Diagnosis and digital priorities of rural tourism experiences in Belize

Melisa Almendarez
1. **Executive Summary**

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed a deep digital divide that has existed for decades and it exacerbated inequality by leaving millions of people globally, cut off from essential services and support as well as human contact with loved ones. Tourism related services have strived on digital platforms for marketing packages and travel sales as such Digital inclusion can no longer be seen as a nice to have – it’s now a need to have.

Over the years, digital literacy has been incorporated in Secondary and Tertiary institutions in Belize and this has given a wide-ranging base of Belizeans the essential digital skills. It has helped thousands of people to gain the skills and confidence they need to embrace digital tools in their life and work. This also allows people to navigate digital environments which otherwise might have been inaccessible, such as accessing agriculture and health information, products and services, research and do it yourself tutorials. The divide exists however in the rural communities as the statistics have shown 28.2 percent (80,356) of persons living in Belize five years and older accessed the Internet in the three months leading up to the census of 2010, with 84.6 percent of those persons using only a computer and 2.1 percent using only a mobile device.

The Belize District had the highest rate of Internet usage at 38.2 percent, followed by Cayo at 29.6 percent, while Toledo had the lowest rate at 16.0 percent. The device of choice was similar across districts, with between 81 and 89 percent of users gaining access via a computer only.¹

The three (3) tourism experiences analyzed during this assessment have all shown an explicit need and want to embrace digital technology into the promotion and scaling up of their tourism products/services. The Women’s group in Southern Belize were the most impactful of the interviews as they showed a keen sense of awareness of the opportunity that exists with having access to the internet, but are also very mindful of their limited capacity to navigate and use these tools effectively. They also highlighted the need to improve their soft skills in parallel to their digital literacy.

The major challenge faced by the experiences in accessing the tourism market has been and continues to be their lack of visibility on the many digital/social media platforms. While the Sarteneja Homestay group has a facebook page created more than five (5) years ago, the information is not updated frequently and is poorly marketed. The San Antonio Women’s Cooperative Ltd while the oldest group providing a cultural tour / experience they too have depended on the limited/booked guests coming from neighboring resorts and tour operators/guides who have marketed the cultural tour as apart of their tour packages offerings to clients/guests.

The Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd was one of the four (4) Women’s Group in Toledo that has an online presence and like the Sarteneja Homestay Group it is not maintained/updated. [https://www.facebook.com/Sarteneja-Homestay-Group-144961045714847/](https://www.facebook.com/Sarteneja-Homestay-Group-144961045714847/)

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¹ Belize Population and Housing Census 2010 Country Report, page 32
The major reason for these weaknesses is that one; telephone and internet connectivity and access whilst available with some inconveniences (average cost $150USD monthly/household and low upload capacity in Sarteneja Village namely) it is not easily accessible/affordable for these small communities that are two; mostly dependent on fisheries and agriculture sales; three; digital literacy is poor and extends to the community level four; the use and access to tools/equipment and software/apps is also a major challenge for the experiences.

In order to support sustainable community development, and promote eco-tourism services there has been a significant integration of the traditional conservationary NGO; there has to be a steering/leading institution to support the alternative livelihood programs in while maintaining a balance with nature, as such the business arms of both Ya’axché Conservation Trust and Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD) two (2) of the experiences “Maya Cultural Visit” and “Sarteneja Homestay Group” respectively are well-poised to efficiently adopt and reduce the digital gaps that exist, the San Antonio Women’s Cooperative are being strategically supported under a broader initiative of FAO’s incubator program to create the atmosphere and enabling environment for the group to enhance its digital capacity and presence.

The direct beneficiaries of the three (3) experiences are of more than 75% Mayan and Mestizo descent, 99% women, however average age of 35 years and older, the need to have youth engagement poses itself as a great opportunity to not only reduce the digital divide but to also guarantee the traditions and practices are fostered and provide meaningful economic benefits to the communities.

The product/packages of the three (3) experiences require further interpretation and streaming to cater to the guest needs/demands of both local and international clients. Some traditional practices while cultural and needs to be safeguarded are not efficient to support a tour offering when a guest is only spending a few hours at the site. Tourism packages can be developed for several users and priced accordingly, lunches/meals “to go”, a restaurant and our outdoor area for passersby, adequate restroom and sanitary facilities to highlight a few.

The women are mostly care-givers, gardeners, cooks and artisans; they have used and have in their possession mobile phones used mostly for messaging and voice calls; a limited number have internet access and use email services. They have limited to no access to computer equipment and tools. They have valued and learnt the importance of partnerships and expressed gratitude to the institutions and organizations whom have provided the guidance and opportunity showcased to them over the years. There was also a sense of reliance and trustworthiness expressed on the part of SACD and Ya’axché.

The opportunity also exists for a balance to occur between integrating the existing agri food systems and cultural preparation with a marketable tourism experience/package. Sarteneja Village has at its core a Tourism Development Plan which is still relevant to the needs of the community as it aims to create a delicate balance between conservation and eco-tourism services. These experiences are partially developed and can use some assumptions and predictions that can help with matching visitors' needs to product benefits, they can then advertise a package tour as a full- or half-day excursion with planned stops to experience more of the destination. This would also increase the reach of each party involved as they could potentially gain access to visitors they never had before. For the visitor, they would receive a total package deal for one all-inclusive price, creating less planning and work for them and more time and access to places they might not have stopped before.
10 Women whom represent the Sarteneja Homestay Group within Sarteneja Village, Corozal District

Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD)

15 Women and 1 Male who represent the Cooperative within San Antonio Village, Cayo District

San Antonio Women’s Cooperative Ltd

50 Women who represent four women’s groups located within Indian Creek Village, Toledo District

Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd,
Maya Rose Women’s Group,
Ancient Maya Women’s Group, and
Indian Creek Maya Arts Women’s Group

Ya’axché Conservation Trust

Experience 1
Sarteneja Homestay Group

Experience 2
San Antonio Women’s Cooperative

Experience 3
Maya Cultural Visit
What is the “story and the magic …….”? the people, we are the magic of Belize and this resource can only be developed with sound investments and partnerships. The Cultural Tours are personable and the charisma of the women proudly showcasing their handicrafts and culinary skills is a true taste of Belize.

As a traveller wrote…about the San Antonio Women’s Group, one of three reviews found online.

**Michael Waxman**

*1 review*

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ a year ago

“This was an excellent experience — a must-see for anyone visiting Belize. The women welcomed us in and brought us to their pottery studio, where they explained the intricate and labor-intensive process for creating their pottery. They then let us use their single potter’s wheel to try our own hand at shaping clay—which was very fun, and confirmed how skilled the artisans are. After that, they showed us the ancient process of how they grind and grill corn to make tortillas—and let us make our own, which were delicious. Finally, they served us a delicious lunch — tamales, chips and salsa, sweet potato, salad with peanut dressing, complete with a dessert of black and yellow cake. And after we were done, we spent a while in the gift shop perusing their beautiful wares and buying a few. Again, this is a very fun, educational half-day activity that adults and kids will enjoy. The women work diligently to serve their community and keep their remarkable culture and heritage alive — your time and money spent here will go a long way toward helping them.”

A special thank you to the Executive Directors of SACD Mr. Joel Verde and Ya’axché Conservation Trust Ms. Christina Garcia, and Ms. Timotea of the San Antonio Women’s Cooperative Ltd as well as Ms. Yvette from the Sarteneja Homestay Group for their cooperation and for providing the details openly and truthfully and for making themselves available at such short notice even under the pandemic restrictions.

A warm thank you to Mr. Julio Chub, Community Liaison Manager of Ya’axché for accompanying me to meet with the women’s group and the candid translation to make for a fruitful discussion. Lastly to the ladies of the Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd and Maya Rose Women’s Group thank you for the hospitality.
Telecommunications in Belize dates back to 1902, when a manual line linked Belize City with Consejo Village in the Corozal District in the Northern region of the country. Since then, Belize Telemedia Limited (Digi) is the leading telecommunication service provider in the country and has since grown from a small company to Belize’s largest nationalized telecommunications company, with the ability to provide the latest in digital communication, networking and technology services. Today, the services and products provided by Digi are vast and varied. The company has expanded its mission to go beyond just providing telephone service but to also provide telecommunications solutions for its residential, business and government customers.

Recent news is that on January 20, 2021, the company Executives took evolutionary steps towards bringing the fastest mobile network to Belize, when they signed a contract with world renowned telecommunications giant Ericsson, for the provision of an advanced mobile cellular network that offers 4G services to DigiCell customers across the Country. Digi operates an extensive network of telecommunication services in wireline, mobile, data, Internet and value-added features. Each offers a full range of products and services that include fixed line telephone service, fixed wireless, national and international mobile services, high speed data services, national and international data networks, along with inter-connectivity to its lead competitor Speednet Communications (SMART) via a lease agreement to lease its facilities in 2003/4.

Speednet Communication (SMART) was granted a license to offer full telecom services to Belize in August of 2003 and officially opened for business in March 2005, with the launch of its cellular brand, SMART. Since then, the company has grown from a small company providing services to approximately 5,000 customers to a well-respected provider with over 110,000 customers.

This was the beginning of a new era that would bring the end of more than two decades of a telecommunication monopoly. While we can evaluate the fairness of the competition to the consumer it is safe to say this saw more rural villages receiving telephone and internet services as SMART expanded its services to these otherwise dead zones.

Belize is becoming one of the fast-growing telecom markets in the Caribbean and has seen an increase in the teledensity as well as a sharp decline in tariffs for various services within the sector thus, contributing to the economic growth of the country. Telecommunications along with Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), has vastly accelerated the growth of the social and economic development of our country. Since telecommunications has now emerged as a key driver of our economic and social development in our ever-increasing knowledge intensive society, we will continue to play a leadership role in this industry in Belize, says the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the entity who is the Telecommunications Sector Regulator. The PUC is required to promote reliable and affordable telecommunication services, foster increased reliance on market forces for the provision of telecommunication services, and to encourage investment and innovation within the telecommunication sector.²

² https://www.puc.bz/telecom.html
The purpose of the PUC is to regulate the electricity, water, and telecommunications sectors in Belize to efficiently provide the highest quality services at affordable rates, ensuring the viability and sustainability of each sector.

The PUC Secretariat was commissioned in March 2001, having incorporated the traditional regulatory bodies, the Office of Electricity Supply and the Office of Telecommunications. The Chairman is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Commission’s activities that are undertaken by a staff selected for the technical knowledge and experience in the electricity, water and telecommunications sectors.

The Belize Telecommunications Act, 2002, No. 16 of 2002, liberalized telecommunications and made the PUC the industry regulator. Since then, the PUC has implemented a licensing regime - license terms and conditions for new entrants and on price control and inter-connection set the stage for competition. License conditions and legal obligations require license holders to behave in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, to provide cost-oriented services to competitors and to refrain from abuse of a dominant position with predatory or other anti-competitive practices.

Satellite Internet Access is available from various Belize and expat installers, most of whom do not advertise so as to not to invite harassment from the Public Utilities Commission. It is best to ask friends or neighbors for a contact or referral.

Satellite Internet is also widely available from a number of cable companies and is relatively cheap for Belize – about US $120 a month for unlimited use. The speed is about 2 Mbps up and 25 Mbps down. Hughes and Dish Networks are the preferred providers in Belize. Viasat satellite internet service is available as of 2021 all over Belize. The service bandwidth / speed is 17 megs down x 3 megs up and a total data throughput of 1000 gigabytes per month.

Belize Internet By FIBER OPTIC

In 2018 Belize Telemedia invested in a national Fiber Optic Network. The service has rolled out to San Pedro Ambergris Caye, Belize City, the City of Belmopan and Orange Walk. With other districts coming on line. The service plans are:

5 Mbps only: U.S. $ 30.

10 Mbps with free mobile plan: U.S. $50.

20 Mbps with free mobile plan and free home phone service: U.S. $85.
When is tourist season in Belize?

Belize’s high season for tourism runs from late November to mid-April, which coincides almost perfectly with the chill of winter in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. The high season is also the dry season. The best time to visit Belize therefore is from late November to mid-April, during the country’s dry season, warm temperatures, clear skies and easy access to the country’s many coastal and inland attractions.

The Tourism industry was one of the largest and fastest growing globally. Belize has benefitted from this growth, so much so that Tourism was our Country’s number one foreign exchange income earner. This has changed, Tourism in Belize is halted because of SARS-CoV-2 which has caused Belize to put in place travel restrictions into Belize. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020.

This pandemic has revealed the deficiencies in health systems worldwide and has crippled economies like ours whom have had a high dependency on tourism services. Unemployment has reached resounding rates, as many people have lost their jobs or have seen their incomes cut due to the coronavirus crisis. Resorts and restaurants are forced to shut down, some for good and others temporarily.

