literature was found in relation to the fishing industry rather than marine pollution or biodiversity. Both the GEDSI-focused literature and our primary data place emphasis on women in particular, with only occasional reference to other marginalised groups such as indigenous groups, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, children and youth, and the LGBTQ+ community. Little work has been done to understand how marginalised people are being affected by environmental degradation in coastal communities, and our (relatively light touch) primary data collection suggests there may be little in the way of programming or interventions that explicitly aim to involve the voices of these groups – and indeed those of women - in consultation, design, delivery or monitoring.

Coastal communities face widespread economic and environmental challenges, but women experience compounded barriers that heighten their risks and limit their rights, while other marginalised groups receive less focus in research and data. Our research found that coastal communities in general are facing challenges around insecure livelihoods, poverty, lack of access to funding/ credit, and environmental degradation, amongst other issues. However, within this overarching context of marginalisation, women face multiple barriers that expose them to greater risks and preclude them from accessing their rights. Without explicit and intentional efforts to promote inclusive consultation and engagement, the institutional barriers facing these groups – both social norms and behaviours as well as access to finance and policy making spaces – will perpetuate exclusion.

Fisher communities are most reliant on marine and coastal resources, whose degradation affects both men and women. Although men are heavily involved in fishing, the position of women within the sector is made more insecure due to their reliance on male counterparts. Livelihoods, culture and wellbeing, safety, housing, water scarcity and harmful coping mechanisms are all affected by environmental degradation. Conservation initiatives have been controversial in some instances, where consultation has been lacking and communities – especially those most dependent on marine or coastal resources - have experienced negative impacts.

Although evidence on SEAH in Belize is lacking, our research suggests that power imbalances, gender inequality, and economic stress are all linked to different types of GBV evident in these communities and related places of work. For example, there is some evidence that the sexual harassment is a known phenomenon in both the fisheries sector and tourism industry, but due to the power and standing resorts have in coastal communities, it often goes unaddressed. Women in fishing communities often face a range of social stigmas that increase their vulnerability to violence.

A wide range of stakeholders are already working in the "GEDSI and environment" space, presenting a valuable set of partnership options. These organisations are in some cases working explicitly on a GEDSI mandate (such as cultural associations or women's rights groups), but in most cases they are working to a conservation, business or regulatory mandate, and are exploring ways in which they can promote more equitable and inclusive ways of working. The knowledge, experience, data (albeit limited), networks, legitimacy and infrastructure (broadly understood) that these organisations hold could be a tremendous asset on which the next phase of OCPP could build.

The inadequacy of available data to provide a disaggregated picture of the ways in which environmental degradation is affecting different groups is a barrier to inclusive programming. Gender inequality has been considered in some studies, but not in a way that is holistic and intersectional, nor across the different areas of OCPP interest. As the Blue economy continues to change it is also influenced by factors such as demographic shifts, changing gender roles, technological advancements, and ecosystem changes—including climate change and the recent shocks of COVID-19 pandemic—understanding the socioeconomic factors driving or impacted by these changes is vital, which will require an investment in both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Such an investment would help programming options to enhance effectiveness and accessibility in the short term, as well as support the sustainable and inclusive management of marine and coastal resources in the longer term.

5. Recommendations

This section sets out recommendations for OCPP to consider within both its current and future programming to ensure a robust embedded GEDSI approach. The recommendations were discussed in a workshop with the OCPP stakeholders on 14 April 2025. Note that the lessons presented in section 3.5.2, with associated policy implications, may also be considered as part of the Belize-specific programming *considerations.* We note that, without knowing what OCPP partners have planned for the next phase of programming in Belize, it is not possible to provide very tailored recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Demonstrate a strong commitment to GEDSI within the OCPP

- **Consider steering committees and reference groups for ongoing dialogue and consultation** that consists of a cross-section of stakeholders from the small-scale fisheries communities, with a sufficient representation of CSOs including associations, WROs, OPDs and GBV providers. The research has shown that there must be a concerted effort to ensure representation of women in these groups. Simply engaging small fishing associations alone does not assure adequate representation of women, this

must be an internal process where systemic barriers are removed to support meaningful participation of women. Do not underestimate the importance of engaging men in GEDSI discussions.

