

NEWSLETTER

# BELIZE ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS



*"Making Belize Sustainable"*



## INTRODUCING: KEISHA RODRIGUEZ - BAP COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Competent, visionary, innovative, and techy are just a few choice words that her friends and family use to describe Keisha Rodriguez. The 36-year-old, published poet, has been a self-employed Urban Development Planner and GIS consultant for over four years. She is a founding member of Belize Association of Planners (2013); and was the youngest and most junior planner in Belize at that time.

Despite being relatively new to the field then, Keisha says she recognized that BAP's formation was a significant step towards creating awareness and value of planning for Belize's development framework. She credits influence from BAP's President, Carolyn Trench-Sandiford, who she says has mentored her over the years, and who keeps her motivated. Carolyn "is visionary and works tirelessly to build BAP into a formidable civil society organization," Keisha notes.

Notwithstanding her friends and family telling her to get a 'real job', Keisha asserts, "I enjoyed being part of the organization from its inception, I learnt so much and it gives you a great sense of satisfaction to know that you were a part of the creation of something new and innovative."

She wishes people knew about why BAP is so crucial to ensuring that we have safe, sustainable and successful communities in Belize; which is part of the reason Keisha says she enjoys working directly in urban communities - it allows her to interact with people from all walks of life.

Keisha admits that working as a volunteer at BAP does come with challenges. While planners see how things connect

spatially, socio-economically, environmentally and politically, she concedes that "It can be difficult to convey that to people who are sectoral or project-oriented." But Keisha is enthusiastic with the progress that BAP has made over the last few years, and BAP's future prospects. "We have younger, more vibrant... people who have joined the Association... which gives us hope for the future of the profession and for Belize as a whole."

Keisha believes that BAP will grow, exponentially, over the next five years, and is poised to play a major role in Belize and in the region in terms of education, outreach, research and advocacy for planning and urban issues and challenges.

She encourages, especially young people, to volunteer; and anticipates that BAP will be able to provide opportunities for youth to become qualified planners, so as to make Belize sustainable.

## BAP JANUARY ACTIVITIES



BAP and RTI are also pleased to announce a collaboration with the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) to provide \$27,000.00 USD to fund an exercise to strengthen the role of civil society in governance accountability.

The awards to BAPDA and EmergentCorp and the collaboration with the BNN are made possible through a project funded by the United States Embassy, CARSI GRANT titled "Improving the Data Ecosystem for Governance Decision Making in Belize", the goal of which is to "Build capacity among Belizean civil society organizations and civil service actors to promote enhanced governance accountability."

**PRESS RELEASE**

January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**The Belize Association of Planners and Research Triangle International award grants to two Civil Society Organizations and enter into a collaboration with the Belize Network of NGOs**

The Belize Association of Planners (BAP) and Research Triangle International (RTI) are pleased to announce the award of micro-grants of \$5,000.00 USD each to two (2) civil society organizations (CSOs) for short-term (6 month) projects designed to improve government accountability through the incorporation of secondary data sources into a quantitative analysis with policy recommendations.

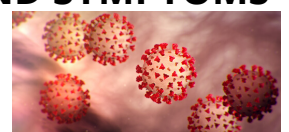
The two awardees are (1) The Belize Assembly for Persons Living with Diverse Ability (BAPDA) to fund a project focused on **Institutional Strengthening, Advocacy and Governance** and (2) EmergentCorp, to fund research and data collection into the **Push-Pull Factors Influencing Women in Governance**. They were selected from eleven applications.

**CONTACT**

Carolyn Trench-Sandiford  
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## COVID-19 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))



1. Fever
2. Cough
3. Shortness of breath (symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure)

**Seek medical advice if you develop symptoms**

# Citizen Security In Belize- Why We Feel Unsafe and How to Fix It? (Part 1)

by Deseree Arzu and Eric Sanchez



Photo Credit:: FSTV

As an intro to this three-part article, we, surveyed, informally, a few people, via social media, and asked them whether they felt safe walking in the cities and towns of Belize.. Below are their responses, and where they reside:

1. "Not at all! Nowhere in this city. I used to feel safe in my village but that is no longer so. I can hardly take a morning walk for fear of being the witness to some crime then becoming the target! It's pure stupidity. We should feel safe in our homes, in any part of this beautiful country, Belize." (Female resident living on north-side Belize City)
2. This question literally saddens me. It gives reason for pause. When I think of citizens who are not even safe from police and must trod the streets in neighborhoods that are gang-infested. Seriously, who is safe-and where are they safe? The harsh recognition that no one is immune to the violence that has taken over our streets and homes makes me shudder." (Female Belizean-American living abroad, but who visits sometimes)
3. "I'm scared for my family and friends. When I'm home visiting, I just fly down south and head to the Cayes." (Male Belizean-American living abroad, but who visits sometimes)
4. "'Unfortunately, I carry a gun everywhere. That says a lot.'" (Belizean-American man living abroad who frequently visits)
5. "I'm scared mostly for my kids cause my son just got rob coming from a 'high school' game just last week. It is sad cause the streets not safe at all." (Belizean woman living on south-side Belize City)