As a Country we are well poised and able to adopt safety and hygiene measures to live with SARS-Cov-2 and our relevant authorizing agencies will guarantee that happening. Some experts have warned; however, it could be years before levels of employment return to those seen before the pandemic, therefore we must act now to continue to safeguard our cultural heritages and to improve our food security systems. Globally there are responses designed to continue to provide critical support services to developing countries like Belize. More specifically is that the Director-General of FAO gave the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAO RLC) the mandate to advance in helping to realize the agrotourism potential of the region by joining forces with the private sector. “The successful implementation of this Project can make digital villages and rural tourism key drivers to increase resilience, diversify farmers’ incomes and rebuild better during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Additionally, that 1,000 rural communities to be linked with the GIAHS platform, as a digital strategy for the global promotion of sites with agro-tourism potential, in order to offer these communities to gain important advantages in providing tourism services.

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3 FAO and UNWTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support countries in promoting non-agricultural income generation strategy linked to the tangible and non-tangible attributes of rural-urban communities

It cannot be emphasized enough that “Digital literacy” is essential for farmers and their families to be able to effectively use existing digital tools to enter new markets. For example, in order to provide relevant information on the attributes and products of communities and their natural environments, or design digital marketing strategies aimed at reaching new markets. Finally, digitization is an instrument that helps to expand the scope and cost efficiency of policies (public and private) to support rural communities.

The networking and collaboration amongst public and private sector agencies to invest in the digital/technological and infrastructural needs will be essential to the realization of this initiative. Belize already has the natural landscapes and the cultural practices that can be linked perfectly with developing sustainable agro-tourism products. Hospitality and Communication / Soft Skills will be useful training skills required so that it will improve every aspect of the tourist experience of Belize through our food and culture.

The three (3) experiences analyzed intend to offer a guided tour to showcase our cultural foods and meals in an eco-friendly environment to the next wave of tourists.

Figure 4 Image of San Antonio Womens Group
Recent data from the Statistical Institute of Belize via its Labour Force Survey reports that in September 2021, the employed population was estimated at 174,237 persons, a net increase of 17,948 more males and 10,834 more females compared to September 2020.

Overall, males continued to dominate the labour market, with about 62 percent of all jobs being held by men. Among the major occupations, about half of all employed persons worked in ‘Services and Sales’ or ‘Elementary Occupations’.

Across the 14 major industries, most employed persons were found in the ‘Wholesale and Retail Trade and Repairs’ (19.1 percent), ‘Agriculture and Related Activities’ (14.1 percent), and ‘Government Services’ (13.9 percent) as shown in Table below.

Image of Table taken from SIB Labour Force report period to September 2021 released November 2021

The report further highlight that all districts experienced increases in employment with the most significant gains observed in the Belize district, where over 13,000 more persons were employed in September 2021 compared to September 2020. Across the country, there were about 8,800 more persons working in the ‘Tourism’ industry in September of this year compared to September last year.

Marketing and digital services

There are multiple companies that provide marketing and digital services, from web page design and hosting as well as branding and print material. Cost associated to these services are generally cost prohibitive for small businesses. The Experiences evaluated are not able to afford the expert services rendered by these businesses without direct financial assistance.

The digital services have become very innovative and adapt to the market trends. Eco friendly products are also more widely available and social media network campaigns prove useful in attracting potential customers.

Digital literacy of experiences are very low and they are not able to prepare these marketing and branding concepts without adequate tools and software programs.
3. **Methodology**

**Scope of Work:**

The experiences in Belize are located in rural-urban communities with agrotourism potential; therefore, we needed to identify the linkages to agro food systems, and the required internet access and digital tools to allow for strengthening/scaling up of these services.

In order to generate a successful strategy of entering new markets through digital innovations, they need to develop specific capacities for these innovations to achieve the expected effect.

Focusing on the capacities that need to be strengthened and/or developed to extend the use of digital tools in the tourism business and in the communities involved.

In addition, this analysis will also generate the inputs to promote and highlight each of the experiences, as the basis for mobilizing technical skills, networks and resources to scale up the initiative.

In this regard, three areas that have been assessed for further strengthening to take advantage of the positive effect of digitization are as follows:

(a) *literacy and digital skills training,*

(b) *digital strategies for the promotion, sale and management of products and services based on digital innovations,* and

(c) *creating new linkages with the private sector (tourism agencies and digital operators) and the public sector.*

**Field Visits Conducted:**

An Evaluation Exercise Interview Guide (see Annex for more detail) was developed. Interviews were coordinated and site visits conducted to validate characterization information, to collect and summarize findings.

In this stage of the analysis, a rapid assessment to identify the priorities in each of the three experiences was completed with face-to-face field visits. In total, 5 interviews were conducted, as well as discussions with key stakeholders including SACD and Ya’axché staff, service providers, and associations, between October 22 and 29.

Interviews were held in Western Belize in Cayo District, Corozal District Northern Belize and in the Toledo District in Southern Belize.

**Main purpose:**

1. Validate and in this report share the updates to the main features of the characterization sheet

2. Map the key actors/players in the experiences

3. Identify any gaps to strengthen the three areas of focus within the framework of the “1000 Digital Villages” initiative, an initiative based on the digitization of rural tourism experiences, with links to agriculture, fishing or aquaculture, in order to expand digitization in the territories.
4. **Key Findings – National Context**

Belize is the only English-speaking country in Central America, and by virtue of its geographical location and historical background, is a part of both Central America and the Caribbean. The country therefore participates in the activities of the Central American Integration System (SICA) as well as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Spanning approximately 8,867 square miles, Belize is bordered on the east by the Caribbean Sea, on the north and north-west by Mexico, and on the west and south by Guatemala.

The country of Belize consists of six major administrative areas or districts: Corozal in the north, Orange Walk in the north-west, Belize in the east, Cayo in the west, Stann Creek in the south-east and Toledo in the south. Within each of these districts are clearly defined boundaries delineating urban from rural areas. The capital of the country, the City of Belmopan, lies in the Cayo District.

Belize has a wide variety of cultures, the proportion of the population claiming to belong to each of the major ethnic groups. 52.9 percent or 170,446 of all Belizeans see themselves as belonging, at least in part, to the Mestizo ethnic group. The second largest ethnic group is the Creole, at 26 percent (83,460) of the population, followed by the Maya at 11.3 percent, who along with the Garifuna (6.1 percent) form the two indigenous groups in Belize.  

Household Composition (SISB, 2010 census, pg 40), households consisted mainly of a head, a spouse and their children. About 18 percent or 27,522 of the children were at least 20 years old. Factors contributing to the high proportion of grown children in the parental home could include the cost of higher education, growing housing costs, lack of employment or the dissolution of families resulting from divorces (Setterson, 1988; Da Vanzo & Goldscheider, 1990), as well as cultural norms. After children and household heads, the next largest category of household members was the spouses/partners at 16 percent, followed by grandchildren which accounted for 5.6 percent of household members.

The Internet represents one of the fastest means of accessing and sharing information, and it is fast becoming a necessary tool for success among all sectors of society. The number of Internet users is also one of the indicators used to monitor a country’s progress in the achievement of Target 8.F under United Nations Millennium Development Goals 8, which states “In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications” (UN, 2003).
Literacy and Ethnicity

Among ethnic groups, the Lebanese (95.5 percent), Garifuna (94.5 percent) and Creoles (93.5 percent) have the highest adult literacy rates, while only 22.7 percent of Mennonites and 65.5 percent of Ketchi Mayas 15 years and older have completed at least 7 years of primary education. Although for the most part the adult literacy rate is higher among females, Asian, Hindu, Mennonites and Ketchi and Mopan Maya women have a lower literacy rate than their male counterparts.

Additionally, there has been an improvement in literacy among all ethnic groups over the last ten years. Except among the Ketchi and Mopan Mayas, the Mestizos and the Mennonites, the youth literacy rate is upwards of 93 percent.

THE KEY ACTORS/PLAYERS IN THE EXPERIENCES

Young Person / Local Talent

Experience 1 Sarteneja Homestay Group in the North of Belize, Corozal District.

Mr. Ivandi Perez is a 30-year-old who was born and raised in Sarteneja Village and is a proud Sartenejeño. Mr. Perez attained his associate’s degree in General Studies with a major in Computer Science at Muffle Junior College in June of 2011. Thereafter, he began to acquire an interest in the graphic design profession and broaden his knowledge through committed self-development.

What began as a pastime has now evolved into an exciting professional path that has led him to work in developing marketing materials and publicity campaigns. Over the years, he has had the opportunity to work with and for several community-based non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), with Mobile App Development, and with the print industry, all of which have helped him broaden his skills and improved as a career professional in marketing and development.

Currently he is pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Strategic Marketing at the Universidad Interamericana para el Desarrollo (UNID) in order to expand his expertise in the field of marketing.

Experience 2 San Antonio Women’s Cooperative in Western Belize, Cayo District.

Ms. Keira Mesh is 14 years old, born and raised in San Antonio Village, Cayo District and is the 3rd child of Ms. Timotea Mesh, a founding member and group leader of the San Antonio Women’s Cooperative.

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7 Belize Population and Housing Census 2010 Country Report, page 30
She is currently enrolled and doing her 3rd year of General Studies at the Sacred Heart College. She is smart and energetic, with a very outgoing personality.

Her creativity stems from her growing up surrounded by a mother who is hands on and business oriented. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking pasta dishes, shrimp and fried rice are her favorites, her specialty however is making delicious fresh fruit smoothies.

Her grades over the years have been exemplary. She ensures assignments are completed on time and is now venturing on raising her own farm animals, having recently bought 2 cows along with her older sister which they are caring for. She is very savvy with the computer and is keen on learning new things, this presents an exciting opportunity for her to learn and support the Group in its digital needs.

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Experience 3 Maya Cultural Visit in Southern Belize, Toledo District

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Nathaniel Castillo – is 22 years old and is currently the marketing and communications officer at Yaaxche. His email contact is nathaniel.castillo@yaaxche.org

Nathaniel was born in Belize City but since the age of 8 months he has been living and grew up in Punta Gorda. He is passionate about conservation, water quality, and videography. He recently completed his Bachelor’s Degree in Natural Resource Management at the University of Belize in June of the year 2020. During his time at the University of Belize, Nathaniel saw the effects that humans had on the water supply and through his Bachelor’s research, he inventoried and assessed the water quality of groundwater within the City of Belmopan.

He continues to work in the conservation community as he is currently working with Ya’axche Conservation Trust doing Marketing and Communications work to spread awareness in the Maya Golden Landscape.

Having seen the issues with conservation awareness Nathaniel continues to pursue his education/training with online courses in multimedia production. In August of this year, he attended the Galen University Film and Media School in Collaboration with The Belize Film Commission and Film Belize. In the film production course, he learned about film production from the director Dennis Minor from San Francisco.

Additionally, he is currently enrolled in the UNESCO Transcultural Programme conducted by the International Film and Television School of San Antonio de Los Baños (EICTV). Director Carlos Bosch is teaching the online course ‘Thinking On Your Feet: Things I Learned While Filming Award-Winning Documentaries’. Nathaniel hopes to use all his experiences to further spread the awareness of conservation throughout Belize and the world.
KEY ACTORS/PLAYERS IN THE EXPERIENCE 1 – SARTENEJA HOMESTAY GROUP

Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative (CSFI),

Shipstern Conservation & Management Area
http://www.itcfund.org/project-belize/

Shipstern Conservation and Management Area is a protected area located in the Corozal District of northeastern Belize. Shipstern C&MA protects approximately 21,500 acres of a variety of habitats centered on Shipstern Lagoon, one of the larger inland lagoon systems in Belize. It is operated and managed by Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative (CSFI) is a Belizean NGO, not for profit, duly registered and audited.

Wildtracks
http://www.wildtracksusa.org/

Wildtracks Belize is a well-established conservation organization and is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and has been working toward the sustainable future of natural resources since its establishment in 1990. Wildtracks manages two terrestrial protected areas—Fireburn and Balam Na. Both privately protected areas are located in Corozal District in northeast Belize. The Wildtracks team continues to work tirelessly to strengthen conservation education, awareness building and community outreach efforts, with the ultimate goal of giving all rescued, surrendered and confiscated wildlife the best possible chance of being reintroduced to the wild.

Wildtracks embraces multi-sectoral, participatory input from stakeholders in identifying solutions to sustainable development issues. Wildtracks also invests in building community capacity, and provides mentoring for community organizations while building an appreciation for the value of balancing conservation and sustainable development.

Wildtracks achieves results through strengthening national and site level conservation of ecosystems and species, building engagement and strengthening capacity towards effective environmental stewardship at all levels. They focus on endangered species rehabilitation and reintroduction, and technical support to strengthen national wildlife and protected area strategies and their implementation.

