



# REPORT OF VIRTUAL REGIONAL CONFERENCE

OUR FOOD  
OUR HEALTH  
OUR PEOPLE

Accelerating Healthy Food  
Policies to Tackle NCDs





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August 2021



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Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>ABDA</b>	Antigua and Barbuda Diabetes Association	<b>HSFB</b>	Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados
<b>BCOPC</b>	Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition	<b>METVT</b>	Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community	<b>NCDA</b>	Non-communicable Diseases Alliance
<b>CARPHA</b>	Caribbean Public Health Agency	<b>NCDs</b>	non-communicable diseases
<b>CCH</b>	Caribbean Cooperation in Health	<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>CET</b>	Common External Tariff	<b>NNCDC</b>	National Non-communicable Diseases Commission
<b>CoI</b>	conflict of interest	<b>PAHO</b>	Pan American Health Organization
<b>COP</b>	childhood obesity prevention	<b>PLWNCDs</b>	people living with non-communicable diseases
<b>COVID-19</b>	coronavirus disease of 2019	<b>POSD</b>	Declaration of Port of Spain
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>CROSQ</b>	Caribbean Community Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality	<b>SIDS</b>	small island developing states
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organisation	<b>SPS</b>	sanitary and phytosanitary
<b>CVD</b>	cardiovascular diseases	<b>SSBs</b>	sugar-sweetened beverages
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>TNA-NCDs</b>	Transformative New Agenda for NCD Prevention and Control in the Caribbean
<b>FoPNWL</b>	front-of-package nutrition warning labelling	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product	<b>USD</b>	United States dollars
<b>GHAJ</b>	Global Health Advocacy Incubator	<b>UWI</b>	University of the West Indies
<b>HCC</b>	Healthy Caribbean Coalition	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>HCY</b>	Healthy Caribbean Youth	<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>HFJ</b>	Heart Foundation of Jamaica		
<b>HFSS</b>	high in fats, salt, and sugar		

Acknowledgements

The Board of Directors and Secretariat of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) express appreciation to all those who contributed to the **success of Our Food, Our Health, Our People: Accelerating Healthy Food Policies to Tackle NCDs**, the first virtual regional conference convened by the Coalition, including presenters, panellists, media representatives, and persons from the Caribbean region and other regions around the globe, who gave of their time and expertise voluntarily and unstintingly.

The HCC acknowledges the ongoing sponsorship provided by FirstCaribbean International ComTrust Foundation and Sagicor Life Inc.; funding provided by the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAJ) for this conference; and support provided by the NCD Alliance (NCDA).

The Coalition appreciates the participation of chairpersons of National Non-communicable Disease Commissions (NNCDCs) in Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, and Jamaica, and of representatives from the following entities:

- Antigua and Barbuda Diabetes Association
- Belize Cancer Society
- Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat
- Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA)
- Caribbean Institute for Health Research, University of the West Indies (UWI)
- Department of Health, Bermuda
- EarthMedic/EarthNurse, Trinidad and Tobago
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN)
- Grenada Cancer Society
- Heart Foundation of Jamaica (HFJ)
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB)
- Helen’s Daughters, St. Lucia
- Imperial College London
- Lake Health and Wellbeing, St. Kitts and Nevis
- Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Public Health England
- St. Lucia Cancer Society
- Slimdown360, Trinidad and Tobago
- Trinidad and Tobago NCD Alliance
- University of Technology, Jamaica
- University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados
- WHYFarm, Trinidad and Tobago

We express gratitude to Sir George Alleyne, HCC Patron; Mr. David Neilands, Former Advertising Executive, Barbados; HCC Member Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); Healthy Caribbean Youth (HCY); and last, but by no means least, to the HCC Team that organised the conference, working behind the scenes and in front of the cameras to ensure that the online platform adequately captured the spirit of the Caribbean and the pleasure of coming together to share information, ideas, and recommendations for enhancing regional food policies and food and nutrition security, for the health of the people of the region.





Info

# Executive Summary

vfairs information desk



The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) virtual conference “*Our Food, Our Health, Our People: Accelerating Healthy Food Policy to Tackle NCDs*” was a one-day event on 1 July 2021 with a packed, exciting agenda that addressed issues relating to healthy nutrition, and food and nutrition security, in the Caribbean region. Convened in the framework of the January 2021 *Transformative New Agenda for NCD Prevention and Control in the Caribbean* (TNA-NCDs), a proposal from HCC for equitable, rights-based, and people-centred approaches to reduce the region’s oppressive burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the virtual conference sought to foster an intersectoral approach to accelerating the development and implementation of healthy food policies by Caribbean countries.

The conference attracted over 350 attendees, the majority (89%) from the Caribbean, with small proportions from North America (5%), Europe (4%), Latin America (2%), Oceania (1%), and South Africa (less than 1%). The highest percentage of attendees (39%) came from civil society, but there was also significant representation from the public sector (38%), with private sector (17%) and development agencies (5%) also represented.

Like the TNA-NCDs, the virtual conference was catalysed by the devastating health, social, and economic effects of the ongoing pandemic due to coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19). COVID-19 highlighted and deepened existing inequities and vulnerabilities, had its most severe health impact on persons living with NCDs (PLWNCDs), and highlighted the Caribbean’s food and nutrition insecurity. The pandemic not only provided an opportunity to emphasise the need to effectively address NCD prevention and control, but also spurred commitments by individual Caribbean governments and the collective Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to build back better and fairer systems, including those related to food and nutrition security.

Such a task cannot be done by governments alone, and the HCC virtual conference brought together key stakeholders—representatives from government, civil society, and private sector, and from national, regional, and international levels—to discuss the topic and propose solutions. From the opening session, which included keynote remarks by Dr. Carla Barnett, Secretary-General Designate of CARICOM, through

sessions that addressed healthy food supply, healthy food environment, and people-centered movements for change; food systems governance; and leveraging COVID-19 and food and nutrition insecurity to tackle NCD policy, the presenters, panellists, and discussants treated attendees to a feast of technical content, Caribbean perspectives, and action-oriented suggestions to benefit the region. Short lunchtime conversations highlighting particular aspects of the topics, and health breaks that addressed both physical and mental health, were included in the experiences in the innovative virtual conference centre.

The presentations and discussions underscored that actions to improve food systems and healthy nutrition in the Caribbean region begin in the pre-conception phase and run the life course, with emphasis on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding; school nutrition and physical activity; meaningful engagement of PLWNCDs and youth; and consumer power and pressure. A critical reminder was that ‘bottom-up’ policy development involving all those affected by the policy, such as PLWNCDs, youth, farmers, and the public, is optimal.

Barriers to action were identified, chief among them low food production in the region, coupled with a high regional food import bill. Participants urged advocacy for policymakers to seize opportunities engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic—refilling the public purse through taxation of unhealthy products; ensuring efforts to prevent NCDs, which drive severe COVID-19 complications; and ensuring food and nutrition security in the region by developing, implementing, and monitoring policies for evidence-based solutions. These policies would, among other actions, prioritise local food production; reduce consumption of processed and ultra-processed products high in fats, salt, and sugar (HFSS), especially by children, thus contributing to reduction of childhood obesity; prompt research and surveillance; address gender issues associated with farming and food production in the region; and ensure the involvement of civil society, especially PLWNCDs and youth, in policy development, implementation, and assessment.

Practical and realistic statements were made regarding private sector and commercial media interests, the importance of the ‘bottom line’ in for-profit enterprises, and the need to recognise and manage conflict of

interest, while exposing industry interference, and hammering home the message that without healthy people—productive human capital—a country and its economy cannot prosper and develop equitably and sustainably. Links were made among food systems, food and nutrition security, and climate change, issues of great significance to Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS) in the fight against NCDs, and justification was provided for integrated, multisectoral, whole-of-government, whole-of-society, and health-in-all policies responses to the issues, to achieve win-win solutions and co-benefits across sectors.

Recommendations arose from the presentations and discussions addressing governance, participation/inclusion, partnerships, and strategic interventions, to be addressed by all key stakeholders in healthy nutrition and food and nutrition security—governments, civil society, the health-supporting private sector, and development agencies and organisations—consistent with the mission and the priority areas of focus of the TNA-NCDs. The recommendations encouraged:

- Wide stakeholder participation in current regional initiatives with the potential to impact policies to improve food availability and consumption;
- Monitoring and evaluation of interventions, to identify successes, challenges, and lessons learned;
- Capacity building for PLWNCDs, youth, and other persons or groups in conditions of vulnerability to enable their meaningful involvement in policy development, and the implementation of mechanisms to allow them to do so;
- Meaningful engagement of agriculture workers—especially women and young people—in discussions related to healthy nutrition, food and nutrition security, and related policy development;
- Establishment or strengthening of national, regional, and international partnerships, including with SIDS in other regions, and entities addressing climate change and other issues that impact food and nutrition security and NCDs, to facilitate joint action and resource mobilisation;

- Exploration of mechanisms to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with the private sector—healthy commodity industries—concurrent with the development and implementation of policies to identify and manage conflict of interest, and strategies to prevent industry interference;
- Strengthening of partnerships with the media, and the use of both traditional and social media, to promote equity- and rights-based, accurate reporting related to food and nutrition security and other NCD-related issues;
- Caribbean representation and participation in global fora addressing these issues, including the 2021 UN Food Summit;
- Exploration of the role of National NCD Commissions in the Caribbean as brokers and catalysts for action at national and regional levels; and
- Continued focus on the prevention of childhood obesity in the Caribbean, through policies for healthy nutrition and physical activity in schools; fiscal measures, including taxation of unhealthy products; restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy products to children; and regulatory measures, including front-of-package nutrition warning labelling (FoPNWL).

Assessments of the event made during the conference, including from the virtual chat room and from a post-event online questionnaire, were extremely positive, with most participants expressing satisfaction with the virtual platform, the technical content, and the Caribbean flavour of the event.

# Introduction

The [Healthy Caribbean Coalition](https://www.healthycaribbean.org/)<sup>1</sup> has, since its inception, seized opportunities to advance the prevention and control of NCDs in the Caribbean, in collaboration with its valued partners. Taking advantage of the spotlight shone on gaps in food and nutrition security in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the WHO Director General in March 2020 and ongoing at the time of writing, the HCC convened a virtual regional conference on 1 July 2021 with the theme **Our Food, Our Health, Our People: Accelerating Healthy Food Policy to Tackle NCDs**.

The goal of the conference was to build regional momentum for the implementation of healthy food policies as part of the [Transformative New NCD Agenda in the Caribbean](#) proposed by the HCC in January 2021.<sup>2</sup> Grounded in principles of human rights and equity, the TNA-NCDs reflects an agenda that can be adopted, adapted, and implemented by all key stakeholders in NCD prevention and control in the region—government, civil society, and the health-supporting private sector—and one of its key strategies is the integration of multisectoral actions that address NCD reduction and related issues.

One of the main NCD risk factors is unhealthy diet. The diet in Caribbean countries, as in other vulnerable, resource-constrained SIDS, has changed drastically over the last twenty years. There has been a transition from diets comprising mainly nutritious, locally-grown foods to diets with significant amounts of processed and ultra-processed HFSS foods. The availability of these unhealthy products is influenced by globalization, and they are often imported, more affordable than healthy alternatives, and heavily marketed by their producers, manufacturers, and distributors. Almost all Caribbean and Pacific SIDS import over 60% of their food, 50% of islands import over 80% of their food, and

it is anticipated that SIDS' food imports will increase to 8-10 billion United States dollars (USD) by 2020 if nothing changes.<sup>3</sup> This nutrition transition has fuelled the epidemic of overweight, obesity, and NCDs that SIDS in the Caribbean and many other regions face today.

The pandemic has worsened this dire situation, as NCDs and obesity increase vulnerability to severe illness and death from COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> The responses to the pandemic—including restrictions on travel and movement between and within countries ("lockdowns"), disruptions in food supply chains, absence of school meals and school feeding programmes due to school closures, and greater dependence on non-perishable processed and ultra-processed foods, especially among persons and groups in conditions of vulnerability—have highlighted the need for greater attention to food and nutrition security. Aligned with WHO's call for a new narrative to guide policy and practice for better human, ecosystem, and animal health and well-being,<sup>5</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift in the way that the Caribbean tackles NCDs, including prioritising stronger, more resilient food systems that centre on the region's food and people, contribute to regaining lost ground in NCD reduction, and improve planetary health.

Keenly aware of these issues, the HCC invited persons from across the region, representing government, civil society, and private sectors, including PLWNCDs, youth, and academia, to participate in a virtual regional conference to consider strategies and mechanisms for increasing awareness of, and actions to address, the varied and complex dimensions of the regional food system. This report summarises the conference background, objectives, methodology, remarks, presentations, and discussions, as well as conclusions and recommendations for action.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Healthy Caribbean Coalition. NCDs and COVID-19 in the Caribbean: a call to action—the case for a Transformative New Agenda for NCD Prevention and Control in the Caribbean. Bridgetown: HCC; 2020. Available at: <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/TNA-NCD-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Global action programme on food security and nutrition in small island developing states: supporting the implementation of the SAMOA pathway. Rome: 2017: FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/sids/en/>.

<sup>4</sup> NCD Alliance (NCDA). Briefing note: Impacts of COVID-19 on people living with NCDs. Geneva: April 2020; NCDA. Available at: [https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/COVID-19\\_%26\\_NCDs\\_BriefingNote\\_27April\\_FinalVersion\\_0.pdf](https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/COVID-19_%26_NCDs_BriefingNote_27April_FinalVersion_0.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. Food systems delivering better health - executive summary. Geneva: WHO; 2021. Available at: <https://video.lmdint.com/file/healthtalks/Executive-Summary-Health-Narrative.pdf>.

# Background

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Caribbean had some of the highest rates of adult obesity in the world, and 1 in 3 Caribbean children living with overweight and obesity.<sup>6,7</sup> The Caribbean region has the greatest burden of NCDs in the region of the Americas, with 78% of all deaths and 76% of premature deaths (among persons aged 30–69 years) attributable to NCDs.<sup>8</sup>

In the face of this evidence, Caribbean regional policymakers have long recognised the importance of NCDs. These conditions have been included as priorities for joint action by Member States of the [Caribbean Community](#)<sup>9</sup> in each iteration of the regional health agenda, the [Caribbean Cooperation in Health](#)<sup>10</sup> (CCH), since the first CCH was formulated in 1986; the regional health agenda is now in its fourth iteration, [CCH IV, 2016–2025](#).<sup>11</sup> Other critical high-level milestones include the [2001 Nassau Declaration](#)<sup>12</sup> by CARICOM Heads of State and Government (HoSG), which stated that “the health of the region is the wealth of the region” and identified HIV/AIDS, NCDs, and mental health as priorities, and the HoSG’s 2007 world-leading [Declaration of Port of Spain \(POSD\): “Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic NCDs”](#).<sup>13</sup> However, an evaluation of the POSD in 2016 found that its implementation was suboptimal, and one of the particular observations was that “indicators with the lowest levels of implementation concern the macro-determinants of diet and physical activity, such as food labelling, trade agreements on food, and exercise and healthy eating programmes”.<sup>14</sup>

The already-lagging Caribbean regional efforts in NCD prevention and control have been stymied, as in other parts of the world, by the disruption of NCD services during the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>15</sup> triggering concerns that

the alarming regional statistics, including those related to overweight and obesity, will worsen.<sup>16</sup> This is especially so since the ‘Big Food’ industry adapted rapidly to meet the growing demand for non-perishables and instant ‘lockdown’ meals, exploiting vulnerabilities to promote nutrient-poor, processed, and ultra-processed HFSS foods. These developments, among several others, call for **urgent action and a transformative approach** to the way the region produces, imports, and consumes food, as well as the strengthening of the policy environment—including policy coherence across sectors—that affects the regional food system.

