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## Press Release

### **The Official Project Launch and Inception Workshop to Mainstream Biodiversity in the Maya Golden Landscape**

With funding support from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Government of Belize, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has partnered with Ya'axché Conservation Trust to implement a 4-year project in the Maya Golden Landscape of Toledo, Belize. The project titled "*Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Belize's Maya Golden Landscape*" integrates biodiversity conservation, protected areas management and sustainable livelihoods at the landscape level. Project beneficiaries include farmers and organized groups from ten (10) stakeholder communities and will be implemented in both protected areas and community zones of the MGL.

The official launch took place on Tuesday, July 16, 2024, at Kiki Witz Resort on Mile 46, George Price Highway, Belmopan, Cayo District. The project objectives and components was socialized with key stakeholders. Invited guests included representatives from FAO, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise (MAFSE), Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MHDFIPA), the National Biodiversity Office (NBIO), the Forest Department (FD), Toledo District Association of Village Council Organization (DAVCO), Cacao producer cooperatives and women's group of the MGL.

The main speaker was Dr. Kenrick Williams, CEO from the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change, who is also the GEF Focal Point/ FAO country representative in Belize. Ya'axché's Executive Director provided a summarized background and overview of the project.

The main purpose of the workshop session was to establish the PSC as the governance structure for the project. This also includes identifying areas of expertise to comprise the body of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for the project. Lead by the Project Coordinator, the 18-month work plan was presented to the participants, updates on the implementation status of project activities was provided and potential opportunities to strengthen the networking between the PSC and the TAC for the duration of the project was discussed.

Over the course of the project, the expected results encompass ethnic sensitive action plans for priority protected areas, community-supported biodiversity monitoring, improved community resources management, and gender responsive trainings and technical support in sustainable agriculture practices. Additionally, the project experiences, best practices, and lessons learned will be captured and made available through multi-stakeholder forums and various platforms to support use in forest reserves and production lands in the MGL and in landscapes elsewhere in Belize.

Ya'axché Conservation Trust is a grassroots community-based organization (CBO) with a vision to promote harmony between nature and human development for the benefit of both. From its



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inception in 1998, the work of the CSO has been in community outreach and livelihoods in southern Belize, in the area now regarded as the Maya Golden Landscape (MGL).

For further information on the GEF/FAO supported project please contact Ms. Christina Garcia (Executive Director) at [christina.garcia@yaaxche.org](mailto:christina.garcia@yaaxche.org) or Marvin Vasquez (Project Manager) at [marvin.vasquez@yaaxche.org](mailto:marvin.vasquez@yaaxche.org).

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