The Antillean manatee is considered globally endangered, and in Belize, is being pressured by watercraft collisions and the increasing threats to the coastal environment. Wildtracks operates the Manatee Rehabilitation Centre under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Belize Forest Department. It collaborates with other stakeholders as a member of the National Manatee Working Group, an advisory committee to the Forest Department, and hosted under the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute.
Wildtracks also partners with the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development, providing this community-based protected area co-management organization with technical support for manatee conservation in one of Belize’s key manatee areas – Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary - building community capacity for effective management, strengthened protocols and data analysis for aerial surveys, water quality monitoring and monitoring of seagrass and coastal development.  

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**Sartenaja Fishermen Cooperative**

The Sarteneja Fishermen Association (SFA) is a community-based membership organization established by Sarteneja fishermen on 19th September 2007. It seeks to provide greater representation for the reef fishermen of Sarteneja, and opportunities for income diversification for fishermen of Sarteneja. SFA seeks to reduce the dependence of both individuals and the community on the Belize reef, providing representation on national committees and advisory groups, including the Spawning Aggregation Working Group.

SFA members are very aware of the need for a healthy reef ecosystem if they are to maintain their traditional lifestyle. Reducing their fishing pressure is one way forward, but needs to be balanced by seeking alternatives. The SFA is assisting its members in seeking income diversification to reduce dependency and impacts on the reef. It has facilitated the establishment of 23 pig farming units by 80 SFA fishermen, and a Central Pig Rearing Unit to provide stock for members and a financial sustainability mechanism for the organization.

It provides training opportunities, capacity building, support and cooperative marketing to ensure fishermen are able to create meaningful, long term, income generation through livestock production alternatives

In years they have partnered with SACD and are developing eco-tourism tours adequately named A day with a Fisherman Tour. This experience will also be developed and marketed by the SACD business arm. This wholesome activity completes the Sarteneja Homestay Group “homestay” package.

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**KEY ACTORS/PLAYERS IN THE EXPERIENCE 2 – SAN ANTONIO WOMEN’S GROUP**

Tour Operators and Guides, Hotels & Resorts

The Tour Guide Association within the District as well as the national bodies represented

More than two dozen Resorts and Hotels are located in the area of the experience, the Belize Tourism Board and Belize Hotel Association, Belize Tourism Industry Association are key partners to support this experience.

Public listings are available online:  
https://belizetourismboard.org/industry-sectors/tour-guides/  

8 [http://www.wildtracksusa.org/manatee-program](http://www.wildtracksusa.org/manatee-program)  

9 [https://www.facebook.com/sartenejafishermen/](https://www.facebook.com/sartenejafishermen/)
KEY ACTORS/PLAYERS IN THE EXPERIENCE 3 – MAYA CULTURAL VISIT

Humana people to people rural gardening program

https://www.humana-belize.org/

A Non-governmental organization established in 2007, under the regulatory agency: Ministry of Human Development of Belize. They work with vulnerable populations and traditionally marginalized groups from different ages and backgrounds in rural and hard-to-reach communities of Belize. They have been working in Southern Belize and conducting sessions in ‘Backyard gardening” for households.

Tour Operators and Guides, Hotels & Resorts

KEY ACTORS/PLAYERS ACROSS EXPERIENCES

Belize Tourism Board (BTB)

The Belize Tourism Board (BTB) is the legislated body designed to govern, enhance and promote the Belize tourism product at a national and international scale. The Belize Tourism Board is a statutory body within the Ministry of Tourism that functions as a strategic partner between government and the private sector to develop, market and implement tourism programs that fulfill the emerging needs of our local industries and international tourism marketplace for the benefit of Belize and Belizeans.

The BTB is tasked to undertake numerous strategic initiatives as well as the implementation of tourism policies to address the changing needs of the tourism industry globally to ensure Belize remains marketable as a travel destination.

The BTB monitors and tracks visitation from the major port of entries including cruise tourism arrival, this data is aggregated and segregated to key visitator experiences, the information is published annually and widely accessible online.

The BTB in the wake of the pandemic has at this time implemented standards for tour operators nationally.

What is a Gold Standard entity?
A Gold Standard entity is one that has thoroughly followed the new safety procedures and has the guests’ safety as their utmost priority.

10 https://belizetourismboard.org/about-btb/how-the-btb-works/
**How are you ensuring visitors are washing and sanitizing?**

All establishments operating within Belize’s cruise bubble will be required to implement the below best practices:

1. Enforcement of handwashing
2. Mandatory use of face mask
3. Enforcement of physical distancing
4. Hand sanitizing stations
5. Health Screening Procedures

These are significantly impacting the services of the Tourism Experience 1 Sarteneja Homestay Group as these safety procedures are a direct contradiction to the homestay experience of living with a family. The Group with the assistance of SACD is currently working tirelessly to address the concerns as such private entrances/exits, private restrooms and outdoor dining spaces are improvements that will be required for the group to be able to continue to offer their services going forward.

Tourism Experience 2 San Antonio Women’s Cooperative is well underway with meeting the required safety protocols and procedures. A formal preparation and submission of the procedures to the relevant authorizing entity is pending at the time of preparing this report.

Tourism Experience 3 while Ya’axché has implemented relevant safety procedures at its Field Station the Women’s Group have not fully ventured into this formal preparation, as the current tourism services are at a stand still / significantly paused in the recent months.

Current restrictions/precautions for the country are as follows:

At this time, fully vaccinated passengers can book excursions with Gold Standard Tour operators only. See link below. If you are not vaccinated, please ask your Shore Excursion desk on board for information on Bubble Tours. [https://belizetourismboard.org/industry-sectors/tourism-gold-standard-entities/](https://belizetourismboard.org/industry-sectors/tourism-gold-standard-entities/)

**Will I be required to wear a mask while in Belize?**

Yes. By law, all citizens and visitors to Belize must wear a face mask when in public spaces. Exceptions are when seated for eating or in water.

**Are restaurants, bars and gift shops open in Belize?**

Restaurants, saloons, diners and other similar establishments allowed to operate may offer dining-in services by reservation only for no more than 50% of its seating capacity, with fully vaccinated persons only.

Restaurants that have proper ventilation, or a restaurant that is an open-air restaurant, outdoor restaurant, or an al fresco dining restaurant that is allowed to operate, may offer dining-in services by reservation only for no more than 75% of its seating capacity, with fully vaccinated persons only.

Bars are closed at this time and Gift shops are presently operational.

See link for additional information. [https://belizetourismboard.org/industry-sectors/tourism-gold-standard-entities/](https://belizetourismboard.org/industry-sectors/tourism-gold-standard-entities/)
The National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) is an established statutory body under the laws of Belize and is mandated to foster and implement programs that will seek to encourage Belizeans and persons interested in Belize to better understand our historic and ethnic roots and instill pride in ourselves about our country’s unique heritage and shared national identity. NICH is responsible for the day-to-day upkeep and management of all Archaeological Sites and historic monuments in the country and is collecting relevant fees for visitors to these sites, they maintain annual visitation data and monitor the economic activity on the grounds. It is crucial for the tourism experiences to work in close collaboration with NICH in any promotion of the cultural practices and experiences at the sites.

The National Cultural Policy 2016-2026 identifies key areas and strategies for the continued preservation and promotion of Belize’s cultural heritage that is both people and sites.

file:///C:/Users/pc/Downloads/National-Cultural-Policy-2016-2026.pdf

Seventeen (17) archaeological sites have been given reserve status. Fourteen (14) of which are open for visitation as listed below, many have been excavated and studied with partial restorations and the establishment of visitor facilities.

1. Cerro Maya, Corozal District
2. Santa Rita, Corozal District
3. Lamanai, Orange Walk District
4. Altun Ha, Belize District
5. El Pilar, Cayo District
6. Cahal Pech, Cayo District
7. Xunantunich, Cayo District
8. Barton Creek, Cayo District
9. Caracol, Cayo District
10. Serpon Sugar Mill, Stann Creek District
11. Nim Li Punit, Southern Belize
12. Lubaantun, Southern Belize
13. Actun Tunichil Muknal, Cayo District
14. Marco Gonzales, Belize District

Other Associations/Institutions

These partnerships were strategically considered based on the needs and potential for providing meaningful training including support with marketing, financial and or technical assistance for product development to create one seamless travel package for visitors. A travel package might include return airfares, airport transfers, accommodations, tours and experiences, and meals all for a special price. Travel packages may be tailored to fit certain traveler styles.
**Associations & Institutions:**
Belize Tourism Industry Association
University of Belize, Cayo District
Julian ChoTechnical High School, Toledo District
Escuela Secundaria, Corozal
Protected Areas Conservation Trust

**Co-management Organizations and Organization working with or in Protected Areas:**
Protected Areas Conservation Trust
Association of Protected Areas of Belize (APAMO)
Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment, Toledo
Hol-Chan Marine Reserve, San Pedro

**Telecommunication services:**
Belize Telemedia Ltd
Speednet Communication (SMART)
Public Utilities Commission

**Government entity and or Regulator Body:**
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
Ministry of Health, Public Health Department
*Food Handlers Training and Certification*
Bureau of Standards
BELTRAIDE
  - BTEC
Belize Marketing and Development Corporation
https://bmdc.bz/
Cooperatives Department, Ministry of Food and Agriculture
Extension Services/Department, Ministry of Food and Agriculture
Ministry of Sustainable development and Blue Economy
Forestry Department
Fisheries Department
  - Hol Chan Marine Reserve
  - Bacalar Chico National Park

**Private Institutions:**
Spice Farm, Golden Stream
Bladen Nature Reserve – BFREE
Humana People to People

**Farmer Groups & Cooperatives/Associations**

**Financing institutions:**
Toledo Teachers Credit Union (TTCU)
St. Francis Xavier Credit Union (SFXCU)
Development Finance Cooperation (DFC)
Development Finance Corporation (DFC)

Marketing & Communications Companies/Service Providers:

Artisans & Craftmen:

Transportation:
Experience 1 Sarteneja Village, Corozal District

Population of 3,500 according to 2016 estimates, (SIB 2010 Census Report, pg 64 1,824 Males 919 Females 905 No. of Households 431)

The name Sarteneja is a Castilian distortion of its original Mayan name Tzaten-a-ha, which means 'water between the rocks'.

Sarteneja is the largest fishing community and the third largest village located in the Corozal District, near the Bay of Corozal. Due to its location on the Bay, it is the only place in the country of Belize where you can watch the sun set over the beautiful Caribbean Sea.

Sarteneja is on the Sarteneja Peninsula, approximately forty miles by road from Orange Walk Town and is near the privately owned Shipstern Conservation & Management Area.

Sarteneja Village is renowned for artisan boatbuilders and as well as pineapple and plantain farming, delicious Mestizo cuisines, gorgeous beaches and exotic ecosystem in the area. Sarteneja is ideal for fishing, birdwatching and swimming. The village's economy is based primarily on fishing for lobster, conch, and finfish. There are many farmers, particularly retired fishermen who farm.

Tourism is becoming increasingly significant as a source of income or at least as another alternative livelihood for those who no longer fish. Restaurants, bed and breakfasts, arts and crafts are other tourism related services.

Most of Sarteneja's inhabitants are of Yucatec Maya and Mestizo ancestry.¹¹

Infrastructure:

Road – Gravel Road, 2 hour drive, accessible with 2 ferry crossings from Corozal Town, partially paved, works to be completed in 2 to 3 years.
Sea – access by boat, neighboring Chetumal, Mexico Border
Air – air access available, domestic flight
Electricity - Connectivity to the Main power/electricity grid
Water – running water available
Internet - Telephone and Internet connectivity available

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarteneja
Digital Literacy: Low

Experience 2 San Antonio Village, Cayo District

Population of 2,124 according to a 2016 estimates

(SIB 2010 Census Report, pg 64 1,847 Males 933 Females 914 No. of Households 381)

San Antonio is a village in the Cayo District of Belize. Its population is predominantly Yucatek or Qʼeqchiʼ-speaking Maya. Cayo District is a district located in the west part of Belize. It is the most extensive, second-most populous and third-most densely populated of the six districts of Belize. The district's capital is the town of San Ignacio which is approximately 20 minutes from San Antonio.

San Antonio Village is primarily an agricultural village, with the chief crops being corn, citrus fruit (more specifically, oranges, grapefruit, and tangerine), as well as plantains and bananas. It is a culturally diverse area with six (6) major Archaeological sites excavated for visitation in close proximity. The lush forest and waterfalls make this part of the country a viable tourism destination. Recent works are now seeing the upgrade of the road leading to the main site of Caracol Archaeological Reserve.