In April 2020, the HCC and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission, released a joint statement, [Strengthening Food and Nutrition Security in the Caribbean: A Legacy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#),<sup>17</sup> calling for urgent action to develop a healthy, resilient, and sustainable regional food system, focusing on increased domestic production and trade, and lessening the region’s reliance on imported processed and ultra-processed foods. This renewed focus on domestic products was a core element of the statement, given that the Caribbean is a significant net importer of food, with some countries importing over 80% of what they consume.<sup>18</sup> The joint statement also addressed the need for a multisectoral approach, outlining actions for civil society, government, and private sector entities to prioritise regional food and nutrition security measures and focus on the needs of persons in conditions of vulnerability who need to be at the centre of the regional food system, including PLWNCDs and youth.

In July 2020, CARICOM, as part of its [COVID-19 Response Agri-Food Plan](#),<sup>19</sup> committed to reduce the region’s USD

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization. Obesity and overweight, 9 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>.  
<sup>7</sup> Healthy Caribbean Coalition. Childhood obesity prevention. Available at: <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/childhood-obesity-prevention/>.  
<sup>8</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Noncommunicable diseases in the Region of the Americas: facts and figures. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2019. Available at: [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/51483/PAHONMH19016\\_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/51483/PAHONMH19016_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y).  
<sup>9</sup> <https://caricom.org/>.  
<sup>10</sup> <https://caricom.org/documents/caribbean-cooperation-in-health-initiative-phase-1/>.  
<sup>11</sup> Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA). The Caribbean Cooperation in Health-IV report 2020: regional public goods in focus. Available at: [https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Publications/CCH-IV-Regional-Public-Good-Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Publications/CCH-IV-Regional-Public-Good-Report_final.pdf). Port of Spain: 2020; CARPHA.  
<sup>12</sup> <https://caricom.org/nassau-declaration-on-health-2001-the-health-of-the-region-is-the-wealth-of-the-region/>.  
<sup>13</sup> <https://caricom.org/declaration-of-port-of-spain-uniting-to-stop-the-epidemic-of-chronic-ncds/>.  
<sup>14</sup> Port of Spain Declaration Evaluation Research Group. Evidence briefs: the evaluation of the 2007 CARICOM Heads of Government Port of Spain NCD Summit Declaration. March 2016. Available at: <https://food4changecaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/POSDEVAL-EVIDENCE-BRIEFS-Apr-2016-v7.pdf>.  
<sup>15</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Rapid assessment of service delivery for NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas. Washington, D.C.: 4 June 2020; PAHO. Available at: [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52250/PAHONMHNVCVID-19200024\\_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52250/PAHONMHNVCVID-19200024_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y).  
<sup>16</sup> We need to act now to protect Caribbean children and young people—a letter from pediatricians from across the Caribbean region, 4 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/we-need-to-act-now-to-protect-caribbean-children-and-young-people/>.  
<sup>17</sup> <https://pressroom.oecs.org/strengthening-food-and-nutrition-security-in-the-caribbean-a-legacy-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>.  
<sup>18</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). State of food insecurity in the CARICOM Caribbean—executive summary. Bridgetown: 2015; FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i5132e/i5132e.pdf>.  
<sup>19</sup> <https://caricom.org/caricom-covid-19-response-agri-food-plan/>



5 billion food import bill by 25% over the next 5 years ('25 in 5').<sup>20</sup>

In January 2021, the HCC launched the TNA-NCDs,<sup>2</sup> setting out a bold vision focused on prevention and reducing NCD risk factors, including the promotion and acceleration of policies to reorient food systems to be **more sustainable and resilient**. Priority policies include taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) of at least 20%, FoPNWL, and bans on the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods to children. The TNA-NCDs also emphasised the need for multisectoral, health-in-all-policies, whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches for effective NCD prevention and control in the Caribbean, and highlighted—among other issues—the benefits of concurrently addressing NCDs and climate crisis adaptation and mitigation, emergency and disaster preparedness, food and nutrition security, and poverty reduction. These are critical considerations, given that the pandemic has further slowed progress on achieving a number of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeting these issues.<sup>21</sup>

In February 2021, regional food security was a priority issue during the 32nd Intersessional Heads of Government Meeting, when Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and Chairman of CARICOM, highlighted the need to rally for improved food security. The Prime Minister acknowledged the link between NCD mortality and “poor quality diets and lack of access to fresh produce”, and called for a redoubling of efforts in “addressing NCDs and exploring their nexus with food and nutrition security, and low levels of fruit and vegetable consumption.”<sup>22</sup>

On 28 May 2021, CARICOM hosted a virtual “[Caribbean Regional Dialogue in preparation for the United Nations \(UN\) Food Systems Summit](#)”,<sup>23</sup> in which a wide range of stakeholders participated, including civil society; the

HCC, through its Executive Director, delivered a brief intervention on food security and health. The Caribbean Regional Dialogue raised issues relevant to the [UN Food Systems Summit](#) scheduled for September 2021, which was itself preceded by the UN Pre-Food Systems Summit 26-28 July 2021.<sup>24</sup>

On 16-19 June 2021, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) hosted its [65th Annual Health Research Conference](#)<sup>25</sup> under the theme “Pandemic, NCDs and Climate Change: the Caribbean’s Triple Threat”, and on 28-29 June 2021, WHO hosted the [SIDS Summit for Health: For a Healthy and Resilient Future in Small Island Developing States](#),<sup>26</sup> representing the first time that WHO SIDS Member States from across all regions came together with partners to focus exclusively on health and well-being. The Summit noted and discussed the high prevalence of NCDs, with their economic and social determinants, as a significant challenge for SIDS, and its [Outcome Statement](#)<sup>27</sup> emphasised the need for coordinated, multisectoral action in SIDS to build healthy, sustainable, resilient food systems that focus on the preservation of biodiversity and provision of healthy diets.

The UN General Assembly, the PAHO Directing Council, and meetings of the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) and the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), will all be held in late 2021. These meetings of regional and global policymakers and key stakeholders provide opportunities for applying principles of human rights and equity to transformative strategies focused on securing a healthier future for all, ensuring that no one is left behind. The HCC’s regional virtual conference on healthy food policies was thus well-placed to advance transformative ideas, strategies, and mechanisms that can feed into these international fora.

<sup>20</sup> <https://today.caricom.org/2020/07/27/25-in-5-plan-to-tackle-caricom-food-import-bill/>.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council. Progress towards the SDGs: report of the Secretary-General. 30 April 2021. Document E/2021/58. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/E/2021/58>.

<sup>22</sup> Statement by Prime Minister and Chairman of CARICOM, Dr. the Hon. Keith Rowley, at the CARICOM 32nd Intersessional Heads of Government Meeting. Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 24 February 2021. Available at: <https://www.opm.gov.tt/statement-by-prime-minister-and-chairman-of-caricom-dr-the-hon-keith-rowley-at-the-caricom-32nd-intersessional-heads-of-government-meeting-wednesday-24th-february-2021/>

<sup>23</sup> The video recording of the regional dialogue is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5CCtuyjv8>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://conference.carpha.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/06/28/default-calendar/sids-summit-for-health>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/sids-summit/sids-summit-for-health---final-outcome-statement.pdf>





# Participant Summary

The virtual conference attracted 582 registrants, 363 (62%) of whom logged on to the site. The number of persons who watched all or some of the morning sessions totalled 328 (90% of those who logged in); 209 persons (58% of those who logged in) participated in the lunchtime sessions; and 190 persons (52% of those who logged in) watched all or some of the afternoon sessions.

Participants were drawn from all over the world and included high-level policymakers; technical personnel; national, regional, and international representatives from civil society, including academia, media, and CSOs working to address specific NCDs; high-level representatives of regional and international intergovernmental agencies and institutions, including the CARICOM Secretariat, FAO, and PAHO; PLWNCDs and youth advocates; and private sector representatives.

Participants from the civil society sector comprised 39% of attendees; public sector, 38%; private sector, 17%; and development agencies 5%, as shown in **Figure 1**. The majority of participants were from the Caribbean region (89%), with 5% from North America, 4% from Europe, 2% from Latin America, 1% from Oceania, and less than 1% from South Africa, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 1: Conference attendee representation across sectors

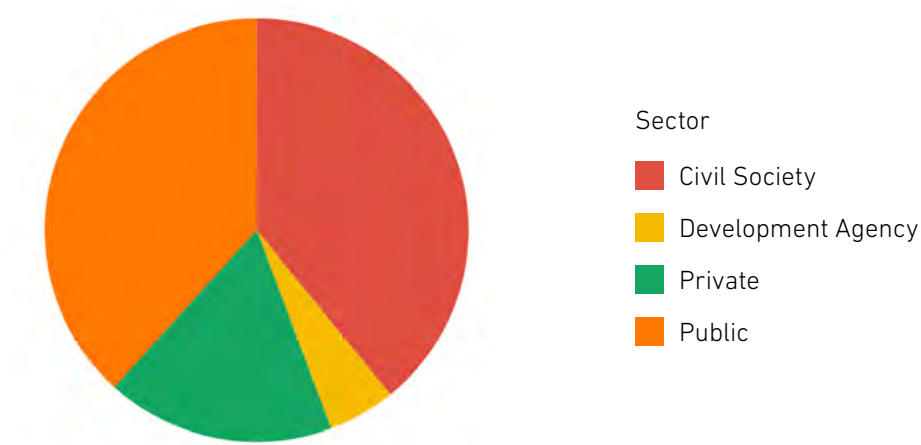
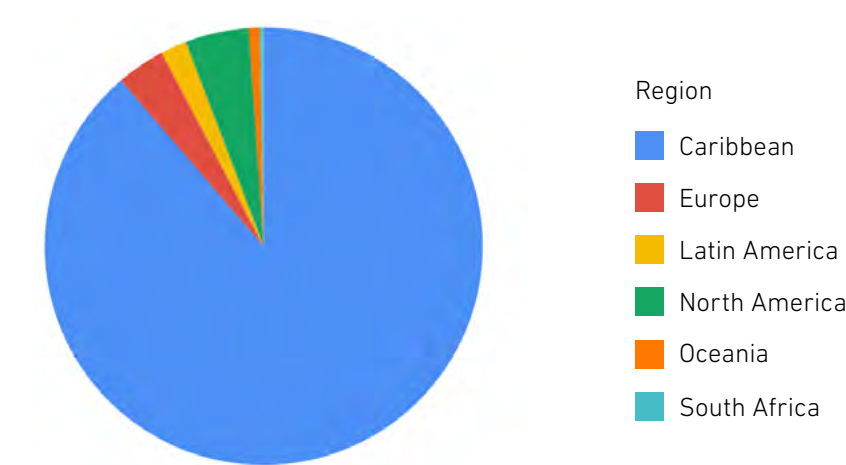


Figure 2: Conference attendee representation across geographic regions





# Conference Objectives and Methodology

## The overall conference objectives were to:

1. Create a broad understanding of Caribbean food systems and identify policy levers which will lead to healthier diets.
2. Assess progress, successes, challenges, and lessons learned in advocating for, and implementing, evidence-based healthy food policies with a focus on:
  - mandatory FoPNWL,
  - healthy school policies, and
  - fiscal food policies.
3. Build a diverse coalition of multisectoral, multistakeholder actors including people living with NCDs (PLWNCDs) and young people, calling for healthy food environments as part of the broader TNA-NCDs.
4. Develop a call to policymakers to accelerate adoption and implementation of healthy food policies.

The official start of the conference was preceded by videos with Sounds of the Caribbean; an interlude of steel pan music from the Panache Steel Orchestra, Antigua and Barbuda; quotes from participants and presenters on the way forward for food and nutrition in the region; instructions on how to navigate the virtual conference centre, including accessing the auditorium for the sessions, visiting display booths, and downloading documents of interest; and summaries of the agenda items and main session presenters. The [conference agenda](#)<sup>28</sup> is available at on the HCC website.

The conference methodology comprised welcome and opening remarks to set the stage; five moderated sessions, each addressing a specific theme, with presentations to provide information and spark discussion; and panel and group discussions. The discussions ranged over a variety of topics related to strengthening food and nutrition security and healthy food policies in the region, emphasising accelerated, innovative, and transformative approaches and actions. The sessions were separated by brief health breaks, during which participants were encouraged in physical activity and relaxation, and the lunch period included concurrent 30-minute conversations on ten topics related to NCDs and food. The topics ranged from local small-scale farming, innovative food solutions, and digital advocacy to the impact of the sugar tax in Bermuda, human rights, NCDs, and the law, and building a civil society media movement in support of FoPNWL. These lunchtime conversations were facilitated by members of [Healthy Caribbean Youth](#)<sup>29</sup> (HCY), the youth arm of the HCC.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/OUR-FOOD-OUR-HEALTH-OUR-PEOPLE-Accelerating-Healthy-Food-Policies-to-Tackle-NCDs-HCC-VC-21-concept-note-and-programme.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/healthy-caribbean-youth/>.

# Welcome and Opening Remarks



## **Sir Trevor Hassell, President, HCC**

The HCC President welcomed all participants on behalf of the HCC Directors and Members, and stated that the conference would focus on a transformative agenda to tackle NCDs more effectively, in particular the acceleration of healthy food policies in the region. He noted that this was a topical political issue, made more so by the COVID-19 pandemic that had highlighted the unsustainability of food systems in the Caribbean, and food and nutrition insecurity. He expressed his delight in recognising all the stakeholders who had come together to consider the issues, stated his anticipation of an exciting day of discussions, and introduced the next four speakers: Ms. Maisha Hutton, Executive Director of the HCC; representatives of two of HCC's valued partner organisations, Ms. Renata Clarke, Caribbean Subregional Coordinator, FAO, and Mr. Dean Chambliss, Caribbean Subregional Programme Director, PAHO; and the conference's Distinguished Speaker, Dr. Carla Barnett, CARICOM Secretary-General Designate.



## **Ms. Maisha Hutton, Executive Director, HCC**

In welcoming participants, Ms. Hutton indicated the HCC team's pleasure at the presence of so many participants from within and outside of the Caribbean, noting that each year the HCC Secretariat hosts a regional meeting that enables Caribbean civil society to come together with partners and other stakeholders to share issues and solutions for NCD prevention and control. She noted that though the conference was a virtual one due to COVID-19-related constraints, the HCC team had created a virtual conference centre for participants to explore, complete with exhibit hall, lobby, lounge, and avatars.

Ms. Hutton emphasised the importance of NCDs, noting that unhealthy diet, which is a major risk factor for these conditions, accounts for 60% of disability-adjusted life years lost in the region. She also noted burgeoning obesity and overweight among adults and children, due in large part to unhealthy diet dominated by cheap, heavily-marketed, ultra-processed foods, especially during the pandemic, stressing the urgency of changing the regional diet and getting back to "real food".

She advised that the conference would discuss related issues through five sessions—the morning sessions would highlight the evidence-based policy interventions needed to reshape the environment and barriers to their implementation, followed by ten concurrent lunchtime interactions on a variety of topics. After lunch the conference would celebrate the power of people, for example in advocating for FoPNWL; hear the voices of PLWNCDs and young people—those who will bear a greater burden if no speedy action is taken; and listen to reflections by selected NNCD Chairpersons on actions so far, and how best to proceed to fulfill commitments made by political leaders in the Caribbean almost 15 years ago through the POSD.





**Ms. Renata Clarke, Caribbean Subregional Coordinator, FAO**

Ms. Clarke brought greetings from the FAO, and expressed her pleasure at participating in the event. She stated that the food system in the Caribbean has been dysfunctional for some time, citing the high degree of poverty and vulnerability among the region's small-scale framers; low productivity, with importation of most of the food consumed; growing problems with both undernutrition and obesity; and environmental degradation. She indicated that though some countries agree that change is needed, the perception seemed to be that a few "tweaks" might work—however, FAO agreed with the HCC that nothing less than a transformation would suffice.

Ms. Clarke mentioned the Caribbean Regional Dialogue convened by the CARICOM Secretariat at the end of May 2021 in preparation for the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, during which HoSG and ministers shared their thoughts about food systems transformation in the region. She characterised it as a "powerful meeting", and noted that His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, expressed the view that regional food systems transformation is at core of regional development aspirations and requires greater attention, especially to ensure food security, combat threats of climate change, and mobilise financing for climate-resilient agriculture.

