

**Talking Points on “Non–health UN Agencies Supporting CARICOM in achieving the NCD related SDGs”**

- Thank the moderator, the organizers Sir Trevor Hassell and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, as well our host the Government of Jamaica. Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.
- This meeting is important in the build-up to the High-Level Meeting in NY. I am grateful for the invitation to come and explain how the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes that support national development efforts have come together to help the Caribbean region push back against NCDs.
- As the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations for Jamaica, the fight against NCDs is clearly one of those issues that justifies the need for someone like me. For one thing, the population of UN Agencies involved in fighting NCDs is surprisingly wide and diverse. In addition to the usual suspects at WHO/PAHO, it includes FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF – but also discrete, such nocturnal animals as the IAEA... and certainly others.
- This challenge is not unique to the NCDs. The United Nations have extremely varied assets, all of which have long worked in the Caribbean. But the challenges of MICs are different, and so is the context of the integrated Post-2015 Global Development Agenda. To keep answering the needs of our

members states at a time of growing complexity and decreasing resources, we needed a new way of working.

- Accordingly, instead of Agency-by Agency and country-by-country cooperation programmes, 20+ UN Agencies and 18 English- and Dutch-speaking countries and territories in the Caribbean have agreed on an umbrella framework for the period 2017-2021, the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework for the Caribbean (UN MSDF). Thirteen of these countries<sup>1</sup> are CARICOM members, and discussions are on-going with the Government of the Bahamas to join the framework.
- And at the regional level, the latest UN-CARICOM Biennial Meeting agreed on the UN MSDF as the framework for collaboration between CARICOM and the UN in the region.

### **Common Multi-Country Assessment**

- How did we arrive at the UN MSDF? First, we looked at the needs. A Common Multi-Country Assessment analysed the priority challenges facing the participating countries. Some of the general findings will sound familiar after yesterday's opening presentations: the interest of Caribbean countries in region-wide cooperation as a tool for further integration, the need for closer cooperation with regional organisations such as CARICOM, the imperative of deepening partnerships with civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

- Among the sector-specific findings, a number reflected NCDs as a priority for the region, starting with the realisation that the Caribbean is the worst-affected region of the Americas, with 70% of deaths attributable to NCDs.
- The prevalence of NCDs was widely portrayed as the primary health challenge, particularly diabetes; strokes, hypertension and heart disease; cancer; and chronic respiratory ailments. Major impacts of NCDs were identified on households and individuals, on health systems, on state budgets and on national economies.
- So when the results of the Needs Assessment were presented to them, the countries of the region agreed that the NCDs constituted a priority, cross-cutting development challenge for the five-year period.

### **Difference we aim to make through the UN MSDF**

- Building on the findings of the Common Country Assessment and the priorities expressed by the participating countries, the UN MSDF has identified four main areas for our joint work. One of them is ‘A Healthy Caribbean’.
- Within this priority area, one of two outcomes for the UN system is *“Laws, policies and systems introduced to support healthy lifestyles among all segments of the population”*. It is within this area that the UN Agencies seek to support the Member States’ efforts at tackling Non-Communicable Diseases.
- The outcome focuses on the need to examine and strengthen systems to address mounting concerns about the impact of NCDs on the lives of Caribbean women, men and children such as diabetes and hypertension, risk factors such

as tobacco use, and the strain these place on national health systems and economies.

- Accordingly, in 2017, seven UN Agencies were working on initiatives specifically tackling NCDs from Barbados and the OECS to Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Other than PAHO/WHO, these Agencies included FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and, yes, IAEA.
- On-going projects tackle a range of issues around NCDs including inter-sectoral policies and programmes for food and nutrition security; promoting inclusive food system for healthy eating habits; school feeding policies; education campaigns on nutrition; prevention of substance abuse; management of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases; national strategic plans on NCDs; and tobacco control.
- In addition, within the regional collaborative effort championed within the UN MSDF, a Virtual Policy Network of UN colleagues from multiple UN Agencies located across the Caribbean will focus on Non-Communicable Diseases, specifically, in line with CARICOM's priorities, child obesity. This year, they aim to support member countries in the run-up to the Third UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs. Multi-Agency advocacy material is under preparation, and support will be extended to interested Member States.
- The UN Agencies have committed, through the UN MSDF for the Caribbean, to address NCDs as a region-wide development priority. So what do we need to do together to help make the UN MSDF a success? Again, other speakers have made these very same points: we need innovation and effective advocacy to mobilize new, additional resources; we need all parties to make good on their

stated commitment towards integrated action around these inter-sectoral issues; and we need continued support, and tighter partnership, with governments and civil society organizations.

- Oh and since, like me, you probably wonder what IAEA is up to, know that they have just launched in Jamaica projects to improve cancer diagnostic and treatment, but also the disease resistance of ginger and sweet yam.

### **One final point**

- Charity begins at home. On NCD issues as on so many others, all of us must walk – or in this instance, run or dance – the talk. All of us, government bodies, civil society organizations, private sector companies or international agencies must practice what we preach and help ourselves by helping our staff change behaviours to improve their own health and that of their family. Let me mention two initiatives by the UN in Jamaica.
- Jamaica's Minister of Health, the Hon. Christopher Tufton who spoke here yesterday, has taken the lead, in a very physical sense, of a "Jamaica Moves" campaign. Well, Hon. Minister, what took you so long? For some years now, right outside my office, UN staff two evenings a week run a karate class and two evenings a week a zumba class – if you have to ask, you probably need to join a class – and I won't mention the vaunted benefits of all those lyme evenings my staff are so fond of!
- Second initiative, a long-running global programme helping UN colleagues tackle HIV/AIDS now facilitates, in Jamaica, an annual Staff Wellness Day where colleagues and their children can, in a festive, supportive environment, consult health practitioners, get their body-mass index estimated, have their blood

pressure and blood sugar level taken, know their HIV status, meet stress counsellors, meet exercise coaches and try out their classes, access HIV counselling and testing, and have a Jamaican good time.

To wrap up, the UN Agencies and the Governments of the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean have identified NCDs as a priority area of work under our joint, coordinated programme of cooperation for 2017-2021. Through a more focused, integrated approach, at a time of increased complexity and limited resources, the UN Agencies aim to achieve better results through more efficient cooperation on this inter-sectoral development issue. We look forward to continuing to work with all interested actors of the region and beyond to make a difference in the lives of the people of the Caribbean.