- **Recognising that trust between communities and external stakeholders may have been damaged** (e.g. through the gillnet policy), ensure consultations with communities are inclusive and meaningful, with proper feedback loops to ensure people know how their inputs are integrated.
- **Engage local authorities** to explore ways of enabling women's access to administrative processes for activities such as obtaining fishing permits.
- For new projects, **ensure gender mainstreaming at project design stage** to ensure there is sufficient budget to resource GEDSI activities across the programme life cycle.
- **Identify key GEDSI objectives and integrate this into the Programme's next Theory of Change**. Ensure that gender/ age/ disability disaggregated data continue to be collected, monitored, and embedded in the evaluation framework, as per minimum collection requirements.
- **Advocate for inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups in other fora where OCPP is present**. Going beyond OCPP's own programmes or interventions, OCPP members have significant power to influence other stakeholders that may not operate in an inclusive manner – for example, across the whole governance of MPAs.
- **Support and share research that focuses more deeply on particular marginalised groups** about whom there is very little research. However, factor in research fatigue, and be sure to link research to programming or interventions (i.e. applied research) and to share final research products.
- **If future programming encompasses alternative livelihood initiatives, ensure these are aligned with the interest and needs of the community**, and that related grants are accessible to women and those with very limited assets.

Recommendation 2: Address safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme

OCPP is currently working with multiple partners. It is imperative that all partners have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in order to prevent and respond to SEAH and other safeguarding related misconduct and to ensure that programme activities have been suitably risk assessed. To do this OCPP should:

- **Review what safeguarding procedures are in place** across all partners to safeguard both OCPP funded staff and individuals coming into contact with programme staff for each partner, recognising that the approach will need to be different depending on the type of partner that is assessed.
- **Review or conduct risk assessments of high-risk activities for the programme.** OCPP should identify and conduct a full risk assessment for all

activities that are more likely to lead to SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct. These should include all activities that involved children and young adults, women and other vulnerable community members. The risk assessment process will ensure that OCPP is aware of activities where SEAH could occur to ensure risk is mitigated and these activities are carried out safely. There should also be a clear plan for ongoing regular monitoring and oversight. This is in addition to ensuring these risks are added to the programme risk register as appropriate.

- **Review the impact of sexual harassment across all programme activities and staff and take appropriate action to address these**. OCPP should consider working with a safeguarding specialist to consult with women staff at all levels about their experiences of sexual harassment related to the programme and identify strategies to mitigate and address these. These should also volunteers, contractors, paid or unpaid.
- **Endorse the CAPSEAH commitment and work towards compliance**. In 2024, The UK Government launched the Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH, 2024) which aims to bring consistency of approach and promote shared values across the international aid sector to end SEAH. Other sectors are highly encouraged to adopt the principles this document endorses. CAPSEAH stresses the importance of zero tolerance to inaction toward SEAH, survivor support and strong preventative efforts reduce the prevalence of SEAH. OCPP should consider the principles contained within CAPSEAH and consider beginning build small steps toward compliance over the duration of the programme. This document is a useful reference point to consider best practice standards toward SEAH that should inform and future programming and project activities.
- **Take a broad approach to understanding safety for those linked to OCPP initiatives and apply a holistic understanding of risk throughout the value chain**. For example, the GBV risks identified by fisher women could be an important consideration for any investment in the fisheries sector; SEAH risks identified would be important for any investment linked to the tourist industry.

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Annex

Annex 1

List of Key Informant Interview participants (anonymised)

KII 1 Producer cooperative (seaweed)

KII 2 Small-business owner (seaweed-based products)

KII 3 Fisherwoman, Belize Federation of Fishers

KII 4 Social justice advocate, LGBTQI+

KII 5 Seaweed farmers association representative

KII 6 Social scientist working for coastlines and people project

KII 7 Conservation organisation representative

Annex 2

TASA (2024) table summarising challenges linked to marine conservation and its impact on communities

Table 5: Participants' Perception of Marine Conservation Changes and Suggestions for Actions