Ms. Clarke highlighted the alignment of these views with the three main areas of focus of the Regional Dialogue: policy orientation and actions needed to ensure food security and healthy diet; investment in building resilience to the impacts of climate change; and strategies for funding and financing to catalyse the transformation. She stated that the report of the Regional Dialogue would ensure that this strong Caribbean perspective resonates in both the Pre-UN Food Systems Summit in Rome at end of July 2021 and the UN Food Systems Summit in New York in September 2021, to garner support for solutions emanating from Caribbean countries. She also referred to the emphasis placed by Barbados' Prime Minister, the Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, on the region's goal to reduce food imports by 25% by 2025, and noted that at the Regional Dialogue Prime Minister Mottley urged even greater ambition—to expedite the production of as much food as possible in the region.

In closing, Ms. Clarke assured her audience that FAO was working with countries to transform food systems and enable sustainable and inclusive agriculture systems that play a leading role in the COVID-19 recovery process, and gave more specific examples of FAO's assistance to Caribbean countries, including:

- review and revision of agricultural and fisheries policies and strategies;
- elaboration of sound value-chain development strategies that are market-driven and that create more-than-decent jobs in agriculture and agribusiness for youth, women, and men;
- leveraging climate financing to enable achievement of climate change adaptation goals in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry;
- use of integrated data systems that enable early warning and anticipatory action to reduce loss to climate-related risks;
- development of data- and evidence-informed nutrition policies and programmes, exemplified by a partnership with the UWI to assist St. Kitts and Nevis to complete a food consumption survey; and
- development and implementation of school feeding programmes that instill good eating habits and provide markets for local products.



**Mr. Dean Chambliss, Caribbean Subregional Programme Director, PAHO**

In bringing greetings on behalf of PAHO, Mr. Chambliss characterised the conference as exciting and motivating, and expressed his pleasure at joining HCC and other longstanding PAHO partners for this urgent conversation on NCDs, overweight, obesity, and diet, grounded in equity and human rights. He emphasised the importance of rights-based, whole-of-government, whole-of society, health-in-all-policies actions in making headway on these issues, and recognised the unique role of civil society.

Mr. Chambliss summarised NCD statistics, noting that not only did these conditions lead to early death, but also to persons being unable to carry out routine activities of living, such as going to school, working, playing, and enjoying life to their full potential. He noted that in the Caribbean, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and overweight are linked to unhealthy, excessive intake of HFSS foods, driven by widespread availability, accessibility, and marketing of these products. He stated that the Caribbean region has the highest rates of childhood obesity and overweight—known risk factors for adult obesity, hence for NCDs and premature mortality—in the Region of the Americas, leading to a higher risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, with at least one-third of the Caribbean population being at higher risk of COVID-19 complications based on the presence of at least one such underlying condition.

Mr. Chambliss remarked that the COVID-19 response, with lockdowns, school closures, supply disruptions, and economic fallout, has had a negative impact on diet and activity, and that addressing NCDs is essential to end the pandemic, and for economic recovery and resilience. The pandemic, he said, provides opportunities, and can act as a catalyst for action and change to address NCDs, including through:

- implementation of the TNA-NCDs proposed by the HCC;
- CARICOM's prioritisation of the regional agenda on food and nutrition security, and reduction of the food import bill;
- use of laws and regulations to reduce the demand for, and offer of, HFSS and processed and ultra-processed products, noting collaboration between the [Caribbean Court of Justice Academy for Law](#)<sup>30</sup> and PAHO to [launch the Caribbean Public Health Law Forum](#) on 30 June 2021,<sup>31</sup> bringing together CARICOM institutions, governments, civil society, and academia to facilitate communication, collaboration, and engagement between health and legal affairs to address NCDs; and
- the process led by the [CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality](#)<sup>32</sup> (CROSQ) since 2018 to revise current CARICOM standards for pre-packaged foods, incorporating the PAHO-recommended, evidence-based octagonal 'high-in' FoPNWL and the PAHO Nutrient Model,<sup>33</sup> which allow consumers to quickly identify unhealthy products. He highlighted this as a proven intervention, free from conflict of interest, and ratified by a study in Jamaica,<sup>34</sup> and noted that

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ccjacademy.org/>.

<sup>31</sup> A video recording of the launch is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKiMjurC-rA>

<sup>32</sup> <https://website.crosq.org/>.

<sup>33</sup> Pan American Health Organization, Front-of-package labelling as a policy tool for the prevention of non-communicable diseases in the Americas. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2020. Available at: [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52740/PAHONMHRF200033\\_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52740/PAHONMHRF200033_eng.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y)

<sup>34</sup> Pan American Health Organization, Ministry of Health and Wellness, Jamaica, and University of Technology, Jamaica. Superior efficacy of front-of-package warning labels in Jamaica. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; March 2021. Available at: [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/53328/PAHONMHRF210002\\_eng.pdf](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/53328/PAHONMHRF210002_eng.pdf).

FoPNWL is supported by regional mandates, including the POSD, communiques from the [37th](#)<sup>35</sup> and [39th](#)<sup>36</sup> Regular Meetings of CARICOM HoSG, and the CARPHA 6-point policy package to address overweight and obesity,<sup>37</sup> as well as by a [statement from the Special Rapporteur on Right to Health](#).<sup>38</sup> He also stated that FoPNWL can be an enabler of other key, complementary policies to reduce consumption of unhealthy foods, including restriction of marketing to children, taxation, and school-based interventions.

Mr. Chambliss ended by noting that the region is at a turning point in which real change is possible, and advised that this opportunity be approached with a sense of urgency, as failure to act will have irreparable consequences on health and development.



**Dr. Carla Barnett, CARICOM Secretary-General Designate**

Dr. Barnett thanked HCC for the invitation to participate in the conference and expressed her pleasure at being in attendance. She noted the explosion of NCDs in the region as people's lifestyles evolved, with links across obesity, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases (CVD), chronic respiratory diseases, and mental disorders, and their negative impact on quality of life and productivity, which made them important from a public policy perspective.

“The timing of this conference is excellent... there is a present strategic opportunity for alliances across the health and agriculture sectors.”

Dr. Barnett stated that these issues were not new to CARICOM, as the 2001 Nassau Declaration had recognised the critical role of health in economic development, and the threat that health problems would impede this development by devastating the region's human capital. Though the focus was on HIV/AIDS at that time, to build on the successes of region in controlling other communicable diseases—many of which were defeated through the widespread use of vaccines, an issue relevant to the fight against COVID-19—the Nassau Declaration recognised the need for behavioural change and involvement of women and youth. It also recommitted the region to the CCH, and to the development and implementation of a strategic plan for NCD prevention and control.

She noted that in 2007 the HoSG's Declaration of Port of Spain made the Caribbean the first region in the world to recognise, at such a high policymaking level, the significant negative impact of NCDs on health and national development. That recognition gave rise, four years later at the [First UN High-level Meeting on NCD Prevention and Control](#),<sup>39</sup> to acknowledgement of the global threat that these conditions posed to economic development, as well as health, through loss of life, especially premature mortality; reduced household income; declining productivity; reduced gross domestic product (GDP); and worsening poverty, itself a contributor to NCDs. She indicated that studies of current and future NCD costs had led to the realisation that relatively small investments in NCD prevention and treatment interventions would reap respectable returns on investment and GDP.

Dr. Barnett highlighted the changes in culture and lifestyle that have occurred in the region, noting that the ability to purchase ultra-processed foods is often seen as a sign of rising incomes, prosperity, and development progress. She remarked that affordable, healthy foods are often unavailable, and more than 60% of foods consumed in the region were not only imported, but were also processed and ultra-processed. She observed that this situation, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it, had led to long-made policy decisions to address food and nutrition insecurity and ramp up food production in the region being revisited and brought to the fore as a strategic focus of CARICOM.

In closing, Dr. Barnett noted that HCC's advocacy for the consumption of fresh, healthy foods is important, and thanked the Coalition for its actions in promoting health. She cited Ms. Laura Longworth, President of the Belize Cancer Society and HCC Board Member, as a champion for healthy living, and acknowledged the CSOs and partners that support HCC's work. She stated her expectation of receiving recommendations from this conference for policy development, given the need for “many hands on deck” to deal with these and related issues, including building resilience to climate change and reducing poverty.

Copies of all the opening remarks are available on the [conference webpage](#).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <https://caricom.org/communique-issued-at-the-conclusion-of-the-thirty-seventh-regular-meeting-of-the-conference-of-heads-of-government-of-the-caribbean-community-caricom-4-6-july-2016-georgetown-guyana/>.  
<sup>36</sup> <https://caricom.org/communique-issued-at-the-conclusion-of-the-thirty-ninth-regular-meeting-of-the-conference-of-heads-of-government-of-the-caribbean-community/>.  
<sup>37</sup> Caribbean Public Health Agency. Promoting healthy diets, food security, and sustainable development in the Caribbean through joint policy action—CARICOM Technical Brief, revised November 2017. Port of Spain: CARPHA; 2017. Available at: [https://carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/CARPHA\\_6\\_Point\\_Policy\\_for\\_Healthier\\_Food\\_Environments.pdf](https://carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/CARPHA_6_Point_Policy_for_Healthier_Food_Environments.pdf).  
<sup>38</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26130&LangID=E>.  
<sup>39</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ga/ncdmeeting2011/>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/our-food-our-health-our-people-virtual-conference-2021/>.



# Session Summaries

## Session 1

### Our food - shaping a healthy food supply

This session aimed to explore key elements of a Caribbean food system and how they can be leveraged to increase regional food supply and ultimately support a sustainable food sector. The main points of the remarks, presentations, and discussion made are summarised below.



**Moderator's remarks - Dr. Kenneth Connell, Deputy Dean Internationalization and Recruitment, Faculty of Medical Sciences, UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados; HCC Board Member**

In brief remarks, Dr. Connell indicated that the scene had been set, and, using a cricket metaphor, stated that the speakers in the initial session—opening batsmen and women—had started the innings. He introduced the four speakers for the session: Professor Fitzroy Henry, Professor of Public Health Nutrition, University of Technology, Jamaica; Mr. Nigel Durrant, Agricultural Trade Specialist, Office of Trade Negotiations, CARICOM Secretariat; Mr. Jacinto Buenfil, Policy Officer Environment and Climate Change, FAO; and Ms. Keithlin Caroo, Founder, Helen's Daughters, St. Lucia.



**An overview of Caribbean food systems and NCDs  
Professor Fitzroy Henry**

Professor Henry indicated that his presentation would focus on the relationship between food systems and public health, exploring the goal, the main barriers to its achievement, and the degree to which the region exhibited enough “boldness” to break down the barriers.

He noted that the goal of a successful food system was to meet the health needs of the Caribbean population regarding food availability, food accessibility, food consumption, and their impact on nutrition (focus on obesity) and health (focus on NCDs). He emphasised the need for recognition of the factors affecting each of these food system components, including, respectively, local production and imports; food cost and purchasing power; food industry influence on consumption; and consumers' own practices, in terms of tradition and culture.

Professor Henry stated that, currently, Caribbean people consume a dietary “pie” with proportions of 39% staples, 20% food from animals, 17% sugar, 14% fats and oils, 6% fruit, 2% legumes, and 2% vegetables, whereas the aim was to move to proportions of 47% staples, 15% food from animals, 8% sugar, 10% fats and oils, 6% fruit, 6% legumes, and 8% vegetables. He indicated that, except for Haiti, there is sufficient food available in Caribbean countries to move to the desired “pie”, but despite the availability of land and water, barriers included, for:

- **Food availability:** The region's status as a net importer of food, with a food import dependence ratio (total food imports/total food consumption) ranging from 40% in countries such as Belize and Guyana, to 95% in The Bahamas, Barbados, and St. Kitts and Nevis. In Jamaica, fat availability and consumption is in excess of the ideal consumption, with a large proportion coming from imports; a similar situation exists with sugar, including "invisible" sugars in cereals and other products; and vegetable consumption is significantly below the desired "pie" level. A further issue with imports is that most are health-retarding (fats, sugars, and ultra-processed foods) and few are health-promoting (legumes and vegetables).
- **Food accessibility:** The cost of food, exemplified by an increase in the Consumer Price Index in Jamaica from 31.7 in 2000 to 177.2 in 2017, and purchasing power, demonstrated—again in Jamaica—by a recent study showing that an average percentage of 106.8% of a minimum wage salary is needed to procure the cheapest balanced diet for a family of three. This statistic highlighted purchasing power limitations for low-income groups; for other categories of workers, the average percentage was clerk/cashier 59.6%, registered nurse 20.6%, and mid-level manager 16.4%.
- **Food consumption:** Unhealthy food products and practices; food industry marketing that does not pay enough attention to health, and food labels that are difficult to understand. He reiterated that regional efforts are being made to address food labelling, translating the existing label information into easily understood symbols, but there is resistance, and food policies to address these issues are essential.

In summary, Professor Henry noted that key barriers to achieving the target of halting obesity and NCDs are located in the food industry, agri-/trade policies, health, education, and civil society, including issues related to transportation and commerce that give franchise holders undeserved leeway in the food system. He expressed the fervent hope that at the end of the conference the stakeholders would see their way clear to being bold enough to advance removal of the barriers.



### Trade measures to support a nutritious, sustainable food supply Mr. Nigel Durrant

Mr. Durrant indicated that his presentation would address CARICOM initiatives in food production, trade, and development, and noted CARICOM's long history of developing strategies to promote regional trade in agri-food products, with the aim of enhancing production and incomes, based on the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and its objectives for development policy, marketing, and resource management related to agriculture and fishing.

He highlighted the Common External Tariff (CET) as the main vehicle for providing support to regional producers for a range of agricultural products in which CARICOM Member States have a producing interest. However, he noted that these products attract a tariff of 40%, whereas the tariff is 25% for non-agricultural goods, and that some agriproducts attract tariffs lower than the protective tariff of 40%, due to various factors, including consideration of the cost of living and their potential for production in the region. Mr. Durrant advised that the CET is currently being reviewed in order to better fulfil its objective of facilitating trade within the region, and indicated that stakeholders may wish to indicate their interest in being part of the process.

He stated that CARICOM is also seeking to harmonise sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures aimed at protecting agricultural health in the importing countries, since there are instances where the measures imposed by some countries in respect of intraregional

trade may not be appropriate, though SPS measures are legitimate when based on scientific assessment of risks. He advised that the Caribbean Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) is currently working on protocols to facilitate the movement of key crop products in the region, and that a policy on the movement of animal products is to be approved soon.

Mr. Durrant also noted the following:

- Regarding external trade agreements, CARICOM has always been very cautious in liberalising trade in agricultural products, in order to protect regional producers and allow them to thrive and grow, whether at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or in bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries. The Community has had to negotiate a separate agreement with the United Kingdom since its exit from the European Union.
- Most of CARICOM's food imports come from outside the region, mainly from the United States of America. Only 12.7% of total food imports were sourced from within the Caribbean in 2010, and the situation has not changed significantly—the current food import bill is approximately USD 5 billion and more recent estimates indicate it may even be twice as large; this has been a flashpoint for policy making in the region as far as agriculture and food are concerned. The main products imported are those not substantially produced in the region, such as wheat, meat products, and refined sugar, which find a market due to increased incomes in the region, despite remaining pockets of poverty. Some healthy products that are imported, such as potatoes and vegetables, are candidates for import substitution.
- Most CARICOM countries have a vibrant domestic food-producing sector, but it comprises mainly small farmers, with much of the product going to the tourism sector. The sector is limited mostly by scale and low absorption of newer technologies, making it desirable to focus on high-quality products that can be distinguished from imports, based on their freshness and relationship to the land, culture, and other factors; poultry, fresh fish, and fruit production is significant in several countries.
- COVID-19 has spurred a redoubling of efforts at the regional level to improve the trading environment for agri-food products given the severe demand shock, due to the measures that had to be taken to control the pandemic and delays in rebound of both tourism and many normal activities that would fuel the demand for food. On the consumer side, there has been reduction of income, which has also fed into challenges with the demand side of the production system.
- Intraregional transportation has been the subject of considerable attention for most of CARICOM's life, and there is not yet a solution in terms of trading products. This is especially evident regarding facilities for transporting fresh produce across the region, where the lack of cold/cool chains, including vessels and port facilities, and the small size of shipments, limit efficiency and increase the cost of doing business.