Surrounding Communities includes Progresso 7 Miles, Cristo Rey Cristo Rey with a population of 873 (SIB 2010) both agricultural and eco-tourism centered.

Infrastructure:

Road – Semi-Paved and is accessible, Village is located 15 miles off the major highway/town – Western Highway, San Ignacio/Santa Elena Town
Sea – not accessible, inland, nearer to the Border with Guatemala
Air – air access available, domestic flight
Electricity - Connectivity to the Main power/electricity grid
Water – running water available
Internet - Telephone and Internet connectivity available

Digital Literacy: Low
Experience 3 Indian Creek Village, Toledo District

Population SIB 2010 Census Report, pg 69 721 Males 377 Females 344 No. of Households 134)

Located on the lush green forested scenic route of the Southern Highway. It is bordering two (2) Maya Archaeological Sites (Nim Li Punit & Lubantun). A mostly indigenous community of Ketchi Mayas. Distinct long lasting thatched roofed dwelling homes, hand crafted and generally cool to accommodate for the hot temperatures. An agricultural village where beekeeping is slowing growing momentum with more than twenty (20) beekeepers having apiaries; this revenue stream serves as an alternative and supplemental income source to complement the cocoa and vegetable plantations.

The two major Archaeological Sites excavated and open for visitation in this community year-round are the major attractions along with multiple small creeks and waterfalls. The Spice Farm is another attraction that is in close proximity to the village. This farm offers a guided tour of the nursery, open field and processing/drying area, it also boasts a full dining restaurant and bar. There are a few additional small mom and pops roadside restaurants along the 45 mile drive from Bella Vista to Punta Gorda Town. Indian Creek Village is a mid-point enroute to Punta Gorda Town.

Nim Li Punit is a small site in the Toledo District. It is situated on a ridge in the foothills of the Maya Mountains just off the Southern Highway, 25 miles north of Punta Gorda. Nim Li Punit is regarded as a ceremonial center consisting of two plazas, one higher than the other. There are 25 stelae of which 8 are carved. The largest structure is 33-40 feet above the plaza level and is constructed of dry, sandstone typical of sites in southern Belize. There are 3 plaza areas and a ballcourt. The concentration of so many stelae make this a unique site.

Lubaantun is located north of the Colombia River, one mile past the village of San Pedro Colombia, and is accessible by public transportation. Lubaantun is unique for megalithic terraces built in the ‘stepped perpendicular’ style. This Late Classic ceremonial center is noted for its unusual style of construction distinctive of southern Belize. The large pyramids and residences are made of stone blocks with no mortar binding them together. The buildings on top of the pyramids were made from perishable materials rather than masonry and hence do not remain. The name is Maya for “Place of Fallen Stones.”

Infrastructure:
Road – Paved and accessible, Village is located on a major highway - Southern Highway
Municipal Airstrip – located in Punta Gorda Town for domestic air travel
Electricity - Connectivity to the Main power grid is not accessible; planned for the very near future
Water – independent rudimentary system
Telephone and Internet connectivity available

Digital Literacy: Low


13 https://nichbelize.org/institute-of-archaeology/archaeological-sites-and-parks/lubaantun/
6. **About the Tourism Product & The Key Actors/Players in the Experiences**

**About the Tourism Product**

When discussing the product of each experience, we found that each desire was to educate, share and develop skills, to offer experiential learning, offer opportunities for relaxation, or it was to simply entertain. The Product purpose is the reason why visitors buy, and it must be directly linked to what the visitor wants. This want is called consumer demand. During the discussions some tourism industry trends, visitor types and motivations were identified, see interview notes if you would like to dig deeper into industry trends and visitor types, and how these have been marketed based on the information shared.

We will focus a bit on how Agriculture provides not only the tourism industry resources for food consumption but also the background for attractions in rural environments which is true of the three (3) experiences evaluated.

A marketing gap exists amongst the experiences as packages are not completely elaborated/defined, recorded/documented and priced accordingly. Limited material/content is readily available for online marketing and sales.

The experiences lack the knowledge and know how to do so on their own.

Signage and curb appeal is one of those quick and inexpensive action items that would serve all the experiences well. Social media and website development, search engine presences google, TripAdvisor are immediate needs of the experiences.

**Experience 1 Sarteneja Homestay Group**

North of Belize, Corozal District

*Institution: Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD)*

Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary

https://sacdbelize.org/

The Sarteneja Homestay Group was Incorporated as part of the Community Engagement and Outreach program under the Economic livelihoods recurrent activities of Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD); The main target groups are international student and church groups and volunteers. Backpackers and eco-friendly tourists, cultural tourists.

SACD is a reputable community-based organization, and has been operating since 2007 dedicated to improving the quality of life of the stakeholder communities of Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS). SACD has been achieving this through conservation, education, and promotion of the sustainable use of the natural resources.

\[14\] https://sacdbelize.org/sarteneja-homestay-program/
Based in Sarteneja, Corozal District, SACD was registered as a non-profit organization in September 2008 under the Companies Act. In its role as site-management partner for CBWS, SACD first signed a co-management agreement for CBWS with the Forest Department, the management authority, on 22nd November, 2012. In little over a decade, SACD has gained national respect and a reputation for being an active and effective NGO with a clear mandate, with consultative leadership and management at its core. Community consultation is considered the starting point for planning, and community participation is woven into project development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

SACD has developed a management plan for CBWS, which is being implemented through the following three programmes: + Natural Resource Management + Education and Outreach + Sustainable Development.

In 2015, SACD established the Community Researcher programme, aimed at providing structure to the internship component of the SACD Volunteer and Internship programme. It has increased the present and future local human capacity for monitoring of CBWS conservation targets and strengthened the Research and Monitoring sub-programme. Furthermore, it has increased the participation of youth members in conservation and stewardship of the biodiversity of CBWS.

The Community Researcher programme trains a cohort of community researchers (CRs) and engages them in on-going research and monitoring activities in CBWS. The main focus of the programme has been to build capacity and encourage active participation of the CRs in the management of their local protected area. To date, SACD CRs have participated in gathering data in the following key conservation target areas: Catch monitoring of the local fishery, Water quality monitoring, Mapping of benthic vegetation, Mangroves and coastal vegetation, Monitoring of Antillean manatees in CBWS and Bird surveys.

An inherent need was identified for accommodations and meals to be provided to the guests of SACD and that is how the homestay group was formed, directly impacting the inhabitants of the community.

Additionally, the SACD Corozal Bay Eco Adventures has been duly incorporated and is the tour operator arm of SACD. The purpose of Corozal Bay Eco Adventures is to promote and sell eco-tourism tours to visitors on behalf of community lead groups. As such offering homestay for the Guests for stays of a night or weeks in duration, in a safe, comfortable, private room with shared indoor toilet (shared with the family only)\(^{15}\). They are also able to enjoy three home cooked meals a day at the homes of the existing Homestay Group members (10 active members currently with 1 full room accommodation private bath in line with existing social distancing requirements). The homestay experience also offers demonstrations/classes on how to make tortillas or practicing Spanish, these activities are unforgettable ways for guests to be culturally immersed and to enjoy Sarteneja.

Ms. Yvette of the Sarteneja Homestay Group expresses that she is cognizant of the need to upgrade their product given the high rise in competition from resort type/model accommodations being developed, they also need to maintain a digital presence if they are to maintain a fair market share of guests/clients wanting to visit Sarteneja.

\(^{15}\) Pandemic / Gold Standards practices require this to be changed to private baths
SACD has attracted and implemented several grants to provide investments to these programs to ensure adequate sanitary measures are installed, capacity building sessions are carried out, for the Groups to remain marketable and that they have a positive outlook to maintain/expand the tourism market share of the community members.

In addition to the Sarteneja Homestay Group, SACD has also fostered a working partnership with the Sarteneja Fishermen Association. The synergies are necessary amongst both groups to complement/enhance the tourism experience, hence a key partner of this experience is the Fishermen Cooperative who is already simultaneously being supported by SACD to promote its ‘day with a fisherman” tours.

Mr. Verde during the interview highlighted a number of key challenges they have made a concrete effort in addressing over the years –

- accessing financing to support the groups investment needs
- Keeping abreast and up to date with changing market trends
- Online presence and active marketing and sales
- Agro processing and value addition

In addition he noted the following needs

- Product scoping across groups and associations, to actively combine services to be able to offer an all inclusive tour package from point of arrival, accommodations, meals, tours and cultural activities.
  - Multi day packages
  - Complete stay packages etc.,
- Maintain unique service and product for separation as much as possible to avoid direct competition but rather cooperation and product saturation
- Upgrade facilities with a business model approach and include adequate eco-friendly practices, off grid technology
- Agro processing and value addition of excess produce

General Challenges identified:

- Additional staff with capacities to support business development of the groups
- Marketing and Sales unit/department strengthened with sales persons and equipment/tools
- Product development and costing capacities
- Online marketing and sales presence
- Consumer demand survey
EXPERIENCE 2 SAN ANTONIO WOMEN’S COOPERATIVE

Western Belize, Cayo District.

Institution: San Antonio Women’s Cooperative Ltd

The San Antonio Women’s Cooperative Ltd (SAWC) has been providing tourism related business since 2012 to an elite group of clients who have traditionally booked via the main resorts and tour guides in the surrounding area. Some vendors may refer to this tour as a “Mayan Culture Day”.

They are fully incorporated under the Companies registry and the Cooperative Act of Belize from 2013. They have invested and developed a pristine sight where they operate from that is in close proximity to the main roadway. This location includes a thatched dining area, outdoor kitchen, a pottery/craft room along with a modest gift shop.

Adequate sanitization stalls have been installed to suit required Covid-19 preventative measures. They are in the process of acquiring the required certification from the regulator body.

The Village of San Antonio is one of the largest agricultural community located in the heart of the Maya Mountain Reserve the popular tourism zone of the country; which attributes to visitors traveling to Belize as it contains six (6) of the fourteen (14) Archaeological Reserves/Sites that are open for visitation, including Caracol the largest and highest elevated site in the country at 500m above sea level.

This group provides a 2-to-4-hour cultural experience by promoting their way of life through conversation about their Mayan heritage and demonstration on the preparation of the traditional meals. These include, preparation of corn tortillas from grinding the corn to make and cook on an open fire, other products include:

- Clay items (vases, pots, trinkets holders, cutlery plates & bowls, traditional pepper mashers and bowls)
- Traditional Cuxtals - Weaved or knitted with different patterns, styles, sizes and colors
- Traditional Mopan and Q’eqchi’ Mayan Clothing (Blouses, Skirts, and Shirts for children and adults)
- Weaved Baskets - Plain, decorated, different sizes, different purposes, different shapes.
- Wood Carvings - Different shapes and sizes, cutlery items such as bowls, spoons, forks, all in variety of sizes
- Slate (rock) Carvings - Mayan gods and calendar, National symbols in different sizes
- Necklaces and Rings – Beads, Coconut, Clay and Slate designs
- Embroidery on cloth made into pillows - Different designs, colors and sizes
Other new proposed products (other demonstration sessions to scale up tours
  ▪ Sugar cane process and making
  ▪ Bed & breakfast – peace corps staff required housing accommodations we offered
    and later offered to students and guests (2 to 3 weeks)

The ingredients are home grown and sourced from the community, of note is
the members of the group grow chicken as a revenue source and for
home consumption, of course the chickens are used in the preparation of
the meals for the cultural tour.

The SAWC comprises of nine (9) active Native Mayan Women four (4)
members age 20 to 45 and six (6) age 45 older; of younger age group One (1) Male member who is the pottery guru
of the group (see image opposite).

After the demonstration of preparing the traditional meal,
guests receive a hands-on demonstration of Mayan pottery
making from natural resources, as well as the fine art of
embroidery on garments is also demonstrated. The
experience concludes with the serving of the traditional
meal prepared.

There's also a modest gift shop for guests to peruse and select
handmade arts, crafts and trinkets. This gift shop is stocked with works from the group members.

