



NCD Advocacy, Accountability, and Conflict of Interest Meeting
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My vision for the Civil Society NCD movement in the Caribbean

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You flatter me by asking for my vision. All of you who have ever attended Christian Sunday school must know the passage from the Acts of the Apostles which says:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

But perhaps these are not the last days and obviously I am not young.

First let me give a clarification. My comments must not be construed only in the context of the strategic plan of the HCC. They are based on my perception of the Caribbean reality and possibility and also what I have heard over the past two days. If I appear to be grandiloquent, such is the nature of visions of those who will more than likely not see them realized. I'm also liberated from the responsibility of crafting a vision for an organization or movement for which I have responsibility.

I am also making the assumption that you are asking me to give a vision of what the movement will become, because I take it from all I know and what I have seen over the past two days that a movement already exists, so I am looking not towards a new movement but what the present one can become. I have often reflected on an NCD movement, perhaps influenced by my

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reading of the success of the feminist movement and the courage of the suffragettes. I was entranced by the description of the abolitionist movement as described by Adam Hochschild's "Bury the chains" and of more direct relevance today has been Doug MacAdam's chronicling of many aspects of the civil rights movement. My task is to create a mental image of a future state that is memorable and motivating as well as inspiring enthusiasm and encouraging commitment by its devotees.

My vision is of a mighty Association of Caribbean people and organizations united in a grand design, stripped of sectoral and linguistic chains, driven by the urgency of braking the advance of NCD's in our space.

But any vision which is by definition related to things to come, cannot be divorced from what has gone before. You will recognize the commandment:

"In this great future, you can't forget your past".

But we have no tears to dry – to the contrary. We should rejoice in how far the movement has come and in how it has grown. For this I must give credit to those who started it and got it here, chief among those being Trevor Hassell, its godfather and godmother.

But we also have to consider the present context and I will refer to two aspects which I think are important.

First is the focus in health at this time. I am an enthusiastic and unapologetic supporter of UHC through a process of progressive universalism. However, I worry that the current enthusiasm for this new truth which, irrespective of the qualifying statements, focuses primarily on individual care and may lead to some delinquency as regards the broader determinants of a people's health. I fear that UHC may lead to us forgetting the need for prevention of NCDs and being caught up in the problems of secondary prevention and tertiary care. Of course, we must have statins and dialysis units, but not to the detriment of the less glamorous but critical prevention. It is not an either/or situation. As I always thought and taught, 60 to 70% of the population's health comes from outside the health care system. The other new truth of relevance in this context is the enthusiasm for precision medicine which targets treatment specifically to the individual.

Second, much of the euphoria that attended the demonstration of population and community-based approaches to controlling NCD's such as cardiovascular disease in North Karelia came from a different epidemiological era. Today, not that those approaches are not important, but there are other variables and as an example it is obesity, described as the tip of the spear of the drivers of NCD's and ill health globally which is coming into prominence. Let me evoke the image of the two sets of forks. We are digging our graves with two sets of forks-literally with one, figuratively with the other.

But enough of context.

Any vision without values and valor is vanity.

I will mention just two sets of values I see civil society in the Caribbean embracing. There are others of course.

The first is equity in health – equity as applied to NCD's- and viewing the problem of NCD's through an equity lens. I see the NCD civil society movement venturing out of its comfort zone and involving groups that are not traditionally involved in advocating for prevention of NCD's but are concerned with equity. As many of you know, equity has been a recurring and driving theme in my professional life.

One of these is the movement that is highlighting the miasma of ageism. I agree that premature mortality is important. I agree and have published arguments that NCD's kill us in our most productive years, those years below the age of 70 and are thus of significant economic importance. But it is not because of personal status that I urge that we do not forget that our Caribbean populations are aging and NCD's are increasingly affecting this age group. The fastest growing population group in the Caribbean is those over the age of 80 years. I see consequences and opportunities in this approach. I see the movement embracing other civil society organizations that concern themselves with the older persons but have not hitherto advocated for NCD's, such as the Barbados Association of Retired Persons, the Caribbean Association of retired persons and analogous groups throughout the region.

The second group would be those which focus on gender issues. The impact of NCD's on women is clear and they suffer both the health and social consequences. There is an abundant literature on the extent to which NCD's have a major impact on women and much of this is gender mediated. So, I ask what about mobilizing women's groups throughout the Caribbean to advocate for NCD prevention. I have often contended that women as a matter of self- interest must be concerned with preventing early mortality from NCD's. Widowhood and female poverty are a terrible combination.

The second value I see the movement embracing is justice. This applies to several aspects of NCD's throughout the life course. The one I have spoken about most often and which Sir Trevor recently highlighted brilliantly in Barbados and James Hospedales has championed in CARPHA as you have heard here is childhood obesity. This represents abrogation of the responsibilities of governments to protect the rights of the child. All governments are signatory to the convention on the rights of the child which states;

Children have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible – to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

.I support enthusiastically the work of HCC in this regard. I applaud the initiatives in Barbados, Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago and hope that the domino will fall in the Caribbean.

And what about valor? This is applicable in several senses. It can refer to the courage to embrace other Caribbean countries and enter dialogue with what Philip Sherlock dreamed of when he spoke of the wider and deeper Caribbean. We cannot be impeded by the fear that partnerships will necessarily lead to loss of identity.

There is valor in addressing frontally the relationship with the private sector and not letting our legitimate concern for conflict of interests hobble appropriate, relevant productive associations. As Derrick Aarons and Jeff Collin pointed out so lucidly, conflict of interest is normal in any set of interactions and it is only improper when primary interests are influenced negatively by secondary interests. Let me make a confession. I admire those who see these problems so clearly and can make sharp divides into what is right and what is wrong. I am also mortified when I hear the railing against dealing with the arms industry by countries which are among the world's most prolific maker and supplier of arms some of which fall into stained hands. Derek Yach in a recent article points out that the tactics of demonizing industry, taxation and regulation have to be modified in this new dispensation.

There will be valor for the mobilization of resources from the other two sectors – government and the private sector. I know it could be difficult to hold these two to account and still have financial partnerships, but difficulty does not mean impossibility. As I cautioned before, there needs to be clarity about the contractual arrangement between the various parties.

Valor also means consistency over the long haul-having the strength to carry on. There must be commitment to the long haul, as much of what you wish for will not happen overnight. And please do not forget the call I made yesterday for a category of Caribbean NCD Champions -men and women of valor who will add to your efforts in preventing and controlling NCDs.

Perhaps the most difficult obstacle to seeing my vision realized is that of maintaining interest. You are here because you are dissatisfied with the status quo and wish to change it. All movements have that as their fundamental ethos. The imperative is never to let the winter of discontent merge imperceptibly into the spring of complacency.

So, let me hope that you and those who come after you keep that before them and for that reason they will be constant need for succession planning. I know that planning does not come easily in movements in general.

Let me wish you good luck and hope that there are many among you who will see the realization partially or in full of my vision for civil society NCD movement in the Caribbean.

I thank you.