### Building climate-resilient healthy food systems in the Caribbean: challenges and solutions Mr. Jacinto Buenfil

In summarising how to build climate-resistant food systems in the Caribbean, Mr. Buenfil characterised the systems under several headings:

- Interlinked value-adding activities, comprising production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, disposal, and recycling;
- Main elements, for example related to agriculture: natural, such as air, soil, ecosystems and genetics, water, and climate; societal, including organisations, policies, laws, and regulations, infrastructure, and socio-cultural norms; and the



core value chain, related to the behaviour of diverse actors, sustainability performance, food and nutrition security, and poverty reduction;

- Products, including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture;
- Inputs and services, such as transportation, improved seeds, research, extension services, and insurance; and
- Sustainability: economic, environmental, and social.

He noted that food systems have been influenced by many drivers, including population growth (1.6 billion in 1900 to a projected 9 billion in 2050), urbanisation (2% living in cities in 1900, to 50% today), and expansion of the middle class (1.8 billion in 2009, projected to be 4.9 billion in 2030). He stated that food systems are major contributors to climate change in terms of global greenhouse gases, and, in turn, climate change is affecting food systems, with climate drivers related to warmer average temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, intense period of rainfall leading to floods, sea-level rise leading to more coastal flooding and erosion, and more intense extreme weather, such as hurricanes.

Mr. Buenfil indicated that the impact of different aspects of climate change manifests differently in various parts of the food system, and includes changes in crop suitability, increased incidence of pests, crop loss or damage, erosion, saltwater intrusion, drought, flooding, decreased water availability, loss of fisheries, and decreased productivity, all resulting in a reduction in food security. He noted that over the period 2000-2009, USD 33 billion was lost due to climate change in Caribbean food systems, which amounts to 61% of regional GDP.

He identified the need for integrated solutions and emphasised that though the current focus may be on production, action was also needed in policy, transportation, technology, business development, and other areas. He stated that from an agricultural perspective, reducing greenhouse gases and improving production and local consumption were the main foci, and actions to be taken, aimed at diversifying production and income, and building resilience, included:

- *Nature-based solutions*, including diversification, beekeeping, solar dryers, and permaculture;
- *Use of appropriate technology*, such as backyard gardening, rainwater harvesting, greenhouses, agroforestry, organic fertilisers, seedbanks, and efficient irrigation; and
- *Establishment of integrated systems*, including silvopastoral systems,<sup>41</sup> vermicomposting, aquaculture, solar hydroponics, agroecology, and other ecologically friendly solutions.

Mr. Buenfil suggested actions for linking climate adaptation actions to the market economy, among them:

- Incentivise local production and consumption, for example through farmer's markets and school feeding programmes;
- Make financing available, including through micro-lending, reimbursable grants, and crowd-funding;
- Link producers to markets, for example through cooperatives and local processing;
- Promote de-risking mechanisms, including micro-insurance, parametric products, and safety nets; and
- Engage the private sector, including through negotiation of quotas, development of quality standards, and use of technology.

He closed by noting the evolution of food systems, from traditional (pre-industrial), to modern (industrial), to alternative (post-industrial).

<sup>41</sup> Silvopastoral systems are agroforestry arrangements that purposely combine fodder plants, such as grasses and leguminous herbs, with shrubs and trees for animal nutrition and complementary uses. See Chará J, Reyes E, Peri P, et al. Silvopastoral Systems and their Contribution to Improved Resource Use and Sustainable Development Goals: Evidence from Latin America. Cali: 2019; FAO, Centre for Research on Sustainable Agriculture, and Agri Benchmark. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca2792en/ca2792en.pdf>.



## Food and empowerment: growing real food and empowering a strong generation of women and youth in agriculture

**Ms. Keithlin Caroo**

Ms. Caroo highlighted the CARICOM food import bill, which was approaching USD 8-10 billion, and noted that though Caribbean countries have fertile land, thriving farming communities, and, technically, are in closer proximity to fresh food than most other regions, the region keeps importing and eating foreign foods.

Ms. Caroo stated that Helen's Daughters, the NGO that she founded in St. Lucia, focuses on the economic empowerment of rural women, given that women are usually the first point of contact in supplying food, starting with breastfeeding and continuing to the procurement and preparation of food, presiding over the household, and overseeing the nutrition of children. She further noted that though women represent the foundation of the food chain and the food security discussion, women and youth remain at the base of the value chain and usually practice subsistence farming, lacking both the requisite skills and education on proper nutrition, and adequate resources.

She highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming in agriculture, as many women and youth face the 'grass ceiling', which excludes them from larger markets due to barriers related to finance, inputs, and training. She noted that these issues may be forcing women and youth out of agriculture—an unwanted development, given the ageing population of farmers—and provided summary statistics demonstrating gender issues in selected countries:

- *Landholding*: In Jamaica, landowners comprise 11% women, 89% men; in Dominica, female banana farmers own 21% of land, compared with 79% ownership by their male counterparts; and in St. Lucia, only 30% of agricultural land is owned by women.
- *Agricultural loans*: There is an overall issue with such lending because of the lack of collateral in agricultural communities. In Jamaica, less than 2% of the commercial lending portfolio is allocated to agriculture and less than 10% of farmers in that country have access to credit, with women farmers being a particularly small fraction of that percentage.
- *Farmer registration*: There are approximately twice as many male as female farmers, and the latter are often not included in official statistics, as their work may be unpaid on family farms, or they may work in subsistence agriculture.

Ms. Caroo noted that Helen's Daughters has implemented programmes that focus on local food production and its agribusiness aspects, recognising that while participants in those programmes cannot compete on scale, they can compete on quality. She emphasised that farmers and farming populations, especially women and youth, must be integrated into the conversation on NCDs, their lack of skills must be addressed, and they too—not only consumers—must be educated on the nutritional value of foods. She gave examples of work done by Helen's Daughters to address these gaps, including the establishment of the Rural Women's Academy, a 6-month virtual programme that focuses on sustainable agriculture, agribusiness development, and nutritional marketing.

**“While high-level policy discussions are often held on the food import bill and on the rise of NCDs in the region, one of the key links—the people of the region—is neglected. The people charged with food security are under-funded, under-resourced, and under-skilled, especially if they are women or youth working in the agricultural sector.”**

In 2017, Helen’s Daughters implemented a Rural Women’s Workshop that comprised a one-day leadership summit for rural women focusing on empowerment, workers’ rights, and financial management, and in 2018 implemented a Sustainable Change Programme in collaboration with the University of British Columbia. This programme partnered chemistry, biology, and geological engineering students with rural women farmers to discuss sustainable agricultural practices, develop skills, and formulate technical recommendations for the sustainable development of farms.

Ms. Caroo closed her remarks by stating that the development and implementation of papers, policies, and programmes aimed at improving food systems must involve the agricultural stakeholders on the ground—solutions must come from the bottom up, and must include farmers and agripreneurs, including women and youth.

**Panel discussion Moderator and all presenters**

In continuing his moderator functions, Dr. Kenneth Connell posed questions to prompt discussion among presenters, as summarised below.

- *Dr. Connell:* Isn’t the main issue to be addressed the critical barrier of the region’s high food import costs?
- *Mr. Nigel Durrant:* Our imports have grown over the years, as economies have diversified and incomes have risen. There are certain staples and niche products that are imported that can be replaced, and the Caribbean Private Sector Organization has proposed a programme for import replacement for a range of products, including poultry, vegetables, and fruit. However, consumer tastes and buying behaviour have changed, and those in charge of processing and packaging have to step up to the plate—people have less time for food preparation, and some people do not wish to have to cut up ingredients for salads, or wash off dirt off root products. Local producers are in competition with products from outside the region that are better presented.
- *Dr. Connell:* Is there a country in the Caribbean that provides a model for skilful trade agreements or taxation to protect healthy foods and support the local economy?
- *Professor Fitzroy Henry:* There is no model country, but there are model policies, for example taxation on SSBs introduced in Barbados and Dominica; Jamaica has addressed the sale of SSBs with sugar content above a certain level in schools; and Belize and Bermuda have also taken policy actions related to reducing sugar consumption. However, these countries have not addressed other policies related to healthy nutrition, and all countries should be encouraged to implement complementary policies, including more understandable FoPNWL, that could make a significant difference. There should also be consideration of the possible regional impact of WTO international policies.
- *Mr. Nigel Durrant:* With regard to the WTO, there is not much that hinders our duty to promote policies that support health—countries are free to promulgate standards and tax unhealthy products, ensuring that the policies apply across the board, to both local and imported products. This latter requirement is usually the issue that provokes debate, but countries can identify the health-promoting policies they wish to put in place and negotiate them through the national and international processes.
- *Dr. Connell:* Has there been a focus on nutrition from the womb? Is there need for gender-sensitive policies?
- *Ms. Keithlin Caroo:* There needs to be gender mainstreaming in agri-policies, related to training, land inheritance, financing, and other aspects, to help women move out of just subsistence farming and move up from the base of the value chain.<sup>42</sup> We need to educate our food producers and connect the dots—we grow food, but often cannot explain how what we grow benefits our bodies and our health.

<sup>42</sup> Related to this comment, Ms. Nicole Foster, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Law, UWI, Cave Hill, HCC Policy Advisor, and Moderator of Session 2, used the conference chat to provide a link to a lecture by Dr. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director, International Trade Centre, on the need for gender-sensitive trade policy, part of the Cave Hill Faculty of Law’s Eminent Speakers lecture series: <https://www.intracen.org/news/Should-Small-States-Embrace-Feminist-Trade-Policy/>.

- *Dr. Connell:* What of our vulnerability to climate change and changes in the availability of food?
- *Mr. Jacinto Buenfil:* The agricultural system is embedded in the larger climate system, and there are technologies that can be used in urban agriculture, even without soil—the region needs to start using those technologies, including apps, and involving young people. There are greenhouses that are hurricane resistant, so that resilience can be built through testing and applying those systems. Agriculture depends on climate, but we can work around hazards, and ensure safety nets such as insurance for crop protection and a supply of seeds for the next crop—an integrated approach is critical. It might be possible to have a system similar to octagonal FoPNWL to indicate the greenhouse gas emissions involved in bringing an imported product to a Caribbean table. More information on, and understanding of, our own contributions to the local economy and health is also important for people to make better choices.
- *Dr. Connell:* How does free intraregional trade factor into all of this? Why import a foreign brand of bananas, for example—which admittedly look more attractive than many local ones—when we have banana-producing countries in the Caribbean?
- *Professor Fitzroy Henry:* It seems to be easier to trade outside of the region than inside, and the CET review is warranted—if a product can be imported into the region from Australasia more easily than from a country that is actually in the region, a problem exists. There are also issues related to having the WTO “level playing field” for both local and imported products, as the former may have a more difficult time in reaching certain standards. The region needs to exploit policy and fiscal spaces, and WTO opportunities, to improve health, and identify the barriers to doing so effectively.
- *Mr. Nigel Durrant:* With regard to intraregional trade, there are challenges with SPS measures, which need more harmonisation and transparency. CARICOM Member States may restrict importation apparently based on SPS grounds, but this may really be protection for their producers. The CET is not as common as it should be—some countries have been given permission to apply lower duties on some products, such as poultry. Producing countries have high tariffs to exclude certain products, while non- or low-producing countries have almost zero tariffs to facilitate the importation of such products—uniformity across countries is needed. If some countries are able to procure a particular product, such as poultry, more cheaply from outside the region, for example from the Unites States of America, which has massive production capacity, then they will take advantage of the opportunity. There is a review of these measures taking place, and HCC may wish to indicate to the CARICOM Secretary-General its interest in taking part in this discourse.

**Closing remarks Dr. Kenneth Connell, Moderator**

Dr. Connell noted that much food for thought had been provided, and the region’s vulnerability to its food supply highlighted. He offered thanks to all panellists and closed the session.



# Session 2

## Our health - shaping a healthy food environment

After a 15-minute health break, during which Ms. Danielle Walwyn, Advocacy Officer, HCC, led participants in physical activity and there were video reminders of how to navigate the virtual conference, this session began, aiming to explore barriers and policy solutions for healthier food environments, including empowering consumers to make healthy food choices. The main points of the remarks, presentations, and discussions are summarised below.



**Moderator’s remarks Ms. Nicole Foster, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Law, UWI, Cave Hill; HCC Policy Advisor**

Ms. Foster welcomed participants, summarised the objective and topics of the session and introduced the panellists: Dr. Anselm Hennis, Director, Department of NCDs and Mental Health, PAHO; Dr. Virloy Lewin, Health Promotion Coordinator, Department of Health, Bermuda; Professor Franco Sassi, Professor of International Health Policy and Economics, Imperial College Business School, London; Ms. Hedda Phillips-Boyce, Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados; and Ms. Vonetta Nurse, Advocacy Officer (GHAJ project), HFJ.



**PAHO’s work in the Caribbean to support healthy food policies, including front of package nutrition warning labelling Dr. Anselm Hennis**

Dr. Hennis highlighted suboptimal diet as an important preventable risk factor for NCDs, and presented statistics from a 2017 study showing the age-standardised intake of dietary factors among adults aged 25 years and over at global level and in various regions and sub-regions across the world.<sup>43</sup> He noted that though the Caribbean had the highest daily fruit intake and a higher than average intake of legumes (peas and beans), the region’s intake of vegetables and grains was suboptimal, and the intake of nuts and seeds negligible. He also presented evidence—from the same study—of the relatively low intake of red meat and processed meat, the high intake of SSBs, and the within-normal-range intake of trans fat and sodium in the region, noting that despite the latter two values, elimination of trans fat from the diet would help to prevent heart disease, and reduction of sodium/salt would help to prevent both heart disease and stroke.

**“The Caribbean region must invest in moving toward sustainable food production and food systems as a priority; control childhood obesity; safeguard the school environment; recognise that what we eat matters; and empower consumers to make healthy choices through “right to know”, evidence-based, octagonal ‘high-in’ front-of-package nutrition warning labels.”**

<sup>43</sup> GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990-2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. Lancet 2019; 393: 1958-1972. Available at: <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2819%2930041-8>.

In emphasising that what we eat matters, Dr. Hennis summarised the information from the 2017 study as follows:

- In 2017, dietary risks were responsible for 11 million deaths (22% of all deaths) among adults.
- CVD were the leading causes of diet-related deaths among adults.
- Globally, consumption of nearly all healthy foods and nutrients was suboptimal.
- Daily intake of all unhealthy foods and nutrients exceeded the optimal level globally.
- Diets low in whole grains was the most common dietary risk factor for death.
- High intake of sodium is a leading dietary risk factor for death.
- Globally, three dietary factors account for more than 50% of diet-related deaths—suboptimal intake of whole grains and fruits, and excessive intake of sodium/salt.

He noted the low production of food in the Caribbean and the high cost of food imports in CARICOM countries, with much of the imported food being processed and ultra-processed products, and emphasised that while many of the smaller Caribbean countries did not have the capacity to increase their agricultural production, there must be efforts to scale-up such activities in countries such as Belize, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that breastfeeding, and infant and young child feeding, were of critical importance in the first 1,000 days of life (conception to age 2 years) to prevent later development of childhood obesity, NCDs, and negative impact on mental health.

Dr. Hennis indicated that PAHO advocated for and supported several interventions, among them:

- The [Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative](#)<sup>44</sup> which emphasises exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first six months of life;
- *School nutrition policies and standards*, through school recognition, the school curriculum, food services and physical activity environments, health promotion, and school health services;
- *Childhood obesity prevention* (COP), not only addressing the school environment, but also actively engaging parents, implementing context- and age-specific nutrition education programmes, and creating healthy environments for nutrition and physical education; and
- *Development of policies and norms* that promote a healthy diet and reduce the demand for, and offer of, unhealthy HFSS products; healthy environments in schools and workplaces; and healthy food shopping, preparation, and consumption, the last exemplified by the development of food-based dietary guidelines and the drive to implement FoPNWL in the region and assist consumers in making healthy choices.

Expanding on the issue of FoPNWL, Dr. Hennis noted that the PAHO-recommended, evidence-based octagonal ‘high-in’ FoPNWL system allows consumers to easily, quickly, and correctly identify HFSS products, and would contribute to reduction of the diet-related conditions of high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and obesity, three conditions that cause 47% of all deaths in the Caribbean. Stating that such reductions were even more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its severe negative impact on PLWNCDs, he summarised the current status of the CROSQ process to revise the nutritional labelling standard:

- The Regional Technical Sub-committee, consisting of 11 CARICOM Member States<sup>45</sup> and National Mirror Committees (comprising seven categories of stakeholders, which could include representatives of Industry and Commerce) established by National Bureaux of Standards in all Member States, had produced a Final Draft CARICOM Regional Standard (FDCRS), which retained the octagonal warning labels and the PAHO Nutrient Profile Model.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/documents/baby-friendly-hospital-initiative#:~:text=UNICEF>.

<sup>45</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

- Voting on the FDCRS by all CARICOM Member States was extended to 30 June 2021.
- If approved by 75% of CARICOM Member States, the Standard would be presented to the CROSQ Council for approval, then to the next available and appropriate CARICOM Council of Ministers for approval as a CARICOM Regional Standard.



**An evaluation of the Bermuda sugar tax: lessons learned for the Caribbean**  
**Dr. Virloy Lewin and Professor Franco Sassi**

*Dr. Lewin* provided an overview of the sugar tax introduced in Bermuda, noting that the incidence of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer increased in that country in tandem with the weight of population—a 2014 survey using the WHO STEPwise approach to chronic disease risk factor surveillance (STEPS) showed a prevalence of overweight or obesity of 75% and diabetes 13%, while 50% of the population drank at least one sugary drink each day.<sup>46</sup> As per the government’s commitment in its Throne Speech, the sugar tax was introduced in 2017 to raise awareness of these issues, start a conversation around healthy eating, act as a deterrent to the purchase of sugary products, provide a catalyst to create a healthier food environment, and furnish revenue for health promotion and community education. It was rolled out in two phases: phase 1, introduced on 1 October 2018, raised the tax on certain sugar-containing items to 50%, while the tax on selected healthy foods was lowered to 0%, and phase 2, introduced on 1 April 2019, increased the sugar tax to 75% and added more items.

Overall, the tax resulted in an increase in the cost in grocery basket items of about 25%, with conflicting reports from the retail sector, unexpected trends, and some consumer hostility at price increases following in-store sales. An omnibus survey showed a reduction of sugary drink consumption to 42% in 2019, and the October 2018 increase in the sugar tax led to revenue collection of USD 5.4 million by 1 December 2019.



*Professor Sassi* began by describing the sugar tax in Bermuda as an important example for the region, as it was designed in a way that is not standard for a tax of that type, being based on an import tariff; it targets a broad line of products, not only SSBs; and it reduces taxes on a variety of products viewed as healthy. In a brief overview, he emphasised the initial increase of the tax from 33.5% to 50% on candies and raw sugar, with a subsequent increase to 75% and expansion to cocoa products.

He stated that in evaluating the tax, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, the former to assess awareness, acceptability, and perceptions of the tax, using a telephone survey and interviews with stakeholders, the latter to evaluate changes in price and purchasing patterns related to the taxed products, through time series analyses of weekly sales and price data from one of the largest retailers in Bermuda.

He summarised the results and conclusions of the evaluation as follows:

- There was high awareness of the tax, but not everyone thought it was a good incentive for a change of diet toward healthy choices, and tax design issues were highlighted for improvement.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Health, Seniors and Environment. Steps to a Well Bermuda 2014. Hamilton: 2016; Government of Bermuda. Available at: [https://www.gov.bm/sites/default/files/steps\\_to\\_a\\_well\\_bermuda\\_2014\\_0\\_3.pdf](https://www.gov.bm/sites/default/files/steps_to_a_well_bermuda_2014_0_3.pdf).

- The sugar tax resulted in increased prices of products containing sugar, with the average price of SSBs increasing by 26%, and the price of non-SSBs remaining constant—though, overall, the price of SSBs remained lower than the price of non-SSBs.
- Consumers reduced their consumption of SSBs by about 26%, and this consumer responsiveness to price changes suggests that the tax will generate health benefits.
- There was evidence of large price promotions coinciding with major sporting events and holidays.
- The tax reduction on healthy products—fruits and vegetables—was ineffective in increasing the consumption of those items, as it was too small in size and the fluctuations in the prices of those products were not offset by the small reduction.
- An improved tax design would have led to a greater impact on dietary behaviours.

Professor Sassi identified the main lessons from the evaluation:

- Taxes can be effective and fair means to reduce the consumption of obesogenic products, even in small countries such as Bermuda;
- Effective communication is critical, to provide clarity regarding products that are taxed and those that are not; indicate the use of the revenue generated by the tax; and raise awareness of the issues, including the health rationale for the taxes;
- There is need for structural changes to the sugar tax, including stronger incentives for healthy options than the 5% tax reduction on fruits and vegetables, possibly including subsidies in addition to tax reduction;
- Price promotions should be regulated, so that they do not negate price increases due to the tax; and
- Complementary policies aimed at creating healthy food environments should be developed and implemented, including improved affordability of sugar substitutes and increased promotion and availability of affordable and healthy options.



**The Barbados National School Nutrition Policy 2021-2022**  
**Ms. Hedda Phillips-Boyce**

Ms. Phillips-Boyce<sup>47</sup> indicated that, like the rest of the world, Barbados had been thrown into a spin in responding to COVID-19, and virtual lessons for students, due to lockdowns, led to compounding of sedentary lifestyles and overeating. She cited data from 2017 showing that 1 out of every 3 students is overweight or obese, quoted anecdotal evidence that Barbadian children are developing type 2 diabetes and elevated blood pressure, and noted that this sets the stage for the Government of Barbados to spend even more on CVD and diabetes than the 63 million Barbados Dollars expended in 2015.

Ms. Phillips-Boyce stated that the purpose of the policy is to ensure that students are provided with a food environment that is safe, that healthy eating is supported and encouraged, and that all aspects of physical activity in schools are promoted, for the health and wellbeing of students. She summarised the policy design process, which involved collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT), and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, with technical support from PAHO/WHO; coordination of a stakeholder consultation process over the period July-December 2020 by the Barbados National Nutrition Centre; preparation of the draft policy by PAHO/WHO; and submission of the draft to the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

<sup>47</sup> Ms. Phillips-Boyce made the presentation on behalf of Ms. Joy Adamson, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados.



She emphasised that the stakeholder consultation process was extensive, involving not only the named ministries and PAHO/WHO, but also the Child Care Board, the Barbados National Standards Institution, and civil society representatives, including academia, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB), the HCC, and a youth representative from the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition. The consultation process included examination of the situation and challenges regarding obesity and NCDs, exploration of best practices and approaches, and discussion of various policy positions.

Ms. Phillips-Boyce summarised the strategies to be implemented for the 2021–2022 school year:

- Encourage more physical activity among students, expanding the focus from competitive sports to encourage students not involved in those sports to take up physical activities that they consider fun;
- Improve the nutritional value, appearance, and taste of lunches offered by the School Meals Programme;
- Work with canteen concessionaires to present healthier options to the students, in collaboration with the HSFB;
- Sensitise parents on the importance of preparing nutritious meals for their children or wards; and
- Improve implementation of the Health and Family Life Education programme in schools, integrating information on healthy eating and fitness, in order to have greater impact on students’ food choices.

In closing, Ms. Phillips-Boyce noted that drivers for the undertaking included students and teachers, and that persons to champion the cause will have to be found, especially since the process needs to be monitored. She also identified various challenges, including supply and demand; types, availability, and accessibility of food for healthy school nutrition, so that the offers of processed and ultra-processed foods can be limited; the price of final offerings; acquiring the taste for certain foods; involvement of vendors around schools; obtaining buy-in by parents/guardians; and ensuring regular monitoring and evaluation of the policy.



**Civil society experiences advocating for healthy food policies in Jamaica**  
**Ms. Vonetta Nurse**

Ms. Nurse stated that the objective of the project, which the HFJ has been implementing since 2017, supported by the [Global Health Advocacy Incubator](https://advocacyincubator.org/),<sup>48</sup> was to increase public and policymaker awareness of the health impact of unhealthy HFSS foods and build support for obesity and NCD prevention policies. She justified the need to provide a supportive environment to encourage healthy eating, noting that Jamaica’s health landscape included NCDs as the cause of almost 80% of deaths; increasing NCD and obesity prevalence in adults and children, with 54% of adults overweight or obese; an increase of 68% in childhood obesity between 2010 and 2017; unhealthy eating practices; and the increased vulnerability of PLWNCDs to COVID-19. She indicated that the policy priorities addressed by the project—based on the health landscape and aligned with national, regional, and international plans and policies— comprised FoPNWL, healthy foods in schools, taxation of sugary drinks, and restriction of the marketing of unhealthy foods to children.

Ms. Nurse stated that one major activity has involved mass media campaigns, six of which have been implemented since 2017, starting with the harms of overconsumption of sugary drinks, transitioning to a call for imposition of a tax on SSBs, and the current campaign addressing FoPNWL, aligned with the consumer’s right to health and right to

information to make healthier choices. She noted that other project activities include public education and outreach; advocacy meetings with ministers and technical support to ministries, departments, and agencies; regular social media postings, podcasts, and Twitter chats; and engagement with the media, including articles, advertisements, radio series, letters to the editor, and interviews, as well as annual journalism sensitisation training conducted in collaboration with academia.

Ms. Nurse emphasised the importance of conducting post-campaign evaluations, noting that such an assessment in Jamaica revealed strong public support for the campaigns—92% supported FoPNWL, 87% strongly agreed to support government efforts to improve children’s access to healthy foods and drinks, and 71% supported a tax on sugary drinks. She emphasised the importance of obtaining the support of the public, as they are consumers and a potential pressure group for policy development.

In summarising project achievements, Ms. Nurse highlighted:

- Partnerships established, including formal alliances with 18 other NGOs, co-branding of campaigns with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and collaboration with the National Food Industry Task Force;
- Leveraging women’s and other civic groups in advocacy;
- Contribution to restriction of SSBs in schools, effective January 2019;
- Technical support for development of a school nutrition policy that is pending approval by Cabinet;
- Meetings with several ministries and provision of evidence for the adoption of healthy policies; and
- HFJ’s membership in the National Mirror Committee for revision of the CARICOM regional nutrition labelling standard and adoption of FoPNWL, with an impact on the voluntary reformulation of products by some companies to reduce levels of fats, sugar, and salt.

She also identified challenges, including socioeconomic issues affecting access to and availability of health foods; lack of knowledge of healthy eating practices; delays in the implementation of recommended policy solutions; lack of evidence-based decision making, as well as challenges to existing, proven evidence; increase in industry marketing and corporate social responsibility, especially since COVID-19, with blurring of the criteria for industry interference; and an aggressive food industry lobby, with pushback on proposals such as for SSB tax and FoPNWL.

**Panel discussion Moderator and all presenters**

Ms. Foster posed questions to prompt presenters’ comments on certain issues, as summarised below.

- *Ms. Foster*: What are the main barriers to policy implementation, and what roles can civil society actors such as the HCC play? What about industry interference? How much of a challenge has that been in terms of implementation of food policy? Are SSB taxes a viable option for Caribbean governments now, to address economy recovery from the pandemic?
- *Dr. Hennis*: One of the main barriers is the lack of government will to implement these policies. There are relationships that impact the economy, and policymakers often do not want to appear to be working against the private sector. There is also an issue regarding policy coherence—for example, though the Minister of Health will be against tobacco use, the Minister of Industry may encourage the tobacco industry as a major foreign income earner, and the Minister of Finance may favour arguments from the latter minister, rather than the former.
- *Ms. Phillips-Boyce*: The METVT has fully embraced all stakeholders, recognising that change will be difficult. There has been encouraging progress because of the policy, and canteen concessionaires, vendors, and

<sup>48</sup> <https://advocacyincubator.org/>.

other food suppliers will be educated and trained on the issues, in collaboration with HFSB, and students will also be sensitised.

- *Ms. Foster:* The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including HFSB and PAHO, is admirable, and the Barbados situation may provide an excellent case study for a whole-of-society approach. However, there may be industry interference, and methods to deal with it, as the HFJ as had to do, are important.
- *Ms. Nurse:* Countering industry interference should take place at all levels—a ‘grass roots’ person may not recognise industry interference for what it is. It may appear to be corporate social responsibility, but it has to be highlighted and exposed, despite the difficulties this may cause. Health advocates have to be able to gather evidence, raise issues as public health priorities, and highlight their importance, without demonising food.
- *Ms. Foster:* What of SSB taxes? What would the Bermuda experience suggest regarding facilitating factors?
- *Dr. Lewin:* The COVID era makes it difficult, but the public has to be sensitised on the importance of taxes; Bermuda needs to do a better job of getting the public on board, and being transparent regarding the use of the tax revenue. At the time of implementation of the sugar tax, there was no conversation about this, and many saw the measure as a ‘tax grab’. Political will is also important—the Government of Bermuda was committed to implementing the tax, as it had been included in the Throne Speech.
- *Professor Sassi:* There was a boost in the implementation of SSB taxes between 2010 and 2013, in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global economic crisis, as these taxes are useful to assist recovery and when public revenue needs to be increased. Given the huge government spending related to COVID-19 and the need for countries to recover from the pandemic, SSB taxes may be seen favourably at this time, and this is a great opportunity for enhanced political advocacy. There is evidence to show that, contrary to one objection that industry often makes in efforts to delay such taxes, there are no job losses as a result of the taxes—jobs actually increase.
- *Ms. Foster:* Is there a possibility of having a coherent region-wide policy with CARPHA as lead?
- *Dr. Hennis:* Policy coherence is important, and a region-wide approach may be useful. Health is often thought of in a siloed way, but it needs a holistic, health-in-all-policies approach. The greatest asset to any economy is its human capital—its people—which means that health and education must be emphasised to ensure healthy populations. The Caribbean continues to lag behind other regions in the Americas in addressing these issues—though much is said, relevant policies to reduce the major NCD risk factors are not being implemented. There is need to have policies for population health, not only for individual health care.

“There appears to be tension between health and the economy, and a similar situation exists regarding the private sector, which is driven by profit, not human health or well-being. However, there can be policy coherence to achieve a situation where improvement in human health and human capital helps the economy, and human health has to be put at the forefront.”

**Dr. Anselm Hennis, Director, Department of NCDs and Mental Health, PAHO**

**Closing remarks Ms. Nicole Foster, Moderator**

In closing the session, Ms. Foster reiterated the critical role that civil society can play, the importance of policy coherence and whole-of-society responses, and the need for ‘bottom-up’ solutions. She reminded participants that as far back as 2001, the region recognised and understood that “our health is our wealth”, and needs to do better at accelerating the NCD prevention and control agenda.

**Session 3**

**A conversation on improving food system governance by managing conflicts of interest**

After a health break, during which Ms. Alaina Gomes, Counselling Psychologist, Antigua and Barbuda, led participants in relaxation exercises and stretches, this panel discussion aimed to explore conflicts of interest in multisectoral approaches to healthy food policy in small communities, and to emphasise that managing conflicts of interest and industry interference are central to good governance for healthy food policymaking in the multisectoral approach to NCDs. The main points of the conversation are summarised below.



**Moderator’s remarks Sir George Alleyne, Director Emeritus, PAHO; Patron HCC**

Sir George expressed his congratulations to the HCC for convening the conference and described the presentations so far as “absolutely brilliant”. He noted that conflict of interest (Col) is one of the more difficult topics to address, as there is always Col—personal and policy—and the focus of this discussion would be on policy Col, which may be individual or institutional. He summarised the differences between the two:

- Individual Col often involves public officials and other professionals who have primary and secondary interests, the former being their main objective, whether it be public policy, patient care, or serving clients, and the latter being opportunities, gifts, or other incentives that may be offered to them to influence their decisions on their primary interests. When the secondary interests of public officials overwhelm their primary interests, corruption occurs.
- Institutional Col involves relationships among entities, and in addressing institutional Col, the focus must always be on the primary interests, that is, what is in the public good. In this discussion, the primary interests are policies that benefit public health, and there is a duty to ensure that they are not derailed by the secondary interests of other players.