Their major challenge(s) in promoting and accessing the tourism market as reported by Ms. Timotea
during the interview

  - Sales and contacting the clients to promote ourselves
  - As the contact person, I don’t have the training and therefore we are not conducting adequate
    sales calls
  - Website, hosting and updating
  - No computer for online booking
  - Using personal cell phone

General Challenges identified:

  - Product Development and Marketing
    o No active website and facebook page
    o No promotion of the embroidery products on the local market
    o Adequate labels and packaging of products for shipping in Belize and Internationally
    o Main sign / Billboard for Roadway for directions / branding of the location
    o Tour package/brochure, flyers, booklet/pamphlets
    o Gift Bag and souvenir to scale up

  - Product Enhancement / Scale up
    o Drying process of pottery requires three (3) days
    o Equipment / Tools Machinery to scale up product offering such as machinery to be able
to conduct demonstration for multiple groups at a time (ceramic oven, pottery spinning
wheel, grinders etc..)
- Business Development & Accounting
  - Transportation / Shuttle for the group to conduct sales, procure goods/items, collect raw materials
  - Accounting tracking is done however is done manually, accounting software and training necessary
  - Printer and scanner already bought but no computer to advance the process
  - E business services - Upgrade of banking services to be able to accept payment via credit card transactions

- Training
  - Digital literacy (equipment, tools and software)
  - Marketing plan and implementation
  - Accounting literacy
  - Finishing Touch of Pottery techniques/methods (colorization and glazing)

**EXPERIENCE 3 MAYA CULTURAL VISIT**

Southern Belize, Toledo District

*Institution: Ya’axché Conservation Trust*

[https://yaaxche.org/](https://yaaxche.org/)

Ya’axché Conservation Trust works with communities in and around protected areas to develop capacity and advocate for the safeguarding and sustainable use of land and natural resources. They currently co-manage two state protected areas and one private protected area in Southern Belize, a 770,000-acre focal area called the Maya Golden Landscape.

EcoTourism Belize (ETB) – is the sustainable business arm of the local conservation body. This program is leading the promotion and development of the “Maya Cultural Visit” focused on this analysis.

ETB operates under NGO status and is tax exempt; however, pays Belize Tourism Board Accommodation Tax in compliance with national regulations. They have since achieved required Gold Standard certification.

The ETB facilitates the authentic Maya Cultural Visit for their target audience of study abroad students and universities, international tour operators, and independent tourists looking to support community development and conservation.

Ya’axché facilities comprises an office in Punta Gorda Town and its Field Station within the tourism experience zone. The Clients of the Field Station average one to four weeks booking, their daily meals are provided within the Community. This service over the years has been provided by the four women’s
groups located within Indian Creek Village: Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd, Maya Rose Women’s Group, Ancient Maya Women’s Group, and Indian Creek Maya Arts Women’s Group.

The groups with the sustainable use of forest products/resources to make traditional crafts and pottery using jippi jappa palm, clay and purchased beads, laces and yarns to make traditional bags and clothing.

Ms. Christina during the interview highlighted a number of key challenges they have encountered and foresee that if these are not addressed adequately it could take longer for the groups to become highly innovative and productive to penetrate the potential tourism market:

- Maintain membership within the groups (internal conflicts contributes to high drop out/turnover rates of memberships within the groups)
- The need to identify a common ground across and amongst the four (4) groups (Product type, quality, price)
- Identify unique service and product for each group to avoid direct competition but rather cooperation
- Determine adequate production costs for each product especially catering services
- Upgrade facilities with a business model approach and include adequate eco-friendly practices
- Agro processing and value addition

General Challenges identified:
- Additional staff with capacities to support business development of the groups
- Marketing and Sales unit/department strengthened with sales person(s) and equipment/tools
- Product development and costing capacities
- Online marketing and sales presence
- Consumer demand survey
AGRO-TOURISM LINKAGES

Agro-tourism by FAO’s definition: refers to people visiting working farms or other agricultural operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or other active involvement. Many tourist attractions can be found in and around each of the experiences such as multiple Archaeological sites, Horseback Riding and Ziplining parks, Nature trails and waterfalls, Dive Sites, Fly Fishing tours etc.; the experiences therefore has the opportunity to offer lodging (home stay) and catered meals and naturally this is already the main product/service offered.

The areas the experiences are not entirely taking advantage of are the showcasing of the farming activities that they themselves are conducting on a day to day basis. The majority of people in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Belize depend on agriculture for their livelihoods – yet we are often net importers of food. One of the serious downsides is that when tourists come, a large proportion of the money they bring in flows straight out again to purchase the foreign food and beverages which make up many hotel menus. “For every tourism dollar spent, between 50 and 90 cents go back out,” said Ena Harvey, Agrotourism Specialist at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. “After accommodation, food and beverages are tourists’ second highest expenditure.” Tapping this market could be a big opportunity for farmers.16

The interviews and analysis of the three (3) experiences has shown that the agricultural production systems being carried out by the group members, their immediate family (siblings, spouses) even the on farm and backyard farming practices are not showcased as a tour.

Below are a few farm practices/activities that can be intertwined with the current meal preparation/demonstration culinary tours already offered.

This will create unique full day tour packages; these recommendations are for the participating group members to consider a stay with a farmer, engage in farming and eat authentic food.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farming activity</th>
<th>Type of Products</th>
<th>Showcase</th>
<th>Current activity</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #cornstory</td>
<td>Corn – Maize</td>
<td>corn chips, corn bread, tamale</td>
<td>Corn grinding and corn tortilla making</td>
<td>Culinary Tour/Exp 1/2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corn planting and products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a small factory/demonstration to show other products that can be derived from the corn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #VegetableGarden story – or #backyaadstory</td>
<td>Vegetable Gardens</td>
<td>Dried rubs, See and taste, Green technology</td>
<td>small scale</td>
<td>Culinary Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Herbs and spices garden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/articles/linking-farmers-tourists-solve-development-challenges-sids
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Agro Processing</th>
<th>Culinary Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #Foodprocessing story</td>
<td>Excess produce or seasonal crops (mango, cashew, berries)</td>
<td>Seasonal produce, Jam/jellies, candies, juices, spirits and wines</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Culinary Tour Exp 1 / 2 / 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #plantainstory or #bananastory</td>
<td>Plantain &amp; Banana Planting and products</td>
<td>2 staple produce, Agro processing, A product with retail market value, Product can be scaled up – condiments, packaging</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Culinary Tour Exp 1 / 2 / 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #cocoastory</td>
<td>Cocoa Planting</td>
<td>Farm visit/tour – method of farming within the conservation zone, Agro processing, Multiple products with retail market value, Product can be scaled up – packaging, shapes, flavors</td>
<td>Demonstration of the processing and basic meal preparation, drink, pastry, Exhibits, Talks, Presentations, cultural events, food and agriculture events</td>
<td>Culinary Tour Exp 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Petting Zoo</td>
<td>On farm / backyard animals – Horses, Chicken, Turkey, Ducks, Pigs, Sheep, Rabbits</td>
<td>a variety of domestic animals are on many of the farms and in most cases within the backyards of the members</td>
<td>Exhibits, Talks, Presentations, cultural events, food and agriculture events</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the #chickenstory</td>
<td>Poultry production – Meat, Eggs, Biofertilizer</td>
<td>Biosafety conditions self-sufficiency farm to table</td>
<td>Local Chickens farmed by the Women’s Group of San Antonio this presents a major opportunity to expand sales to the other resorts in the area, as “free range”</td>
<td>Culinary Tour Exp 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7. Key Findings and Recommendations

**Characterization Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Belize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NAME OF THE EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
<td><em>San Antonio Women’s Cooperative</em> July 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOCATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Region/Department/State (*)</td>
<td>Cayo District</td>
<td>Western Belize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Municipality(s) (*)</td>
<td>San Ignacio town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Towns involved (name) (*)</td>
<td>San Antonio Village</td>
<td>Progresso 7 Miles, Cristo Rey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Location coordinates of towns: (location with UTM coordinates or location in decimal degrees from Google Maps) (*)</td>
<td>17.082597, -89.023422</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BASIC BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT OR PROGRAM THAT SUPPORTS THE EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Start date</td>
<td>Jan 2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Expected completion date</td>
<td>December 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Total budget</td>
<td>330 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Funding entity(s) (*)</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Responsible entity(s) (*)</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Participating entities (*)</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Cooperatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Total number of direct participants (estimated)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Type of participants according to activity (family farmers, fishermen, rural inhabitants, others) (*)</td>
<td><em>Pottery makers, Embroiders House wifes Cooks</em></td>
<td>Cultural presentation Products: arts and craft, clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Number of women (estimated)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10 active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Additional notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of young people (estimated)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20 – 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-45 4</td>
<td>45-65 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males 1 Females 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales volume of the last pre-pandemic exercise (estimated in USD)</td>
<td>5000 USD</td>
<td>Website and face book page, labels and package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the tourism business: type of products and/or services sold; who they sell to; how they are linked to the market; is it formalized in accordance with the tax regulations and the regulations that govern the country's tourism activity; what is the relationship with the agricultural activity; link with networks or organizations; other aspects of interest (maximum 200 words)</td>
<td>The San Antonio Women’s Cooperative offers cultural experiences to visitors, such as the very traditional experience of fire heart cooking and corn grinding on a grinding stone, which is an ancient method of tortilla making. The women of the cooperative decided to focus on embroidery and pottery making. The cooperative attends several local trade shows and community events and the visit resorts and giftshops to market their product. The also sell directly to tourist who are visiting the community and to the villagers and local visitors who are interested in pottery for their home use. The women’s group also offers culinary and pottery making hands on activities for touristor. The visitors can get a first-hand experience in the creation of the local traditional foods and the shaping up of clay pots. Ever since the cooperative started working with the tourism business in 2012, they have been hosting students from Belize and abroad. The cooperative has also represented Belize internationally with 35 of their contemporary pottery pieces being featured twice at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., and for a month in the Dowd Art Gallery at SUNY Cortland in New York. The cooperatives department assists with the legal status of the cooperative as well as with the financial management of the organization. The group is linked to several of the local</td>
<td>Main signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shiping in Belize and Internationally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tour package/brochure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Booklet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giftbag and souvenir to scale up; drying process 3 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale up of other products:</td>
<td>Sugar cane process and making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main sign for branding the location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal vehicle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shuttle for the group; and for guests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bed &amp; breakfast – peace corps staff required housing accommodations we offered and later offered to students and guests (2 to 3 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Food safety training was done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Additional notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tourist destinations as a means of promoting their products.</td>
<td>No promotion of the embroidery products</td>
<td>Accounting tracking is done manually, an upgrade required to digital platform or software. Printer and scanner already bought but no computer to advance the process. Need to conduct application and procedures to be able to receive Payment via credit card – banking with Atlantic bank. BTB gold standard in progress, installations completed pending document/procedures preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the digitization elements that have been integrated and in which dimension (business management, marketing, sales, other); available equipment (computers, cell phones) (150 words)</td>
<td>The cooperative has received basic training in business management and accounting. However, most of the record keeping is carried out manually. The group does not own a computer however several members and their sibling have ownership of cellphone devices and laptops.</td>
<td>The Group leader Ms. Timotea Mesh is the primary contact for the group and currently responds to bookings, coordinate schedules and activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TERRITORY/LOCALITY**

- Digital Connectivity in the territory: Type of networks (2G, 3G, 4G, Other types of solutions) Mobile data and DSL connectivity (4G) yes
- Digital operator(s) that provide the connectivity service (*) Digicell and Smart
- Nearby towns and cities (*) San Ignacio and Santa Elena Town
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Road connectivity and accessibility</td>
<td>Gravel road that cuts through the community and leads to several attractions in the mountain pine ridge forest reserve and the caracol archeological site.</td>
<td>Road under construction, Running Water &amp; Electricity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scalability**

| Identify potential partners to scale, and their current relationship with the initiative (*) | The resilient rural Belize initiative and cooperatives department have ongoing intervention activities in the community promoting entrepreneurial activities amongst cooperative groups. They are also supporting the efforts through the incubation network. | Online marketing sites, platforms Viator / trip advisor  
Belize Tourism Board – tour operator certification and gold standards requirements  
Belize Tourism Industry Association – tourism sector group representation  
Development Finance Corporation – Financing for agricultural and energy efficiency  
Belize Marketing and Development Corporation – marketing and branding  
Digicell & Smart telecomunncation service Providers |

**Contacts**

| Name and email of FAO focal point from Country Office | Armando Aban  
Armando.Aban@fao.org |
| Name and email of the person in charge or direct coordinator of the experience | Timotea Mesh [tmesh05@hotmail.com](mailto:tmesh05@hotmail.com)  
651 6948  
Or [ismesh99@yahoo.com](mailto:ismesh99@yahoo.com), 651 3740 |
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<tr>
<td>NAME OF THE EXPERIENCE</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>− Region/Department/State</td>
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<td>− Municipality(s)</td>
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<td>Corozal</td>
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<tr>
<td>− Towns involved (name)</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
<td>Sarteneja Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>− Location coordinates of</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
<td>18°21'08.0&quot;N 88°09'00.2&quot;W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towns: (location with UTM</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
<td>18.352228, -88.150059</td>
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<tr>
<td>coordinates or location in</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
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<td>Google Maps)&quot; (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASIC BACKGROUND OF THE</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PROJECT OR PROGRAM THAT</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORTS THE EXPERIENCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>− Start date</td>
<td></td>
<td>February 2010</td>
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<td>− Expected completion date</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>− Total budget</td>
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<td>Incorporated as part of the Community Engagement and Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>program under the Economic livelihood’s recurrent activities of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SACD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Funding entity(s) (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends of World heritage</td>
</tr>
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<td>− Responsible entity(s) (*)</td>
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<td>SACD</td>
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<td>− Participating entities (*)</td>
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<td>Sarteneja Homestay Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EXPERIENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>− Total number of direct</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants (estimated)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently only 7 members of the Sarteneja Homestay Group are active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Type of participants</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</td>
<td>House wife’s,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>according to activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooks, Artisans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>farmers, fishermen, rural inhabitants, others) (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of women (estimated)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of young people (estimated)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sales volume of the last pre-pandemic exercise (estimated in USD)</td>
<td>4000 USD</td>
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</table>

**Description of the tourism business:** type of products and/or services sold; who they sell to; how they are linked to the market; is it formalized in accordance with the tax regulations and the regulations that govern the country’s tourism activity; what is the relationship with the agricultural activity; link with networks or organizations; other aspects of interest (maximum 200 words)

Guests are able to be culturally immersed (for stays of a night or weeks in duration), in a safe, comfortable, private room with shared indoor toilet (shared with the family only). They are also able to enjoy three home cooked meals a day. Activities that the homestay experience offers, such as learning how to make tortillas or practicing Spanish, are a wonderful and unforgettable way to enjoy Sarteneja.

The main target groups are international student and church groups and volunteers. Backpackers and eco-friendly tourist, cultural tourist. The groups pays accommodation service tax to the Belize tourism board.

The group practices back yard gardening and offer a farm to table experience. They are also linked with the fishermen’s association who provide fish for the meals at the homestay program.

The group is linked to the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development, Corozal Bay Eco Adventures tour operator, who provide tours for visitors, the fishermen association, Wildtracks and other entities that work in the

| JOELE NOTES: | |
| Northern Belize, poorest region of the country, limited economic opportunities | |
| Agriculture – salinity, drought | |
| Types of plants that can be planted in this area; plantain but strong winds | |
| Tourism is a positive option | |
| Tourism resort – Orchid Bay offer tourism services | |
| Since 2010; community development plan – context, infrastructure etc., | |
| SACD partner w. Homestay (established to increase the # of beds in the community) | |
| Blue ventures – sent volunteers year-round, group from UK pandemic affect | |

Ms. Yvette Group Leader
Started w. 20 families initial – 13 5 years, later 2 family’s personal business; 2 private shop and cake decorating, 8 families
Pandemic caused major delay; 7 members now.
Appreciate SACD 3 years under their wings

Rooms accommodations within homes; guest experience our culture and traditions, village life, meals
10 years in the business
Improve standards for local tourists especially to ensure year round service options (private bathrooms, amenities)
Eco adventure / homestay was ready to participate; gold stand requirements were very high and unable to meet
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conservation and rural development field.</td>
<td>13 families started 2 small guest house (8 total rooms) 10 lady’s homestays 10 rooms 2019 upgrade standards (ENCAPP) project Expand from out of home service; addition of private bath and space 1 room (a double bed and queen bed w. private bathrooms) BTB / BTIA accredited SACD – access University students Corozal bay Eco Adventures SACD green Ltd; Adventures packages Homestay Pesca tours Corozal bay ECO adventures July 2022 – pilot groups coming</td>
<td>2020/2021 – did not acquire BTB licenses given slowdown of the tourism visitation Skill full – local sweets; cooking; cultural tour (a day activity) how to prepare meals as an activity (need to market) w. Tour guides - Cerros – 45 min drive from Sarteneja Tour packages; need to be further developed and be sold Product development and pricing (SACD has a part time marketing officer to focus on design of flyers but limited capacity the creation of the actual packages) - Internet connectivity problematic - Green technology solar power - Greening of homestay - Ac units installation Gold standards certification: units away from the family home; exit doors install; dining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business plan for the community investment – design of packages</td>
<td>and kitchen space outside? As meals are currently done in the homestay house.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road transportation upgraded – 2020 5 years</td>
<td>Waste water distribution; garbage disposal greening component Eco friendly/ promoting green standards; Sustainable farming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet service poor Only SMART available Phone is better service Diginet not expanded to these villages Digi go has a satellite transmission Not doing any additions/customers SMART capacity for the community is not available – no new upgrades Stellarlinks – subservice of SMART Petition sent the Diginet of 1,000 community signatures no real response as yet Students and online classes challenge SACD unable to participate to online meetings Chunox greenhouse abandoned Copper bank tilapia/hydroponics</td>
<td>Expand food production Properties in the village are being procured for large scale investments / resorts Competition growing rapidly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Description of the digitization elements that have been integrated and in which</td>
<td>Capacity building on business management and hospitality. Limited digitization except for access to social media (facebook) and email access. Community has access to internet through internet cafes and also through the partnership with the Sarteneja alliance for conservation and development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension (business management, marketing, sales, other); available equipment (</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computers, cell phones) (150 words)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism started to increase in the community – competition within community; homestay needed to upgrade; tour guide association tour operator license, water taxi service did not work out/work well; worked with fishers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>structure and governance; training social media and marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>group organization is development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenge, to maintain team organization and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collaborative marketing internet, booking, online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SACD business arm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tour operator Eco adventures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Platform to provide the opportunity, Pesca tours – fishing family, Details are pending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay not gold standard so SACD unable to offer their package/to sell this package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation from guest and family BTB requirement; experience is with family so this challenging; should financing be made available to assist them;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees, bookings, commissions, details not worked out as yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**TERRITORY / LOCALITY**

- **Digital Connectivity in the territory:** Type of networks (2G, 3G, 4G, Other types of solutions)  
  Mobile and DSL data services: 4G  
  Poor connection, upload capacity slow, difficult to conduct video, skype / zoom meetings etc.,

- **Digital operator(s) that provide the connectivity service (*)**  
  Digicel and Smart

- **Nearby towns and cities (*)**  
  Chunox village and Corozal Town

- **Road connectivity and accessibility**  
  Gravel road (currently being upgraded to paved road access) access by boat, or road. Community has an airstrip available

**SCALABILITY**

- **Identify potential partners to scale, and their current relationship with the initiative (*)**  
  The Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD) is the NGO working with the communities buffering the Corozal bay wildlife sanctuary. The experience can be scaled up with the other coastal communities.
### CONTACTS

- Name and email of FAO focal point from Country Office
  
  Armando Aban,  
  Armando.Aban@fao.org

- Name and email of the person in charge or direct coordinator of the experience
  
  Joel Verde,  
  ed@sacdbelize.org  
  or  
  sartenejahomestay@gmail.com,  
  634 8032

### INFORMATION REQUESTED

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<tr>
<td>- Region/Department/State (*)&amp;</td>
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<td>- Municipality(s) (*   )</td>
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<td>Punta Gorda Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Towns involved (name) (*)</td>
<td>Indian Creek Village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Location coordinates of towns: (location with UTM coordinates or location in decimal degrees from Google Maps) (*)& | 16°18'37.6"N, 88°50'13.0"W  
16.310438, -88.836934 |                  |
| BASIC BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT OR PROGRAM THAT SUPPORTS THE EXPERIENCE |             |                  |
| - Start date           | September 2019 |                  |
| - Expected completion date | September 2022 |                  |
| - Total budget         | USD$200,000   |                  |
| - Funding entity(s) (*  ) | Inter American Foundation |                  |
| - Responsible entity(s) (*) | Ya’axché Conservation Trust |                  |
### INFORMATION REQUESTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating entities (*)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of direct participants (estimated)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29 at time of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of participants according to activity (family farmers, fishermen, rural inhabitants, others) (*)</td>
<td>All participants are members of four local indigenous Maya women's groups who range both in terms of age and occupation. As entrepreneurs, these women are furthermore artisans, cooks and caterers, providers of rental services and cultural event planners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of women (estimated)</td>
<td>30 women who represent four women’s groups located within Indian Creek Village: Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd, Maya Rose Women’s Group, Ancient Maya Women’s Group, and Indian Creek Maya Arts Women’s Group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of young people (estimated)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>To be confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales volume of the last pre-pandemic exercise (estimated in USD)</td>
<td>USD$3,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the tourism business: type of products and/or services sold; who they sell to; how they are linked to the market; is it formalized in accordance with the tax regulations and the regulations that govern the country’s tourism activity; what is the relationship with the agricultural activity; link with networks or organizations; other aspects of interest (maximum 200 words)</td>
<td>EcoTourism Belize (ETB) - the sustainable business arm of local conservation NGO Ya’axché Conservation Trust - provides visitors authentic engagement with southern Belize’s diverse landscapes through environment and cultural-focused tours. ETB operates under NGO status and is tax exempt; however, pays Belize Tourism Board Accommodation Tax in compliance with national regulations. All profits are then reinvested in Ya’axché’s conservation work within the 770,000-acre focal area, the Maya Golden Landscape. The Maya Cultural Visit demonstrates a partnership between ETB and four indigenous Maya women’s groups 2 groups interviewed, services are similar there are a few distinct niche market opportunities for each group (Marigold ice machine, sweet cool drinks and popsicles for the community including pastries and fruits juices/drinks, rental of facility and furniture’s) Maya Rose, can use a functioning restaurant Ya’axché has the advantage of a wide range of products that can be extracted from these 4 groups; Ya’axché intervention will also be needed to ensure the groups are not saturating the market with the same or too similar of a product Consideration of seasonal produce as well as animals for consumption or rearing for display (iguanas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION REQUESTED</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Additional Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>located in Indian Creek village. ETB facilitates authentic cultural tours for their target audience of study abroad students and universities, international tour operators, and independent tourists looking to support community development and conservation. The Maya Cultural Visit is an opportunity for these women to showcase culinary and crafting skills ranging from fire hearth cooking, basketry, weaving, stone and wood carving, as well as sharing traditional music, dance and overall lifestyle with visitors. Cuisine plays a large role, as the visitor highlight is helping prepare and enjoying a traditional Maya meal. The women also supplement tour income through catering services for locals and visitors. Most meal ingredients originate in backyard gardens, adding authenticity and allowing traditional herb and produce cultivation while providing visitors a farm to table culinary experience whereby all food ingredients are locally sourced. Birds frequent the backyards and small paths trails can be developed to expand the culinary presentations and add on an outdoor activity to neighboring creek etc. Solar and other green technologies and practices can be vigorously pursued and adopted Tour guiding is a skill that women can scale up to, these sessions would provide the history, knowledge, soft skills and communications confidence the women require Food presentation / demonstration Agro processing skills, improve shelf life of produce, jam and jellies of seasonal fruits mangoes etc. Cake baking and decorating techniques using chocolate 😊 Crafts are also sold in nearby tourist villages of Placencia, Hopkins, Sein Bight, items are presold to a few know distributors who canvas these areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Description of the digitization elements that have been integrated and in which dimension (business management, marketing, sales, other); available equipment (computers, cell phones) (150 words)

Social media, primarily Facebook, and email represent the digital tools currently utilized by two of the four women’s groups. These two groups have members with cell phone access, which they use to promote, advertise, connect with and arrange tours. These same two groups have greater experience in cultural tourism; they are registered small businesses guided by a business plan and have increased their business acumen through development training which incorporated business planning, [digital] marketing and financial management.
The other two groups are in the training process and Ya’axché and ETB are continually seeking opportunities to fully engage the women in small business and skill development as an alternative source of livelihood improvement.

### TERRITORY / LOCALITY

- **Digital Connectivity in the territory: Type of networks** (2G, 3G, 4G, Other types of solutions)
  - Indian Creek is covered by the 3G network.
  - Indian Creek is connected to a solar grid, which is backed up by diesel generators.

- **Digital operator(s) that provide the connectivity service** (*)
  - The two digital operators providing internet connectivity are SMART and Diginet.

- **Nearby towns and cities** (*)
  - The largest nearby town is Punta Gorda. Neighboring villages include Golden Stream and Big Falls.

- **Road connectivity and accessibility**
  - Indian Creek is very accessible, as the village is located along the Southern Highway, a fully paved road providing connectivity between southern Belize and the larger cities in central Belize. All four women’s groups are easily reached as they situated alongside the highway.

### SCALABILITY

- **Identify potential partners to scale, and their current relationship with the initiative** (*)
  - Ya’axché/ ETB has been working with these 4 women’s group and they still have the potential to become fully engaged through increased marketing to sell more of their services. ETB continues to secure partnerships to be able to seize opportunities for these women and their communities.

### CONTACTS

- **Name and email of FAO focal point from Country Office**
  - Armando Aban
  - Armando.Aban@fao.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMATION REQUESTED</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Name and email of the person in charge or direct coordinator of the experience</td>
<td>Christina Garcia (Executive Director) <a href="mailto:christina.garcia@yaaxche.org">christina.garcia@yaaxche.org</a> Marcelia Assi (Conservation Business Director/ ETB manager) <a href="mailto:marcelia.assi@yaaxche.org">marcelia.assi@yaaxche.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTION ITEMS

The following action items are recommended to reduce the Low Digital Literacy identified across all three (3) experiences and to jump start scaling up requirements:

Quick Wins

- **Smart Phone and Mobile Devices:** Southern Belize internet access rate is 16%. The Women’s Group do not have adequate smartphone devices to be able to download and use applications such as email, quality photos, social media platforms; mobile phones are $150US typically so this investment could easily be implemented for each group and would be a considerable step towards becoming a digital savvy group.

- **Computer Desktop or Laptop Devices:** All three (3) experiences require adequate computer equipment for email and calendar scheduling and tracking, record keeping and reporting, labels and packaging. Computer Literacy and efficiency doesn’t happen by itself, investment required along with relevant introductory training (microsoft programs, accounting software etc..)

- **Printers and Graphic Design:** a multipurpose printer (color or black and white) would be of significant use and purpose, graphic design and printing of leaflets, flyers, business cards can be done more timely and cost efficient with this type of investment for events and tours.

- **Paper Less Services:** e banking and credit card transactions. Immediate need for groups to conduct application and procedures to be able to receive Payment via credit card.

- **Internet Connectivity/Access:** all experiences have adequate internet / telephone service available, therefore access can be installed at a central location for shared services, and a small service fee can be charged for users to cover monthly expense as required.

- **Improve Signage and Face Lift:** for information sharing and for marketing; all experiences require vibrant and sturdy signs installed to advice/alert guests upon approach to location and at the location/operations of the group. Visual appearance of sites to capture guests attention, improve moods and spirits and to encourage sharing/tagging of photos on social media.

- **Form a “Digital and Marketing Team”:** Although one individual may be responsible for sourcing and delivering the digital needs of the group, the involvement and commitment of all of the members is crucial. Establishing a Digital and Marketing Team to drive initiatives forward will provide the groups with vital support. This team will be invaluable in spearheading and ensuring that the milestones set are successfully achieved.
  
  The Team should:
  - take ownership of the ideas and agree on the recommendations;
  - facilitate action and provide access to different skills and ideas;
  - engage with members to reduce resistance to change; improve awareness and understanding of the need for change
  - schedule training exercise and implement measures immediately if any identified;

- **Online Marketing:**
  - Establish one where necessary and keep an active website with email communications
  - Assign a person to conduct these updates and activities
  - Maintain social media presence such as Facebook or Instagram
  - Listing on sales sites such as Expedia, Viator / Trip Advisor.
**Product Development Strategy and Marketing Plan / Campaign:** Each experience requires a product development strategy coupled by a simplified marketing plan / campaign. The campaign should identify the customer base and the sales pitch required along with the necessary online platform to promote the product. While these are relatively easy solutions to implement, changing daily habits will need to happen over a longer period. The campaign could include various elements to reinforce these habits including:

- Deliver an institutional digital literacy training to all members and disseminate information about the products
- Post visible growth / progress of the customer base
- Use internal newsletters, presentations, stickers and posters to communicate new initiatives and the progress of projects to members in the experiences
- Pilot a competition amongst experiences to design unique marketing campaigns, offering prizes for reaching certain targets or self-reported milestones
- Present an eco-tourism week or day to reaffirm messages regarding the significance to the users of the eco-tourism services

**Greening of Services and Products:** The three (3) experiences should review its procurement policy and purchasing guidelines to prioritize environmentally friendly sourcing requirements. This is a longer-term shift as it will need to be accompanied by a cost-benefit analysis. In many cases, energy efficient or environmentally friendly products will not have a significantly different price, but in cases where that does exist, additional review will be required. The groups can seek to establish procurement contracts with companies offering environmentally preferable purchasing options, such as recyclable products for catering events etc.

**Transition to Renewable Energy:** The biggest source of direct GHG emissions is the use of electricity from the power grid, which is still mostly non-renewable sources. There are a variety of renewable energy options that could be implemented to reduce GHG emissions and also reduce energy costs over the long-term, including off-grid solar as a back-up power source. Other renewable energy options may also be feasible, such as small-scale wind. Renewable energy also sends a highly visible sign to members and partners visiting the experiences is a green group, dedicated to sustainability. The Groups should strongly consider investing in renewable energy at every phase, which has long-term cost reduction benefits.

**Digitalization of Experiences:** The transition to more digital communications and marketing requires time and investment. SACD and Yaaxche have the general digital capabilities to serve their clients. The access they have to digital solutions which are largely dependent on global technology solutions and know how are inexpensive but are not scaled to the local context, or not appropriate for their needs. Insufficient digitalization (hardware, software and persons) creates operational inefficiencies, limits access to information for the groups, and creates delays, loss of opportunity, setbacks due to the limited amount of resource available within the institutions. Groups including San Antonio Women’s Group should explore technology options that will allow them to expand the business model and streamline online support services for the experiences.
• **ONLINE SUPPORT SERVICES:** a unit is recommended to provide the broad suite of expertises that will be required for the scaling up of the tourism experiences, it is inherent that all the members will require training in the general use and the maneuvering of the tools/devices, and will contribute to the product type, features, content etc., however a functioning business model is highly recommended to carry out quarterly review of targets; monitor marketing trends, create and update marketing materials such as videos, taglines, branding. These should be done in a consistent and aggressive manner to drive sales. The Members are often times family members and closely related this creates internal disputes, as such membership changes frequently and often times disrupt business supply flow, these services can be sourced external of the groups (namely the Maya Cultural Visit and the Sarteneja Homestay Group) via the strengthening of the business arm of both Yaaxche and SACD.

• **PRODUCT ENHANCEMENT TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT:** the groups are mostly aware of the adjustments required to improve the attributes of the experiences, finishing/glazing of the Mayan Pottery, colorization techniques, gift box wrapping and shipping, other culinary recipes from the ingredients, hospitality services, food handling, food plating techniques are all training the members in the group can benefit from.

---

8. **Conclusions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK FOR THE TOURISM BUSINESS DURING THE NEXT THREE YEARS?</th>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>OBSTACLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>An increase of tourists visits to Belize annually</strong></td>
<td><strong>Availability of natural resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group dynamics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Visitors seeking unique cultural events</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural heritage and customs</strong></td>
<td><strong>No marketing strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Product can be scaled up</strong></td>
<td><strong>Registered co-operative groups</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak business model and unskilled actors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Availability of Technical support from partners for capacity building</strong></td>
<td><strong>Availability of tools and technical support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unskilled group members of the digital technologies</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK FOR THE DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM BUSINESS DURING THE NEXT THREE YEARS?</th>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>OBSTACLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Availability of tools and technical support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skilled artisans, cooks, craftsmen and women</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unskilled group members of the digital technologies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Service and networks growing/expanding reach to national scope</strong></td>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurial outlook</strong></td>
<td><strong>Experience lacking with marketing / branding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Costs relatively affordable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Youths in households</strong></td>
<td><strong>Training required in soft skills and digital literacy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Costs relatively affordable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Online sales create a significant advantage to capture market</strong></td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Products have shown potential and are marketable</strong></td>
<td>****</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What potential exists to link the process of digitization in the experience of rural tourism with the digitization of agricultural, fisheries and/or aquaculture activities developed by farmers in the local communities and territories?**
Farms and Farmers are encouraged to register on the Ministry of Food and Agriculture platform that provides a unique identification and characterization of each farm. Extension officers are deployed to monitor and collect data annually to populate projections and forecasting to support decisions for importation to maintain product availability. These services are linked to a larger opportunity of networking and technical/extension assistance programs that can be further developed digitally, pest management, pesticides usage and harvesting volumes and availability are then able to sell on the agrilinks platform https://agrilinks.bz/. This program is innovative in its own right but with lack of education campaigns and clear demonstration of the usage farmers and farmer groups are not embracing and using the services to its full extent. A great potential exists for this digital platform to be utilized in harmony with the rural tourism experiences.

Figure 22 agrilinks, ministry of Food and Agriculture
9. **Other Conclusions Related to the Analysis**

Digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and clearly communicate information through typing and other media on various digital platforms. It is evaluated by an individual access to the digital tools, and the individual's grammar, composition, typing skills and ability to produce text, images, audio and designs using technology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience 1</th>
<th>Smart Phones</th>
<th>Social Media and website hosting Platforms</th>
<th>Communication compositing and use of planning tools</th>
<th>Computer equipment and software</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarteneja Homestay Group in the North of Belize, Corozal District</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACD</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience 2</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio Women’s Cooperative in Western Belize, Cayo District</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience 3</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Cultural Visit in Southern Belize, Toledo District</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya’axché</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The context for basic digital skills

There is a digital divide in Belize and it affects more than 50% of the population:
  - people are unable to use the internet independently.
  - people do not have access to the internet in their homes.

It mostly affects those who are vulnerable: older, disabled, poorer and lower skilled. It holds them back from realising opportunities and increases their social exclusion:
  - A limited % have the capability to shop online or to manage their money online.
  - In fact, more than 75% of this age group have very low digital engagement.
  - the non-internet users are mostly in the households

Those facing digital exclusion with low skills are less likely to seek support from the formal education and training sector, and less likely to be engaged with learning:
  - People at the greatest distance from adult learning benefit from a community-based solution and existing face-to-face programmes for essential digital skills, while doing good work. This will not address the national problem at sufficient scale or with sufficient urgency therefore the service providers are the key to ensuring adequate coverage is available nationally.

The interviews with the groups showed that over three quarters of the members are older people and have very low digital engagement and skills. People with lower education are also highlighted. There is an upward trends and positive benefits by people who were connected online during the Covid-19 lockdown:
  - it helped them connect better with friends and family
  - it made them feel more part of a community, and
  - it helped them to manage physical and mental well-being.
  - more persons and businesses have registered for online banking, and more are using the internet for learning.

Organizational Bottlenecks

A lack of technical and financial resources has hindered the growth of these experiences, scaling up will require that these bottlenecks be addressed. Covid-19 restrictions appear to have been primarily responsible for these organisational delays over the last two (2) years, as most Directors and Officers were working from home offices and were not able to meet regularly to impart the support services. The need to reduce the digital divide to these groups is of priority

Challenges for Group Members
  - Low Participation
  - High membership conflicts and drop outs
  - Challenges Related to the External Environment, political and socio-economic factors
  - Soft skills and public speaking – communication
  - Language barrier

Limited Use of Extension Services

Lack of Climate Smart Technology
10. **Next Steps / Solutions**

I. Further engage with technical assistance providers to enhance member outreach and bolster customer-level outcomes.

   o Establish specific type and level of technical assistance offered to members through established partnerships prior to launching a digital literacy training and incorporate details on relevant technical assistance services into promotional campaigns to increase member interest and use.

   o Ensure coordinated feedback and timely visits to facilitate improved monitoring of customer outcomes and to proactively mitigate technology-related challenges.

II. Establish systematic and efficient internal processes.

III. Build the capacity to conduct outreach and effectively engage clients.

IV. Leverage multiple forms of communication to enhance outreach to members.

   o Conduct strategic in-person and/or virtual presentations via community meetings and sessions with association and group members.

   o Consider multiple forms of communication for socialising the products to members, including printed advertisements and media, virtual communication and social media platforms, community meetings, and engagement sessions.