Marine Conservation Challenge	Social Impacts	Economic Impacts	Suggested Actions
Overfishing	○ Decline in fish stocks, ○ loss of livelihoods for fishers ○ Increased food insecurity	○ Reduced income for fishing communities ○ Decline in livelihood opportunities	○ Implement and enforce sustainable fishing practices. ○ Increase enforcement in marine protected areas. ○ Enable additional livelihood opportunities such as aquaculture or eco-tourism.
Coral Bleaching	○ Loss of cultural identity for coastal communities ○ Negative impact on tourism jobs	○ Reduced tourism revenue ○ Degradation of coral reefs, which drives a significant tourism experience.	○ Enhance resources for coral reef monitoring and research. ○ Support strategies to mitigate climate change through adaptation actions. ○ reduce pollution and sedimentation
Habitat Destruction	○ Displacement of coastal communities, ○ Loss of ecosystem services	○ Loss of critical marine habitats (e.g., mangroves, seagrass beds) that support livelihood and income generation	○ Strengthen coastal zone management regulations. ○ Improve access to regulated fishing in marine reserves. ○ Implement habitat restoration projects.
Pollution	○ Contamination of marine ecosystems, harm to marine life and human health	○ Negative perception of tourism destinations ○ Loss of revenue from tourism	○ Improve marine waste management practices. ○ Enforce pollution regulations and promote public awareness and community clean-up campaigns along the coast.
Invasive Species	○ Disruption of native ecosystems, loss of biodiversity on which households depend	○ Impact on fisheries and tourism ○ Increased management costs	○ Implement measures to manage invasive species, ○ enhance monitoring and control efforts, ○ promote public education and awareness
Unsustainable Tourism	○ Overcrowding and degradation of marine sites, ○ Pressure on cultural traditions in local communities	○ Loss of authenticity in tourism experiences	○ Implement and enforce carrying capacity limits, ○ Promote responsible tourism practices. ○ Enhance training of tour guides and tour operators. ○ Engage local communities in tourism planning, decision-making, and product development.
Coastal Erosion	○ Loss of coastal land, displacement of communities, ○ Damage to infrastructure	○ Economic losses from property damage, ○ Increased vulnerability to storms and sea level rise	○ Implement coastal protection measures. ○ Ensure compliance with coastal development and applicable building codes. ○ Enforce stricter penalties for non-compliant coastal development. ○ Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into coastal planning and development

Annex 3

Summary of relevant GBV legislation in Belize

Domestic Violence Act, Chapter 178, Revised Edition 2011 aims to provide legal measures and protections against domestic violence, outlining provisions related to the prevention, intervention, and legal consequences associated with such acts. In the context of work under the OCPP, these provisions in the Domestic Violence Act could help ensure the safety and well-being of women who may be affected, for example, if their livelihoods are being impacted.

The Revised National Gender Policy of 2013 outlines the government's approach to promoting gender equity and women's empowerment. It provides a framework for ensuring that any marine related initiatives in Belize are designed and implemented via gender-responsive lens: safeguarding the participation of women in project activities and addressing the project's impacts on the life cycle of families. *The Revised National Gender Policy 2024-2030* extends its focus on the gaps of previous policy for action. It further outlines the actions that are requires to reduce discrimination against women and GBV. It proposes to enforce women in power and decision-making.

Belize Criminal Code Chapter 101 Revised edition 2000 The Criminal Code contains provisions related to criminal offenses, including gender-based violence. These gender and women's issues are crucial for ensuring the safety, rights, and well-being of women and vulnerable populations involved in or impacted by the project. It is essential to consider these legal provisions to safeguard against gender-based violence, exploitation, and discrimination within the project's implementation and enforcement processes.

Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act Chapter 107 Revised Edition 200023- Provides essential legal protections against sexual harassment and victimization, particularly for women and other vulnerable groups, in employment, institutions, and accommodation. These safeguards are relevant to ensuring gender-sensitive processes when developing marine related projects.

Families and Children Act, Cap. 17324 - This Act provides for the protection of children and their rights, including the right to maintenance and the attendant duty of the parent or person with parental responsibility to protect the child from discrimination, violence, abuse, and neglect. It also outlines the rights of a child to stay with parents, the duty to maintain a child, parental responsibility, harmful employment, and children with disabilities.

Domestic Violence Act, Cap. 17825- This Act offers protection to a child, whether it is a child of the marriage or union and provides for reintegration and rehabilitation of child victims of violence.

Juvenile Offenders Act26- This Act empowers the court to adopt a range of measures in response to a charge it considers, including dismissing the charge,

conditional release of the offender, or his or her release into the care of a relative. The court's actions must be in the child's or young person's "best interests."

Belize Constitution, Cap. 427- This Constitution protects the following freedoms for the benefit of people in Belize, including children: life, liberty, security of the person, and the protection of the law; freedom of conscience, of expression and assembly and association; protection for his family life, his privacy, the privacy of his home and other property and recognition of his human dignity; and protection from arbitrary deprivation of property.

Marriage Act, the Domestic Violence Act, the Criminal Code, and the Crime Control and Criminal Justice.

Act 610: These laws use general and all-encompassing terms that apply to all children, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation.

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The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

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