Sir George stated that the case of tobacco and the arms industries is clear, as their interests are inimical to public health, but in the case of food industry, the situation is not as obvious. He advised that WHO recently produced a toolkit, using the food industry as an example, which guides analysis of primary interests, mutuality of interests, and managing conflict in one or other part of that industry’s activities.<sup>49</sup> He noted that similar issues are confronting the Caribbean region in the matter of healthy food policy, and declared that if analysis demonstrates no possibility of managing any Col identified between the food industry and public health, then policy interference from that industry must be blocked, so that public health can prevail.

<sup>49</sup> World Health Organization. Draft approach for the prevention and management of conflicts of interest in the policy development and implementation of nutrition programmes at country level: decision-making process and tool. Geneva: WHO; 4 December 2017. Available at: <https://www.who.int/nutrition/consultation-doi/nutrition-tool.pdf>.



Sir George then introduced the panellists:



**Dr. Joy St. John**  
Executive Director,  
CARPHA



**Ms. Barbara McGaw**  
Programme Manager,  
HFJ



**Ms. Kimberley Benjamin**  
Lawyer  
Member HCY



**Mr. Julian Rogers**  
Managing Director  
Jamaica Observer  
newspaper, Caribbean  
Journalist and  
Broadcaster

In eliciting panellists' thoughts on the issue, Sir George posed a number of questions, calling on specific panellists to respond—the exchanges are summarised below.

- *Sir George:* From the experience with CARPHA, what should good governance look like? Can it be enhanced by effective management of Col, for a positive, win-win outcome in the topic under discussion?
- *Dr. St John:* In assuming her duties at CARPHA two years ago, those were thoughts that came to her when she began to review the regional public health landscape and examine the drivers and factors that influence those with the power to make policy. As a result, CARPHA made a change in its partnering policy not only to manage Col, but also to avoid situations that would lead to such conflict, and specific guidelines were developed for CARPHA Board Members, who come from the political, technical, and administrative directorates of ministries of health. The Col policy had to be framed in a way that was applicable to both the institution of the ministry of health and to its individual members, so there was need to understand how the ministry functioned, and to realise that there is a political dimension to all actions. There must be a space at the table for consultation and discussion with partners that may bring conflict or disrupt the proceedings, but the 'hard stop' is that there should not be an opposing partner at the table when policy is being decided on.
- *Sir George:* There is no doubt that at the institutional level policies and guidelines are needed and it is good that ethical guidelines exist to frame the types of decisions that CARPHA would have to take. Turning to the HFJ, what types of Col has the Foundation encountered? How has it dealt with the challenges?
- *Ms. McGaw:* Those who work in tobacco control know the tobacco industry playbook, and the food industry has copied several of the tactics, including delaying: pushing for longer consultation periods, requesting more research and evidence, and threatening litigation; dividing: developing and promoting its own labels, which are usually less stringent, arguing for voluntary labelling, and lobbying to stop legislation; deflecting: claiming that labels will scare or mislead people, that the nutritional profile is too strict, and that policies will have a negative impact on business; and denying: implying that there is not enough evidence to make decisions, casting doubt on existing evidence, and arguing a lack of agreement globally on the most effective intervention, such as related to FoPNWL. The government has to lead the charge against this to counter the power imbalance evident with industry influence, since it is government's duty to protect and promote the health of the population, including against Col. In Jamaica, some small- and medium-sized manufacturers

are supportive of the move to FoPNWL, and have asked for technical support to help with reformulation and labelling, so although the industry umbrella organisation may give a blanket statement to the contrary, there are differences among their members that can be exploited in the interests of health. Also, health advocates should pick their battles—there is no need to respond to everything, and one should choose wisely.

- *Sir George:* A complementary question is: How can the law assist in counteracting the promotion of obesogenic foods?
- *Ms. Benjamin:* The use of human rights to frame the issues is important. The [Convention on the Rights of the Child](https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx)<sup>50</sup> (CRC), which all CARICOM Member States have ratified, sets out the obligations of the State Party—the government—regarding the rights of the child, including the right to health, adequate nutrition, and information. The binding obligations include protection, through legal and regulatory measures, from interference by third parties, including industry players, that would harm health. So, there is a significant role that law can play, and governments have the primary responsibility of enacting legislation, including clarification on how to engage with industry, especially since there is no evidence to show that industry self-regulation is effective.
- *Sir George:* All stakeholders should be sensitive to the legal possibilities for ensuring the public health good. It is evident that the media is very influential. How can the media frame Col to show what is in the public good and the primary interests to which we should all aspire? Does the media have a role in explaining all of this?
- *Mr. Rogers:* There is clear understanding of the mandate for persons in the health sector, but there is also a mandate for the media, which has the two-fold role of reporter and development partner. This is not a political role, and the media must become subject experts in order to effectively play its expected role, with knowledge about development issues, whether related to health—as in dealing with COVID-19—or other topic. The media must not see itself as being in conflict with the political side, and its coverage and communication role in COVID-19, including creating instruments of education, has been more consistent than in previous years. There has been progress, but the possibility of Col arises if roles and responsibilities are not clearly identified, and the media can take steps to avoid Col, for example in not carrying tobacco and alcohol advertisements, even before relevant legislation is enacted. Thus, further steps are needed, which can be made through the establishment of clear partnerships between the media and health to assist the media in becoming subject experts.
- *Sir George:* Does CARPHA have a role in supporting ministries of health in managing Col?
- *Dr. St. John:* CARPHA has an important role to play. In its interactions with ministers in health and other sectors, the agency highlights pitfalls and recommends boundaries, outlining the situation and suggesting strategies to achieve win-win solutions, while keeping its objectivity and fulfilling its advisory role. Since CARPHA's focus is regional, and its membership is wider than CARICOM, the agency has to consider geographical and other differences, and tailor its advice accordingly, so as not to disadvantage any country.
- *Sir George:* In area of food or other public policy, does CARPHA see so much divergence in the region that the agency will need to play a special role in achieving coherence around that policy, and in managing any Col that might arise?
- *Dr. St. John:* CARPHA does play a role in advising on Col management to facilitate agreement and consensus among its Member States. As an example, this is one of the agency's functions as a member of the secretariat of an intergovernmental working group looking at healthy diets and alcohol reduction in the region that includes not only health, but also trade.
- *Sir George:* Does civil society have a role to play in managing Col?

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

- *Ms. McGaw*: Civil society definitely has a role to play, primarily a “watchdog” role to ensure that policies are protected from industry interference, by interfacing not only with health, but also with other ministries. The HFJ has conducted journalism training and has found that the reporting around food policy has improved, with more accurate information being shared, and journalists have seen HFJ as an information resource since then. The Foundation has also held sensitisation meetings with ministries and other entities, and though the focus might not have been on Col, instances have arisen where HFJ has alerted key stakeholders to Col, such as their wearing T-shirts supplied and branded by an unhealthy commodity industry. A conference focusing on Col was planned, but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Sir George*: The primary interest is usually evident, but often the secondary interest and its power, such as the provision of T-shirts to ministry staff by the tobacco industry, is not recognised as Col. It is important to identify secondary interests that may exert influence and retard progress in achieving the primary interest, and take steps to avoid such influence. What role can young people play to ensure that secondary interests do not obscure the primary interest of developing a healthy food policy?
- *Ms. Benjamin*: According to the CRC, children and youth are rights-holders and main beneficiaries, and, as such, it is in their interest to ensure that they remain healthy. They must be given the opportunity to participate in policy development, and if not given the space to do so by the government and other authorities, then children and youth must create their own. The Greta Thunbergs<sup>51</sup> of this world receive much publicity, but in the Caribbean children and youth are often told that they “should be seen and not heard”, which is a cultural norm that has to be overcome to ensure that they have input into policies that affect them. Youth can help to identify cases of Col, including through their attention to, and use of, social media platforms, to call out industry interference.
- *Sir George*: The idea of youth ensuring that Col does not get in the way of their benefits is an attractive one. Social platforms allow youth to be heard without being seen, and to insist that there be no interference in achieving the primary interest of healthy food policy in the region, for their own health. Regarding food and food policy: if healthy food policy is in the interest of public health, is the media obliged to desist from promoting unhealthy food policy?
- *Mr. Rogers*: It is in the media’s interest to get more and accurate information, and commercial and content interests are important, as are sponsors. However, there must be sensitisation regarding situations where those sponsors may be inimical to the cause of public health and cause a conflict. It is not in the media’s interests to go against the public good, and if the media realises that it is going down a road that makes no sense, it has to be on guard, even where there is commercial advantage and money to be earned. The media needs to know more about the value of public health outcomes—a healthy marketplace for its products is a benefit, and it is important to keep educating the populace on these situations. Media can work with industry to get the latter’s message out, without acting as an industry public relations agent, and can clarify where Col exists. In many ways, the media is overwhelmed by the volume of information available, and needs assistance in distilling and presenting vital information—the media is a willing public health partner, and the more help it can get, the better.
- *Sir George*: The HCC is a good source of all types of information for the media.

**“The NCD wound is bleeding, and youth are needed to constantly apply pressure.”**

**Ms. Kimberley Benjamin,  
Lawyer, Member Healthy  
Caribbean Youth**

<sup>51</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta\\_Thunberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg).

In bringing the session to a close, Sir George invited each panellist to make very brief final comments:

- *Dr. St. John*: CARPHA is also a source of information for the media. Col is not going away, it will become even more complex, and those who support policymakers are urged to get the frameworks and support they need to develop relevant policy—CARPHA can help. Also, health advocates can no longer “hide” from certain groups—there must be engagement, within guidelines and to a certain limit.
- *Ms. McGaw*: Industry is not a homogeneous group, and there can be engagement with some sub-groups as appropriate. Media messages should include points and counterpoints where necessary in order to present balanced views, and collaboration between media and health is important.
- *Ms. Benjamin*: Multisectoral action is required for NCD prevention and control, and the law provides a framework for such action regarding process, rules of engagement, and information to be provided. Youth voices must be heard, and the CRC stipulates that children be involved in their own health.
- *Mr. Rogers*: The consensus on the need for collaboration with the media is welcome, as is the recognition that the media have to address both commercial and developmental interests.

Sir George thanked the panellists, noting agreement on the primary interest in this discussion—healthy food policy—and increased awareness of the possibility of secondary interests impacting negatively on that primary interest. He also indicated awareness of efforts that had to be made to overcome objections to the primary interest, and took comfort in the admission by some industries that though their shareholders’ interests and profits are important, stakeholder interests and the social impact of their actions are also crucial. He stated that there may be a convergence of the roles of such industries and those of public health advocates, but reiterated that this was not an easy topic.

**“It is important to note that that the food industry is not monolithic, and that there are groups within the industry with which there can be mutuality of interest and demonstration that conflict of interest is not insurmountable.”**

**Sir George Alleyne, HCC Patron**



## Lunchtime Conversations - Summary

Ms. Maisha Hutton, HCC Executive Director, invited participants to join designated conversation rooms to hold short (30-minute) discussions with experts on ten topics related to NCDs and food:

1. **Local small-scale farming makes a big impact: case studies from across the region**
2. **Innovative food solutions for a healthier Caribbean**
3. **Leveraging Fronts/Alliances of Parliamentarians to build political support for food policy**
4. **Digital advocacy: a powerful civil society tool for change**
5. **Tackling marketing of unhealthy foods to children in the Caribbean—where do we begin?**
6. **Research speaks - exploring the food environment in Caribbean schools and supermarkets**
7. **Sugar tax in Bermuda**
8. **Food systems, climate change, and SIDS**
9. **Human rights, NCDs, and the law**
10. **Caribbean voices unite - building a civil society media movement in support of front-of-package warning labelling**

The conversations reinforced, expanded, and provided examples of the main issues addressed and discussed in the five main sessions; notes from the conversations are collated in **Annex 2**, and selected points from the conversations are summarised below.

- Local agriculture, through backyard gardening and small-scale farming, is important for food and nutrition security, and the involvement of children and youth can be promoted through agricultural education involving the use of stories and comics that resonate with them.
- Opportunities for farmers and agripreneurs to strengthen their capacity should be provided, and include access to funding, establishment of cooperatives, and policies that promote the sale, purchase and use of locally produced foods and products.
- Interrelationships and alliances to achieve both SDG 2 ('End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture') and SDG 3 ('Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages') are important. The [Parliamentary Front against Hunger](https://today.caricom.org/tag/parliamentary-front-against-hunger-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/)<sup>52</sup> in Latin America and the Caribbean targets collaborative work among policymakers to safeguard population health.
- Digital advocacy is a powerful tool that should be part of a communications plan to change the thinking and behaviour of multiple audiences, including policymakers and the public. This tool can be cost-effective through the use of social media platforms, which allows specific persons to be tagged, posts to be boosted, and audience engagement measured.
- Regulations against the advertisement and promotion of unhealthy foods to children are often absent or not enforced. Countermeasures against these interventions include educating children, clear product labelling, and promoting local, healthy foods.
- Product labelling is critical for consumer education and to enable healthy choices. In the school setting, the promotion and sale of SSBs and ultra-processed foods are significant, and contribute to childhood obesity.

The black octagonal system of FoPNWL promoted by PAHO was found to perform best among the options available for product nutrition labelling.

- The introduction of sugar taxes should be accompanied by health promotion interventions targeting the public to achieve the desired consumer behaviour change, the private sector should also be engaged, and the disposal of the revenue generated through the tax should be made clear.
- Efforts must be made to produce more earth-friendly products to mitigate the effects of, and adapt to, climate change.
- States Parties' obligation to respect and protect the right to health means the State must "refrain from interfering directly or indirectly with the employment of the right to health", and also take action to prevent external parties from doing so. The language of rights gives civil society a way to enjoin governments from interventions that make the obesity epidemic worse, and to call on governments to put the necessary legislation in place to move towards the full realization of the right to health, including laws governing the marketing practices of outside parties that create obesogenic environments. However, there is no domestic incorporation of the right to health from the international human rights conventions, though there is evidence of cases where the right to health has been interpreted as a provision within the national constitution and litigated in court.
- In rallying civil society to a cause such as evidence-based FoPNWL, the use of social media is important, but these platforms should be used in conjunction with other types of media. In addition, local efforts to complement regional campaigns are critical, with stakeholder mapping, consideration of the prevailing political climate, and tailoring of interventions to the local situation.

<sup>52</sup> <https://today.caricom.org/tag/parliamentary-front-against-hunger-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>.

# Session 4

## Our people - shaping people-centred movements for change

Beginning punctually after lunch, this panel discussion aimed to explore mechanisms for putting people at the centre of policymaking to ensure a brighter future for both people and the planet. The main points of the remarks, presentations, and discussions are summarised below.



**Moderators' remarks Ms. Tara Lisa Persaud, HCC Our Views Our Voices Technical Advisor, and Mr. Pierre Cooke Jr., HCC Youth Voices Technical Advisor**

Mr. Cooke expressed his excitement at sharing this conversation, as the protection of people and their right to health; empowerment of marginalised groups, including PLWNCDs, persons who are differently abled, and others in conditions of vulnerability; and efforts to increase the awareness and involvement of these groups in interventions that directly affect them were important issues for youth advocates.



Ms. Persaud noted that the previous sessions had addressed policy at international, national, institutional, and policymaker levels, but this session is about hearing the voices of PLWNCDs and identifying strategies to include those voices in policymaking.

The panellists for the session were Ms. Diana Gittens, Project Coordinator, Global Charter on Meaningful Involvement of PLWNCDs and Member, NCDA Global Our Views Our Voices Steering Committee; Ms. Kerro Knight, Member, ABDA and Member, HCY, Young Person Living with NCDs; Mr. Fale Andrew Lesa, Youth Advocate and Commonwealth Consultant, NCD Child, New Zealand; and Ms. Francine Charles, Programme Manager, HSFb.



**Global Charter for Meaningful Engagement of PLWNCDs - what does this mean in the Caribbean? Ms. Diana Gittens**

Ms. Gittens began by stating that meaningful involvement involves recognition that the stories of PLWNCDs have power; realising that the right to participation is integral to the right to health; accepting that PLWNCDs are experts on their condition; and partnering to create, implement, and evaluate NCD policies, programmes, and services. She noted that lived experience can, and should, shape health systems that are effective and appropriate, promote health equity, and reduce marginalisation and discrimination, but currently these important voices are muted.

Ms. Gittens indicated that the Global Charter for Meaningful Engagement of PLWNCDs being developed by the NCDA<sup>53</sup> seeks to:

- provide *shared understanding*, emphasising its nature, importance, key principles, and strategies for implementation;
- contribute to *growing knowledge* on this issue, identifying its impact, enablers, and barriers;

- foster *increased commitment*, from governments, multilaterals, private sector, and civil society; and
- improve the *accountability process*, with periodic reporting required from endorsing organisations.

She noted that findings from consultations across the globe for the development of the Global Charter for Meaningful Involvement identified its *characteristics*—inclusion at all stages, involvement at all levels, and power and influence; *barriers to its success*—fear of stigma, low capacity, and inadequate resources; and *strategies to promote it*—creation of enabling environments that are applicable to all aspects of NCD prevention and control, and strong partnerships.



**Placing the voices of youth living with NCDs at the centre of healthy food policymaking Ms. Kerro Knight**

Ms. Knight characterised youth involvement as a 'Big Concept'—one that brings about diversified, specialised, and targeted solutions or change through modern strategies and personalised experiences that will effectively address and cater to issues within our societies. She summarised actions to increase youth involvement as follows:

- *Develop sustainable approaches to ensure that young people—particularly those with NCDs—are heard*, involving them in fora such as youth parliaments, the boards of clinics and other health facilities, and policy advisory bodies. Ms. Knight noted that the main barriers to youth participation are social, economic, and institutional, and suggested, as one strategy to overcome them, establishment of a youth panel, comprising youth with NCDs and persons close to them, to discuss neglected or unfamiliar topics, bring them to the fore, and debate them with government or ministry officials.
- *Invest in, and build the capacity of young people* to allow for, or jump start, their powerful advocacy and contributions in decision-making spaces, creating safe spaces to foster young leaders. This will not only bring about a sense of security, but allow youths to share their experiences and ask relevant questions, geared toward tackling common issues. Ms. Knight indicated that CSOs focused on specific NCDs such as diabetes, sickle cell disease, and cancer, and entities such as the HCC, all foster safe spaces for youth to advocate and share information. She described her experiences with the ABDA as positive and uplifting, as youth are asked to share their experiences, asked about "what we know, don't know, and would like to know", and invited to participate in webinars and discussions, which fuels their feeling that their input is valued and prioritised.
- *Raise the alarm about the government's role in protecting the right to health*, and underline the importance of adhering to the obligations set out in international human rights treaties and enforcing the rights of PLWNCDs. Ms. Knight stated that there should be exposure of the common infractions of their rights that many PLWNCDs have encountered, such as violations of their right to information, care, and healthy foods, noting that strategies to expose the violations and advocate for remedial action include awareness campaigns, community-based marches, press releases, online advocacy, and policy briefs.

<sup>53</sup> <https://ncdalliance.org/what-we-do/capacity-development/our-views-our-voices/global-charter-on-meaningful-involvement-of-people-living-with-ncds>.



Ms. Knight then reflected on the WHO Global Diabetes Compact<sup>54</sup> that was launched in April 2021, which highlights the need to reduce the risk of diabetes, and ensure that all persons diagnosed with diabetes have access to just, comprehensive, and affordable quality treatment and care. She noted key points from the May 2021 [HCC policy brief on diabetes prevention and control in the Caribbean](#)<sup>55</sup> that was developed to tailor the Global Diabetes Compact to the Caribbean setting, with objectives to protect/prevent, detect/diagnose, treat/manage, and recover, and which gives priority to preventive measures, focusing on healthy nutrition, lifestyles, and environment, while seeking to enable optimal care and treatment of persons living with diabetes.



**Climate change and food systems in SIDS - harmonisation of voices for greater impact**  
**Mr. Fale Andrew Lesa**

Speaking from New Zealand, Mr. Lesa offered participants “aloha” and warm Pacific greetings, and noted that there are synergies between SIDS in the Caribbean and the Pacific, which have similar challenges and opportunities. He opined that there is much scientific and strategic justification for working together in the future, noting that food security is never far from the minds of SIDS, as almost all islands in the two regions import over 60% of their food; 50% of the islands import over 80% of their food, most of which is processed, with the top four imported processed foods being wheat, corn, meat, and dairy; and in the Pacific, as in the Caribbean, approximately 75% of people die from NCDs.

Mr. Lesa identified urbanisation and its impact on local food production as another major challenge, as increasing numbers of young people leave the farming life for more opportunity in cities, and cited food production issues as contributing factors to the unheralded pandemic of obesity. He noted that 52% of the agricultural workforce in SIDS comprises women, who do not have the same access to land, resources, and credit as men—SIDS have some of the poorest gender equality outcomes in the world, representing a major barrier to local food security and highlighting the need for gender mainstreaming. He also noted that economic development and good governance are closely linked, and that governance in SIDS is often problematic—institutions in these countries must be improved in order to attract and retain talent.

He stated that climate change is already affecting food security, through increasing temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and greater frequency of extreme natural events, which, in turn, impact food availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability, the four pillars of food security. He noted that global crop and economic models project increases of up to 30% in average grain prices by 2050 due to climate change, which would affect consumers globally through higher food prices. He indicated that low-income consumers would be particularly at risk, with the models projecting increases of 183 million additional people at risk of hunger, many of them in the global South. Mr. Lesa noted that, like COVID-19, climate change will continue to expose inequities, and called for improvement in institutions to address the situation, including the predicted increase in pests and the impact on the fisheries sector—which SIDS are famous for—with prioritisation of strategies to address the depletion of fishing stock, promote marine biodiversity, and protect future food and job security.

“We are literally importing the poison that eventually kills us. The food that we import from abroad not only kills us, it slows us down, making it hard for us to be productive members of our local economies.”

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.who.int/initiatives/the-who-global-diabetes-compact>.

<sup>55</sup> Healthy Caribbean Coalition. Policy brief: The Global Diabetes Compact—Diabetes prevention and control in the Caribbean. Bridgetown: May 2021; HCC. Available at: <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Policy-Brief-The-Global-Diabetes-Compact-Diabetes-Prevention-and-Control-in-the-Caribbean.pdf>.

Mr. Lesa identified feasible solutions that young people could support, including *diversification of food systems* to manage risk and increase productivity; *improved efficiency of food production* to reduce combined food loss and waste—which represent up to 30% of total food produced—and positively impact carbon emissions and the environment; *greater emphasis on a plant-based diet*, to reduce the burden on the environment and on health; *investing in science and technology*, to help make food production more sustainable; and *prioritising the knowledge of indigenous people*, to enhance sustainable food production strategies. He also suggested that youth place themselves strategically to influence these issues, and referred to the gesture by famed soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo that “cost Coca Cola 4 billion dollars in 3 seconds”.<sup>56</sup> He noted that if one person could have such an impact, youth working together could do much to contribute to the solutions.

Before introducing the next speaker, Mr. Cooke noted that these issues were very pertinent, and had also been raised in very recent WHO discussions on food security in SIDS.<sup>57</sup>



**Creating social movements for healthier food environments: lessons from the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition**  
**Ms. Francine Charles**

Ms. Charles acknowledged the challenge to the region posed by food and nutrition insecurity, and noted that the issue has been on the CARICOM agenda for years, without adequate progress. She referred to the results of a [2018 public opinion poll on obesity policy measures in Barbados](#),<sup>58</sup> commissioned by the HSFB and conducted by Caribbean Development Research Services, which showed that people were concerned about childhood obesity; that there was agreement that the government needed to play a role in COP; and that there was support for evidence-based WHO policies.

Ms. Charles noted that despite this, in 2021, Barbados has a 1% chance of meeting the 2025 global nutrition target for childhood obesity reduction,<sup>59</sup> indicating a gap to be closed. She stated that there were clear, evidence-based interventions, but they were not being implemented, and CSOs realised that an important strategy for closing the gap was to collaborate among themselves, with a clear mandate, resulting in the launch of the Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (BCOPC) in 2019. Ms. Charles noted that the BCOPC’s purpose was to be the voice of the children of Barbados in the creation of healthier school, home, and community environments, and that it exemplified a whole-of-civil-society approach, comprising 25 CSOs and about 20 individuals. She noted that the BCOPC chairperson is from the Barbados Muslim Association—not the medical fraternity, as might be expected—and emphasised that though there are many voices and many spaces, the Coalition has one message, modelling the strategy of advertisers.

Ms. Charles described the BCOPC’s work as involving exploration of meaningful youth involvement, giving life to the slogan ‘Nothing for the Youth Without the Youth!’ and indicated that there were approximately 30 youth advocates, mainly from the UWI, working with digital advocacy as part of the Coalition’s activities. She noted that the BCOPC also ‘walked the talk’, collaborating with the farming community and using its

“A big lesson learned is that this movement is a marathon, not a sprint, but we are convinced that we are stronger together.”

<sup>56</sup> See World is One News (WION) video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tvo3prGzVc>.

<sup>57</sup> See information on the WHO virtual discussion Building towards healthy and sustainable food systems in SIDS: listening to the voices of young people held 24 June 2021, available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/06/24/default-calendar/building-towards-healthy-and-sustainable-food-systems-in-small-island-developing-state-listening-to-voices-from-young-people>, and on the WHO SIDS Summit for Health, held virtually 28–29 June 2021, available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/06/28/default-calendar/sids-summit-for-health>.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CADRES-Infographic-FLYER.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> World Health Organization. Global nutrition targets 2025: childhood overweight policy brief. Geneva: WHO; 2014. Available at: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/149021/WHO\\_NMH\\_NHD\\_14.6\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/149021/WHO_NMH_NHD_14.6_eng.pdf?ua=1).

own financial and human resources to provide PLWNCDs with free hampers of healthy food over the period May–December 2020, as part of the pandemic response; providing free training for school vendors in preparation for the implementation of policies that emphasise healthy school nutrition; donating water coolers to schools to encourage water as the preferred beverage; and building its own capacity through social media training, relationship building, and other interventions.

Ms. Charles provided examples of the BCOPC’s successes, including its participation in the development of the Barbados National School Nutrition Policy, with plans to track implementation of the policy; advocacy for the octagonal ‘high-in’ FoPNWL system; and international recognition, by way of an invitation to HFSB to contribute to the development of a revised COP policy for the World Obesity Federation.

In introducing the subsequent panel discussion, Mr. Cooke emphasised the importance of targeting disadvantaged, vulnerable communities and integrating actions to influence policy, stating that at international level, youth in SIDS are recognised and commended for their observance of these principles. The panel discussion followed the model of previous ones, with the moderator asking questions, including some drawn from the chat room, and encouraging specific panellists to respond.

**Panel discussion Moderators and all presenters**

- *Ms. Persaud:* Much amazing work has been done in two years, and there is force and might in coming together, but how can PLWNCDs be given a permanent voice at the table, rather than civil society being an afterthought and having to insert itself in these spaces? What are the challenges in ensuring that CSOs are always consulted by policymakers?
- *Ms. Charles:* Inclusion in policymaking spaces is an ongoing challenge for civil society as a whole. Though the HFSB was close to the process of development of the Barbados National School Nutrition Policy, the Foundation had to request involvement of one of its youth representatives, and such requests for insertion will have to continue until the culture changes to one of meaningful engagement. The voice of a large team of determined people resonates with government in small societies—HFSB is now recognised as a valued player and is increasingly being called to the table; this should be happening with more CSOs. There is an advantage to having numbers, weight, and influence, which make it more likely that policymakers will recognise that the entity has the ear of the public and invite its involvement in policy development.
- *Ms. Persaud:* There was a question in the chat room on how individuals can join or contribute to the BCOPC, which can be answered in the chat.<sup>60</sup> With respect to youth: what strategies can facilitate inclusion of the youth perspective to influence policymaking, on a more general basis? Could involvement of champions such as music artistes and sports personalities help?
- *Ms. Knight:* Determination of what motivates, interests, and influences youth is important, including aspects of their lifestyle and the trends they follow that align with the nature of the message, so the involvement of music artistes and sports personalities is a useful strategy. It is also important to implement a variety of activities in which youth can participate, and from which they can learn.
- *Ms. Persaud:* Are there examples of the involvement of PLWNCDs or youth in policymaking that have worked in the Pacific region, and have successful nutrition and health policies been implemented there?
- *Mr. Lesa:* Nature-based solutions to climate change, food security, and health care are fundamental. Local ownership and production in the food and beverage industry are more cost-effective, require less technical assistance, and are less prone to corruption by profit and politics than foreign ownership. Doing more locally increases the resilience of SIDS, and the Pacific region is very good at implementing local strategies first, since when the UN and other international agencies import skills and talent as part of their technical assistance and their projects end, the skills and talent leave, putting sustainability at risk. Instead of relying

on overseas talent, local people must be given the technical skills they need to enable more local ownership and interventions, and must be trusted to be the experts, including in reviving traditional indigenous medicine practices and growing food locally.

- *Ms. Persaud:* There is a chat question concerning the possibility of targeting individual schools or communities to implement a comprehensive programme for reducing childhood obesity, including monitoring and evaluation to identify components that may serve as models.
- *Ms. Charles:* The HFSB initiated a Model School Programme in 2018 to address childhood obesity, working with six schools to provide a template for healthy nutrition, starting with a ban on SSBs. The plans for expansion had to be postponed due to the pandemic, but the HFSB was able to present the assessment of the programme’s implementation as input into the development of the Barbados National School Nutrition Policy. The lessons learned included the importance of addressing the obesogenic environment and the importance of evaluation, so the Foundation is now exploring the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework that might be shared with government.
- *Ms. Persaud:* The issue of monitoring and evaluation is an important one, and one that is relatively neglected in the region, where it is usually an “add-on” or done if and when it is requested by donors and resources provided. The data and the stories uncovered through monitoring and evaluation go a long way in providing lessons and informing future programming.
- *Ms. Charles:* Advances in technology have been of great help to CSOs, especially through social media, which allows communication without burdensome costs, and the use of apps, which could be locally developed and allow increased assessment of these interventions to promote research and provide evidence.
- *Mr. Cooke:* When youth are having conversations with high-level persons, what is a top recommendation for those high-level engagements? Should youth be part of an advisory team?
- *Ms. Gittens:* Both participation in an advisory team and individual, opportunistic advocacy can be effective in the appropriate circumstances. Youth should know what they want to say and how they are going to say it, and individual advocacy can precede advisory team engagement. Youth should be familiar the policymakers—know who they are, and how to connect with them.

Ms. Persaud asked panellists to indicate their top issue for inclusion in food policy to prompt a final round of comments, and responses were as follows:

*Mr. Lesa:* Data are critical to indicate what works, what does not work, and how to replicate successes from one part of the world in other areas. There is a data gap to be filled on meaningful participation of youth in policy development, and there is need to invest in young academics, scientists, and researchers.

*Ms. Charles:* Paramount is the need for policies that enable interventions to make healthier food more affordable than unhealthy food.

*Ms. Knight:* There must be prioritisation of, and significant investment in, youth, with creation of spaces to obtain their input of positive, creative, and effective ideas.

**“ We need to be more mindful about the nature of multinational business, and the fact that is it not about our health, it is about profit. Weaning ourselves from those institutions is the key to being self-sustaining and, more importantly, to supporting our local resilience. ”**

**Mr. Fale Andrew Lesa, Youth Advocate, Commonwealth Consultant, NCD Child, New Zealand**

**Closing remarks Mr. Pierre Cooke Jr. and Ms. Tara Lisa Persaud, Moderators**

In closing, Ms. Persaud thanked Mr. Cooke for co-moderating the session, and expressed gratitude to panellists for their interventions and suggestions for enhanced involvement of PLWNCDs and youth in policy development.