V. Enhance the flexibility of products to broaden the pool of potential clients
## 11. **Needs of the Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Recommendations and Partners activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy and digital skills training</strong></td>
<td>Digital and social inclusion, software and hardware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTL – internet in schools</td>
<td>Fultec Computer Systems – leading computer and software sales company in Belize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital strategies for the promotion, sale and management of products and services based on digital innovations</strong></td>
<td>Print material, signage, website, social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained marketing officers - Build capacity and internal support team</td>
<td>Slingshot – leading billboard company in Belize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating new linkages with the private sector (tourism agencies and digital operators) and the public sector</strong></td>
<td>Extension services, financing, business development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. BTB – publications and online networks</td>
<td>Destination Belize – annual publication and feature stories; online presence and promotions internationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <a href="https://www.destinationbelize.com/">https://www.destinationbelize.com/</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTB’s Belizean Traveler Facebook page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/BelizeTourismBoard">https://www.facebook.com/BelizeTourismBoard</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour operators and associations (BTIA, BHA etc.,)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NICH – Cultural Events and Expos</td>
<td>Festival of arts (annual event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Presentations at ceremonies (September Celebrations)</td>
<td>Street Festival (annual event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ministry of Agriculture</td>
<td>Agrilinks (platform to sell produce and products)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <a href="https://agrilinks.bz/">https://agrilinks.bz/</a></td>
<td>BMDC marketing and development arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperatives Department – group formalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. DFC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing – small loans and business planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. ANNEXES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Tasks/Deliverables</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Project Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Conduct an initial meeting with the FAO country technical team, to approve the concept, scope and timing of the study, as well as the general objectives of the compliance assessment.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Review of market survey documents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Preparation of Inception Report

2.1 Review of market survey and work plan, X

2.2 Review of documents and discussions with various stakeholders        X

2.3 Finalize Market survey and arrangements                                  X

2.4 Communication & Scheduling Field Visit w. Beneficiaries XX

2.5 Preparation and presentation of Inception Report                        X

2.6 Submission of Inception Report                                           X

3. Data Gathering

3.1 Preliminary Review of Relevant Literature                                X

3.2 Conduct Field Visit X X X

3.3 Report on 1st Market Survey X

3.4 Report on 2nd Market Survey X

3.5 Report on 3rd Market Survey X

3.6 Additional Data Collection / Field Work X X

3.7 Data Analysis and reporting X

3.8 Final report X X

4. Submission of Reports

4.1 Submission of draft report X

4.2 Validation presentation to FAO Technical Officers X

4.3 Final report X X
ANNEX 2 GUIDING QUESTIONS

In addition to use of the “GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF DIGITAL PRIORITIES OF PARTICIPATING RURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN STAGE 1” annexed the following guiding questions will be used

1. What are their major challenge(s) in promoting and accessing the tourism market? Why? Any recommendations to address these challenges?
2. Which challenges faced by the group are you most excited about solving? Why?
3. How can this challenge be addressed over time?
4. Who or where are you networking with to receive support about the potential solutions you require?
5. What other areas would you require further guidance in? and what kind of support? Technology, financing etc.,
6. Do you foresee any challenges in scaling up the program?
7. How is the territory and its institutionality? advantages and limitations
8. What they sell, how they sell, where they sell and how much they sell; link with agri-food systems
9. Who are the direct participants and how are they? their abilities and their resources
10. How are they organized? capabilities, equipment, infrastructure, networks
11. What processes have been digitized? What models have been used? brief story of digitization process
12. How is the network that links them with digitization, tourism and development?
13. What is the “story and the magic ………”?
ANNEX 3 INTERVIEW NOTES WITH BENEFICIARY INSTITUTIONS

In addition to use of the “GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF DIGITAL PRIORITIES OF PARTICIPATING RURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN STAGE 1” annexed the following guiding questions was used to carry out a conversation with the interviewees to collect the general information on each experience and:

Experience 1 – Sarteneja Homestay Group

1. What was their major challenge(s) in promoting and accessing the tourism market? Why? Any recommendations to address these challenges?
   - BTB Gold certification
   - Product Development & Marketing
   - Online Sales, website and POS, credit card sales bank approvals;
   - Viator / Trip Advisor online sales
   - Increase the Number of Beds, we have reduced significantly in the last two years

2. Which challenges faced by the group are you most excited about solving? Why?
   - Create sales packages and launch
   - Recognized eco-friendly services, community based
   - Gold standard protocols met to allow for product launch in 2022

3. How can this challenge be addressed over time?
   - Continue to work with strengthening the marketing arm of SACD
   - Ensure sound investments are made to develop the product (accommodations meet required certification standards)

4. Who or where are you networking with to receive support about the potential solutions you require?
   - FAO, BTB, traditional funders and sponsors (UNDP, COMPACT, PACT etc.,)

5. What other areas would you require further guidance in? and what kind of support? Technology, financing etc.,
   - Marketing and sales
   - Digital equipment and use
   - Hospitality and culinary skills
   - Soft skills and communication
   - Tour guiding

6. Do you foresee any challenges in scaling up of the program?
   - Keeping the membership vibrant and active and resilient
   - Guest do not come in the volumes required for a decent income
   - Strong partnerships and linkages developed and sustained

7. How is the territory and the group organization? advantages y limitations
   - SACD established institution with co-management agreement for the protection of the Corozal Bay, seeking partnership for co-management of Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve
   - Community and outreach program keen on supporting small business development
   - Experience in writing and executing grants
   - Partnership with other groups, Fishermen Cooperative

8. What they sell, how they sell, where they sell and how much they sell; link with agri-food systems
   - See notes in characterization sheet
9. Who are the direct participants and how are they? their abilities and their resources
   Homestay group members (notes in characterization sheet)

   How are they organized? capabilities, equipment, infrastructure, networks
   SACD – business arm, marketing officer, fully operational office building

10. What processes have been digitized? What models have been used? brief story of digitization process
    Website, email, skilled in Microsoft programs
    Videography equipment and tools, edit skills required
    Online sales and marketing required, product development, visual aide

11. How is the network that links them with digitization, tourism and development?
    Services available, institutions and governing body and regulations exist
    Group requires guidance and adequate planning

12. What is the “story and the magic ……..”?
    Community and Conservation Organization
    Cultures and tradition, in an effort to maintain a sustainable tourism development don’t want another
    San Pedro; want to keep the community and nature intact, destination

    Age group – above 40 women group
    SACD Staff – mixed ages, including females

    Young man; marketing officer age 29 years
**Experience 2 – San Antonio Womens Group**

1. What are their major challenge(s) in promoting and accessing the tourism market? Why? Any recommendations to address these challenges?
   - Sales and contacting the clients to promote ourselves
   - As the contact person, I don’t have the training and not conducting sales calls
   - Website, hosting and updating
   - No computer for online booking
   - Using personal cell phone
   - Currently just depending on 3rd party sales from the resorts and tour operators; Resort guest, driver and van Nine Belize tours sell tours for $395US per person - $50 per person with food is the rate the cooperative charge (San Ignacio hotel 8 groups for a season, Blancaneaux, Galla, Mystic River, Maya Walk, Cahal Pech, San Ignacio Hotel)
   - Private travelers – freelance tours – potential clients
   - Schools and students who travel annually to Belize, University of Michigan 30 students once per year) selling of crafts
   - Craft not sold countrywide – getting the product out is difficult given transportation
   - Packaging of craft for shipping
   - Charges and fees
   - Gift Shop building located across the street

2. Which challenges faced by the group are you most excited about solving? Why?
   Getting back to business with the pandemic restrictions, having our products packaged and shipped to customers, we could have been making sales even with the lock down

3. How can this challenge be addressed over time?
   Online sales, trained officer to continuously update and maintain the site, adequate computer equipment

4. Who or where are you networking with to receive support about the potential solutions you require?
   Only the Cooperatives Department, we work with the Tour Guides and Resorts in the area to conduct the cultural tour

5. What other areas would you require further guidance in? and what kind of support? Technology, financing etc.,
   Training on pottery glazing, finishing touches
   Traditional method, natural way of painting the pottery for decoration only; pottery made to be used for everyday and to make them food safe
   Lack of technique not allowing group to be able to sell more of the pottery products to the resorts; glossy look
   Guatemala’s products are not adequate for food safety….

6. Do you foresee any challenges in scaling up the program?
   More innovation, competition kitchen presentation is being copied ka’an and Chaa Creek, two of our major sales agents are now offering a similar tour at the resorts kitchen
Improve presentation – Corozal Students, San Pedro High, Belize Elementary School, Eden High School, Galen University (50 to 75 students’ kitchen & pottery); medicinal plants
Restoring the way of extracting and preparing sugar, as a new product
Molasses and candies
- Training (local villagers) and tools and equipment required

7. How is the territory and the group organization? advantages and limitations
San Antonio Village is in what one would consider the priority Tourism zone of the Country. The group is well established and functioning for more than eight years with a core group of members. Infrastructure and services, they have a relationship with the elite group of resorts/hotels
Not as many animals on the property or on the farms, growing chickens is still the main farming activity of the women
Every family has a farm (corn, vegetables), a tour of farms is on request and up for consideration
Agro-tourism – site, and type of products
Survival training, living on the farm and living off the farm (expand a bit more)
Improve production for home use and for tourism related services

8. What they sell, how they sell, where they sell and how much they sell; link with agri-food systems
Services pottery, embroidery and maya presentation of cultural foods
3 to 3.5 hours depend on the group size 9:30am to midday; guest get to eat foods prepared
Fruits and veggies from farm
Poultry products are from free range grown by the group members
Expanding the farms to be an experience

9. Who are the direct participants and how are they? their abilities and their resources
Leader, email and communication and you do the schedule of tours
Head chef and head cook, cooking
Embroidery – material sourcing, more costly in Belize, yarn from Chetumal w. border closing difficulty, costly to source in Belize
Pottery making – sourcing of the clay, was at the road side in Benque, road going to san Ignacio upgrading of road limits, access for clay source, color and richness was key….
Clay is on people property, scouting of clay resource is required
Upscale the product and maintain reasonable price, “handmade”

Visitors of 30-40 groups – 1 spinning wheel to showcase to method (add on at least 3 spinning wheel); improve demonstration of the pottery

15year old kiln – oven for the pottery refurbishment required, heat loss and cost of butane

Concession stands to get product out
Cost of items is less expensive from Mexico and Guatemala
10. How are they organized? capabilities, equipment, infrastructure, networks
Legally registered cooperative group
Artisans, cooks, embroiders, pottery maker, demonstration tools xxx need upgrading and additional stations to accommodate groups required, main building on a member’s property where culinary presentations are done, meals are also served, building for pottery exhibition, gift shop building

11. What processes have been digitized? What models have been used? brief story of digitization process

mobile phone
internet access at site location, $80 monthly
personal home internet access currently

12. How is the network that links them with digitization, tourism and development?
Available, not utilized by group

13. What is the “story and the magic ………”? 
The learning experience in the kitchen and the pottery making

The traditional food that we serve

A brief outline of presentation given to guests:

5 mins welcome and introduction of staff and we tell them about the village and the purpose of the organization and the presentation

Break for restroom

Kitchen presentation – corn and processes before used for food; fire and type of homes; grinding process of the corn show and tell, masa prepared and then the tortilla process occurs, 1 hour
Tasting of the corn tortilla along with the Porridge that will have been boiling in the meantime

Very interactive and lots of laughter, sweating and chatting

Moved to pottery making thereafter

Introduction and learn about the processes of clay collection and preparation and the type of painting process

Rafael does presentation on the spinning wheel client gets to try thereafter

Their pieces are left or taken with them for souvenir 1 hour

Lunch is served for the group, roasted meat, Chaya and beans and corn tortilla of course

1 group leader escorts group around

Gold standard application pending, sanitization stations installed, members are vaccinated and aware of risks and procedures, application that includes a manual is pending preparation and submission to the relevant authorities – target Jan 2021 to complete
Experience 3 – Maya Cultural Visit
ANNEX 4 PARTICIPATION LISTS INCLUDING NAME, AGE, AND GENDER
These were conducted with participants/representatives of the three experiences in Belize, list of interviewees
- on October 22nd to 23rd, 2021 San Antonio Women’s Group (Group Leader Ms. Timotea Mesh and two members who conduct the culinary and pottery presentations),
- on October 25th to 26th, 2021 Ya’axché Conservation Trust (Executive Director Ms. Christina Garcia) and Leaders and Members of two of the four Women’s Group namely, Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd and Maya Rose Women’s Group,
- on October 28th to 29th, 2021 SACD (Executive Director Mr. Joel Verde) and the Sarteneja Homestay Group

Experience 1
1. Ms. Timotea Mesh, Group Leader, Female
2. Mr. Rafael Canto, Group Member, Potter, Male
3. Mr. Jesefa Canto, Group Member, Kitchen/Culinary demonstration, Female

Experience 2
1. Mr. Joel Verde, SACD Executive Director, Male
2. Ms. Yvette, Sarteneja Homestay, Group Leader, Female

Experience 3
29 women
*Names in italics participated in the interview conducted

Marigold Women’s Cooperative Society Ltd
Members:
1. Felicia Tec
2. Delfina Pop
3. Elfinia Canti
4. Mariano Shol*
5. Concepciona Caal
6. Sarah Ack
7. Catalina Ack

Maya Rose Women’s Group
Members:
1. Rosaria Coy
2. Marta Choc
3. Concepciona Choc
4. Catalina Choc
5. Amelia Choc
6. Rosa Choc

Maya Arts Women’s Group
Members:
1. Avelina Coc
2. Emelda Coc
3. Juanita Teck
4. Rosa Coc
5. Modecia Sam
6. Augustina Sam
7. Cecila Teck
8. Isabella Caal
9. Catalina Coc

Ancient Maya Women’s Group
Members:
1. Sarasaria Makin
2. Dorla Sam
3. Adelina Mas
4. Candelaria Pop
5. Yolanda Ical
6. Zeneida Mas
7. Petrona Chub

*male
ANNEX 5 REFERENCES

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