6. "I feel safe during the daytime." (Belizean woman living outside of the city but works in the city)
7. "Overall, yes! But I could feel safer. I think that if something should happen, there would be no justice; justice would be lacking." (Belizean man living outside of the city but works in the city)
8. "Yes, I feel safe in my country Belize because I don't associate with people who have lunatic tendencies, are members of gangs, or participate in illegal activities. I try for the most part to avoid crowds and areas known to be gang areas or special patrol areas. So in a nut shell, I feel safe." (Belizean man living on north-side Belize City and works in the city)

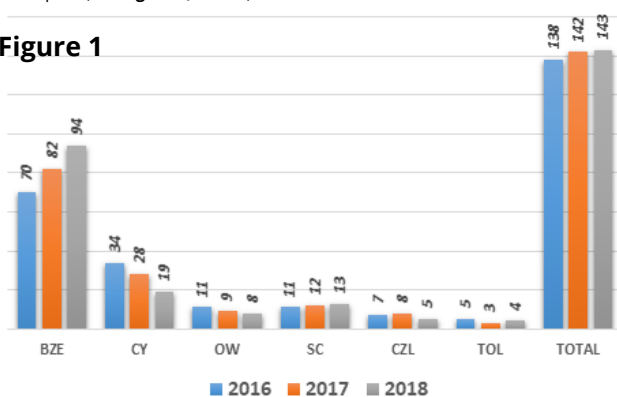
Based on the responses, we found that three of the eight persons felt safe. That safety, for the first individual, is limited to daylight hours only; while for the second person, there is still a need to feel safer. The third person feels safe because he avoids gangs and people he labels as 'lunatics'. The bottomline, though, is that a feeling of insecurity negatively affects our quality of life, decreases our expectation/s of any social or economic development in our community, and subsequently, our country; and it also makes us feel, out-rightly, helpless. So, what is it that makes residents and non-residents feel unsafe?

From what we surmise via the responses above, we could safely say that the crime and violence concentrated in urban communities plays a pivotal role in determining whether one feels safe or not. Even though, when asked what makes him feel unsafe, one man, who lives on north-side Belize City (not featured in the responses above), responded "That some people who are unable to formulate a cohesive sentence elect even more questionable people who then are in charge of running core systems of our national democracy." Another young man, who is currently studying abroad, but who lives in the nation's capital exclaimed, "The fact that our Leaders can manipulate laws and structures to protect themselves when they operate unethically and criminally" makes him feel unsafe. Now, that's deep! But more so, it is a clear indication that citizens recognize while crime and violence tend to be a primarily urban and often even more narrowly construed as a "southside" Belize City issue; there are overarching governance, policy and institutional paradigms that ultimately influence and impact our sense of security. So, how do we, as a nation, address citizen security so that people have a general sense of safety, whether in urban or rural communities, during the day, or at night; at home or outside the home; and what role, if any, should Planning play in enhancing citizen security? But, before we talk about the triggers for insecurity, let's first start with the general definition of citizen security.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines citizen security as "the process of establishing, strengthening and protecting democratic civic order, eliminating threats of violence in a population and allowing for safe and peaceful co-existence." In the process, one must consider what causes crime and violence, crime prevention measures, social cohesion or lack thereof, migration, proliferation of illegal firearms, impunity, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. According to the UNDP, the most popular indications of insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are related to youth violence, gangs, and gender-based violence, particularly sexual and domestic violence against women and girls. It is therefore not far-fetched that Belizeans relate insecurity with rising and intensifying crime and violence within and among the same demographic and socio-spatial groups identified regionally.

The LAC is the only region in the entire world where lethal violence increased between 2000 and 2010; and where crime and violence was the major concern for its citizens according to the 2013-2014 Human Development Citizen Security Report for Latin America. Belize's 2019 Crime and Safety Report, from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, suggests that, time after time, Belize has ranked in the top 10 countries in the world for highest number of murders per capita, with an average of 40 murders per 100,000 residents. The figure below shows the official murder total by district, between 2016 and 2018. To date, the highest number of homicides occurred in 2012; that number was 145! According to the report, criminal gang activity has been blamed for many of those killings, particularly in Belize City which continues to record the highest number of murders, attributed to the street gangs operating in the old capital (See Figure 1, Below)

Figure 1



(Total Number of murders in Belize between 2016 and 2018)



**MISSION** – To address relevant planning and development issues in Belize by working in partnership with the public and private sector and civil society organizations, and the people of Belize through research, education, advocacy and action.

## Upcoming BAP Activities

- Forum for the Central America Regional Security Initiative Economic Support Funds (CARSI-ESF)
- UK-Belize Project Partnership Reception

**VISION** – BAP is a proactive professional planning organization committed to assuring social justice and promoting sustainability in the natural and built environment.

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WE ARE SOCIAL:

