Climate change is affecting coastal ecosystems with severe implications for developing countries heavily reliant on their natural resources for economic growth. In Belize, coral reefs, mangroves, and beaches are the cornerstone of the industry and coastal communities rely on mangrove and reef-based fisheries for food security and income. Growth of the tourism industry is viewed as inherent to economic development in Belize but is often accompanied by habitat degradation that directly threatens the resources upon which the industry depends. The challenge faced by decision-makers is how to move forward with tourism development while maintaining healthy, functional ecosystems that support the tourism industry, sustain livelihoods and provide resilience to climate change.

This project is helping to inform this process by assessing the vulnerability of Belize’s tourism system to climate change threats, including the coastal ecosystems on which it depends, and identifying how current policies facilitate or hinder climate-compatible tourism development based on healthy coastal ecosystems. We are also exploring the policy reforms and adaptation strategies required to enhance ecosystem resilience to climate change and foster tourism development, at both a local and national scale.

The overall aim of this project is to support coastal planners and policy makers in selecting appropriate policies and adaptation strategies for Belize’s coastal areas that meet climate adaptation, developmental and environmental goals. Project outputs will include an interactive vulnerability map, journal articles, policy briefs, a database of potential adaptation strategies for the tourism sector, and a project website to disseminate the findings of this work to a range of audiences.