<sup>60</sup> Ms. Charles indicated that individuals interested in joining the Coalition in Barbados could write to [adminassistant@hsfbarbados.com](mailto:adminassistant@hsfbarbados.com) or [programmemanager@hsfbarbados.com](mailto:programmemanager@hsfbarbados.com).



# Session 5

## Discussion with Chairpersons of CARICOM National NCD Commissions - leveraging COVID-19 and food and nutrition insecurity to tackle NCD policy

After a health break in which Ms. Danielle Walwyn, HCC Advocacy Officer, urged participants to “stand up and move” and demonstrated lively physical activity, this panel discussion aimed to explore the roles of NNCDs in accelerating priority NCD reduction strategies in the wake of COVID-19, in the framework of the TNA-NCDs developed by the HCC. The main points of the remarks, presentations, and discussions are summarised below.



**Moderator’s remarks Professor Alafia Samuels, Retired Professor/ Research Fellow, Epidemiology Research Unit, Caribbean Institute for Health Research, UWI, Mona, Jamaica**

In her introductory remarks, Professor Samuels welcomed participants to the final session, which focused on NNCDs. She noted that Barbados and Bermuda established commissions to address NCDs in 2007, comprising primarily persons from the health sector, but the POSD called for multisectoral commissions or their equivalents, and the NNCDs were expanded accordingly, with additional countries establishing such bodies. She indicated that NNCDs have had mixed performance across the region, with challenges in terms of autonomy, clout, longevity, and methods of appointment, but with COVID-19 highlighting NCDs in such a negative way and demonstrating challenges related to food systems, she identified the current situation as a time for NNCDs to “re-invigorate and re-shine”, and see how best to move forward regarding food and nutrition security. She noted that this topic was a CARICOM focus, but there was no mention in various plans of the 30% of imported foods that are ultra-processed, an important consideration when food substitution is being considered.

Professor Samuels then introduced the panellists:



**Sir Trevor Hassell**  
President, HCC and  
Chair, National NCD  
Commission, Barbados



**Dr. Leslie Ramsammy**  
Chair, Presidential  
National NCD  
Commission, Guyana



**Dr. Damian Greaves**  
Chair, National NCD  
Commission, Grenada



**Professor Trevor  
Ferguson**  
Chair, National NCD  
Committee, Jamaica

The subsequent exchanges followed the question-and-answer format of previous panel discussions.

- *Professor Samuels:* How do we take advantage of COVID-19 to gain political and policy traction in the fight against NCDs?
- *Professor Ferguson:* COVID-19 has been a wake-up call for many, given that the majority of those hospitalised and dying are PLWNCDs. The pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of NCDs as contributors to the overall health burden, and public health officials, policymakers, and politicians are much more aware of NCDs. However, while many people hear about co-morbidities, several are unaware that they themselves have NCDs, and it is important for persons to be more aware of their risk status and take action to reduce their risk as appropriate. COVID-19 has given public health officials a jolt regarding requirements for hospital beds, space in intensive care units, and other aspects of clinical care, and it has become very evident that more partnerships are needed to increase the capacity to effectively respond to NCDs.
- *Professor Samuels:* How can the political decision-making process be ramped up in the wake of COVID-19?
- *Dr. Greaves:* Partnerships are indeed very important, and governments have to take heed of the lessons of COVID-19 in this regard, to bring PLWNCDs, farmers, CSOs, and other stakeholders on board, not as tokens, where they are presented with already-developed plans, but in a meaningful way that involves these groups from inception to completion and monitoring and evaluation. There must be removal of the suspicion that often emanates from these partnerships, along with the realisation that there is no automaticity to establishing partnerships—the methods have to be learned and to be consistently included as part of the political decision-making process and culture.
- *Professor Samuels:* Food and nutrition insecurity has become a problem. How can NNCDs build on political commitment to fast-track policies that are healthy food policies, and not just aimed at reducing the region’s food import bill? How can these healthy food policies be framed in the context of rights and equity?
- *Dr. Ramsammy:* At this time, when CARICOM countries are off-track in progress to achieving SDG target 3.4,<sup>61</sup> FoPNWL is a good opportunity to pursue, but it is not enough—the region must also look at eliminating industrially produced trans fat in the diet by 2023. Guyana completed an assessment to inform interventions toward this goal, but little or no progress has been made, and this is an opportunity for NNCDs to address this issue aggressively.
- *Sir Trevor:* Food and nutrition insecurity has been a recurring issue in this conference. NNCDs can help to deliver on the many perspectives that have been shared, including advising ministers of health on NCD policies and legislation, recommending research, assisting in resource mobilisation, and promoting collaboration and partnerships. The multisectoral nature of NNCDs allows them to act as a bridge between policymakers and the private sector, and encourage support from the latter for healthy food policies. NNCDs can also encourage and promote policy coherence across sectors, address Col, and assist in informing and educating the public.
- *Professor Samuels:* The region has an “implementation deficit disorder”, given delays in region-wide implementation of taxes on SSBs, FoPNWL, school nutrition policies, and other proven interventions. How can this inertia be overcome? Are there examples of NNCDs working toward implementation of healthy food policies?
- *Dr. Greaves:* The lack of political will is an important cause of the implementation deficit, and remedial action has to be driven from the ground up. In order to fight a war, the army that is present must be involved. The region’s children and consumers need to be educated, in order to put pressure on those who walk the corridors of power. Do consumers understand the information? Is time taken to ensure that they and their associations are aware of, and understand, the issues? Are they empowered and powerful? Some are helpless and some look hapless, so the public health sector needs to step up, including medical associations

<sup>61</sup> SDG target 3.4 is “By 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.” See NCD Countdown 2030 collaborators. NCD Countdown 2030: pathways to achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4. Lancet 2020, 396; 10255: 918-934. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31761-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31761-X/fulltext).

and bureaux of standards, to assist consumers and make it clear whose side they are on, consumers or private sector. With regard to healthy food policies, the Grenada NNCDc is advocating for bans on SSB sales to children, and is collaborating with the ministry of education to build capacity in primary and secondary schools and in parents-teachers associations aimed at reducing NCDs among school-age children. The Commission is also working with the ministry of education in the implementation of the Good Food Initiative targeting students when they are out of school.

- *Professor Samuels*: What about policy coherence? Different ministries come to the table with different agendas, exemplified by trade and health in the issue of FoPNWL.
- *Dr. Ramsammy*: NNCDcs have opportunities to bring stakeholders together, including ministries, and this is a key role of the Commissions. The aftermath of the May 2021 CARICOM Regional Dialogue in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit is one such opportunity for providing input that NNCDcs should not miss. The UN Food Systems Summit itself will be held in September 2021, and many sectors, especially agriculture, education, and health, can be involved and brought together by the NNCDcs, including at Cabinet level, to inform national participation in the Summit. In Guyana, the ministries of agriculture, education, and health work together to feed children in remote areas by improving school gardens and school kitchens, and involving parents, to provide healthy, hot meals for the children.
- *Professor Samuels*: The challenge for NNCDcs to use the opportunity of the UN Food System Summit to mobilise the various sectoral actors is an important issue. Further, how can the capacity of multisectoral actors be built to address NCDs?
- *Sir Trevor*: Many members of NNCDcs are not from the health sector and have no health background. The first important intervention is therefore to inform, educate, and empower them to make meaningful contributions to the Commission and advocate for NCD reduction. In turn, Commissioners can encourage the organisations they represent, such as faith-based organisations, to undertake activities to raise awareness and take action for NCD reduction, outside of the Commission. This approach was demonstrated when the Barbados Workers' Union, which had a representative on the NNCDc, advocated for, and was instrumental in, the development of a [National Workplace Wellness Policy](https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/National-Workplace-Wellness-Policy-for-Barbados-2019.pdf)<sup>62</sup> that was launched in 2019.
- *Professor Samuels*: The multiplier effect of NCD stakeholder education and awareness is an important one. What role should NNCDcs play in making sure that policymaking is evidence-based? How can the non-scientific influences be confronted?
- *Professor Ferguson*: NNCDcs usually have persons who are specialists in research and evidence. The Commission in Jamaica has a sub-committee focusing on surveillance and research and this sub-committee will review evidence and develop policy briefs to share with stakeholders and ensure that credible information is disseminated. The credibility and reputation of those disseminating the information are important factors in countering the influence of misinformation and disinformation. There is also need to build capacity for new research, either done or commissioned by the NNCDc, and resources—money and people—are needed for this.
- *Professor Samuels*: It is recognised that political realities, even in face of sound evidence, may lead to less-than-desired outcomes regarding policy development and implementation. The food industry is varied—how do Commissions address Col when dealing with health-harming industries?
- *Sir Trevor*: As has been stated, the issue of managing Col within the context of a multisectoral response to NCDs remains a challenging one at all levels. Over past few years, HCC has brought this issue to the fore, if only to have a discussion and provide some level of guidance. The Barbados NNCDc does have private sector representation from the healthy commodity industries, and, as a result, the particular company is seen as one of the leading private sector entities in the region, and is promoted as an international best

practice of private sector engagement in the multisectoral response. However, the issue remains—since the membership of NNCDcs is determined by the appropriate government minister—of whether a representative of the unhealthy commodity industries would be included in an NNCDc, and, if so, how the situation would be managed.

- *Professor Ferguson*: Col has to be discussed and declared by individual members and the broader Commission, the former related to, for example, research funding and ownership of shares in various companies. It would be difficult to say that these things should not be done—Col should be acknowledged, declared, and managed, identifying and emulating best practices.
- *Dr. Greaves*: There is concurrence with the views of the two colleagues who gave their opinion—Col must be dealt with, including through educating and empowering consumers to understand and help overcome the issue. The president of the Grenada Chamber of Industry and Commerce was a former member of the Grenada NNCDc, but there has been no replacement since he demitted office.
- *Dr. Ramsammy*: There is agreement with previous speakers. However, more fundamentally, it is considered that industry is protecting its bottom line, while the government is protecting the health of its people. However, these perspectives do not have to be in conflict—the challenge is to persuade industry that health and business are not at odds, to have them focus on the overarching goal of the health of the population, where there is no conflict.

**“Stakeholder analyses are needed both at the start of, and during, the partnership, to ensure that agreement on the objectives of the partnership remains. There should be no assumption that people are on board ad infinitum.**

**Conflict of interest is a hot potato issue that we may have to drop and pick up from time to time, but we cannot kick the can down the road.”**

**Dr. Damian Greaves, Chair, NNCDc, Grenada**

**“There is no conflict between health and industry in wanting everyone to be healthy, since a healthy population is better at supporting business than sick or dead people.”**

**Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, Chair, Presidential NNCDc, Guyana**

### Closing remarks Professor Alafia Samuels, Moderator

In her final remarks, Professor Samuels expressed her hope for the realisation of the aspirational goal of a shared vision between health and industry, where unhealthy commodity industries realise that they do not have to oppose public health goals, and can support the public good of health for all. However, she noted the ongoing challenge that this presented. She thanked the panellists for their participation and invited Ms. Maisha Hutton to close the conference.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/National-Workplace-Wellness-Policy-for-Barbados-2019.pdf>.



## Close of Conference

Ms. Maisha Hutton, HCC Executive Director, thanked Ms. Renata Clarke and Mr. Dean Chambliss of, respectively, FAO and PAHO, and Dr. Carla Barnett, CARICOM Secretary-General Designate, for their opening greetings and remarks. She also expressed gratitude to the moderators and the presenters/panellists; to the HCY representatives who facilitated the lunchtime conversations; to the colleagues who took a full day out of their schedule to participate and remain engaged; to Dr. Beverley Barnett, the conference rapporteur; and especially to the HCC team members who organised the conference: Ms. Kerrie Barker, HCC Project Officer; Ms. Janea Ifill, HCC Administrator; Mr. Ian Pitts, HCC Digital Content Creator;<sup>63</sup> Ms. Danielle Walwyn, HCC Advocacy Officer; and Ms. Sheena Warner-Edwards, HCC Communications Officer.

She invited individual HCC team members to make brief interventions:

- *Ms. Janea Ifill* offered thanks to everyone, noting that the conference was very motivating, and that she was looking forward to changes related to the theme.
- *Ms. Danielle Walwyn* also thanked everyone and noted that the key actors today reflected the whole-of-society approach that HCC promoted, which had inspired her.
- *Ms. Kerrie Barker* thanked everyone for participating, and expressed gratitude to the rest of the team, including the HCY, and all those who had contacted and communicated with the HCC.
- *Ms. Sheena Warner-Edwards* thanked everyone for their participation in this conference, the HCC's first virtual regional meeting, noting that the majority of the participants stayed until the end, including the media. She reminded the audience that they should follow HCC on social media, and if posting any photos, they should use the hashtag #HCCVC2021.

*Ms. Hutton* noted that, from the comments in the chat, HCC had been able to recreate the warmth of its in-person meetings, and she expressed her gratitude for the support provided. She then asked Sir Trevor Hassell, HCC President, to close the conference.

*Sir Trevor* indicated that a strong case had been made for healthy nutrition policies being central and critical to the NCD response. He stated that he had the sense that the TNA-NCDs had resonated well, with an important role for youth in its implementation, and highlighted HCC's establishment of its youth arm, Healthy Caribbean Youth, and the HCC programme founded on PLWNCDs—[Our Views, Our Voices](#).<sup>64</sup>

He rated the conference as a tremendous success, recognised the important role that the small HCC team had played in that outcome, and acknowledged the many key roles that Ms. Maisha Hutton played as the “choir master”, as she sought to expand HCC's influence. Sir Trevor advised participants to “stay tuned”, as the HCC would be continuing to engage all stakeholders in various ways. He then officially brought the conference to a close, with Ms. Hutton issuing a brief reminder to encourage participants to continue to explore the virtual conference space, which would remain accessible for the next month.

<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom-based HCC team member.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.healthycaribbean.org/our-views-our-voices/>.

## Voices from the Chat

Though the virtual conference allowed only the voices of the moderators, panellists, and organising HCC team to be heard on direct audio, participants posted many comments in the chat room, some of which were highlighted by moderators and answered live or on the chat by panellists. A selection of comments culled directly from the chat is below.

- The flexibility/policy space is there is the WTO agreements. It is simply a matter of ensuring that you meet the requirements of non-discrimination (national treatment and most favoured nation treatment) and ensure that you have the evidence to back up the policy action being taken in term of its health impact.
- Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, recently gave an excellent lecture on the need for gender-sensitive trade policy as part of the Cave Hill Faculty of Law's Eminent Speakers lecture series. It addressed many of the issues being raised and points to some information and communication technology tools available to assist countries in reformulating their trade policy to mainstream gender.
- Re trade issues - There are still 'mental barricades' as we still have a colonial mind-set that 'foreign is better' and we would prefer a non-blemished, pesticide-laden, imported, earlier-picked foreign banana versus a home-grown local (but spotty) banana which is freshly picked and sweeter and more nutritious! Mental slavery!!
- Re trade issues - Please bear in mind that most of the barriers to intra-regional trade in agricultural products are due to the SPS barriers of our own Member States. Market access is blocked and it takes years for countries to approve, even though we generally have the same pests and diseases. It is a most frustrating situation and political will is lacking. Yet, we import happily without even enforcing SPS measures or restrictions on production dates.
- I agree with you. We need that kind of revolutionary action in the Caribbean.
- Hello from Scotland. Great session so far.
- Thank you making that important point, Dr. Hennis! There's so much work that needs to be done with ministries of finance.
- Health and education should be at the forefront indeed.
- Thank you for this powerful discussion HCC.
- Dr. Hennis, your responses are on point!
- Excellent points, Dr. St. John.
- The media are agents of change and have a critical role to play. It's important that the media provide accurate coverage on health issues and I agree that there is opportunity to work with the media to build capacity in the subject area.
- Principles and people over the lure of money!
- "We are literally importing the food that kills us"—a very POWERFUL statement.
- Thank you for having a Pacific Islander. It was an honour.
- Thank you for this Conference which was extremely timely and informative. I hope it will be an annual event!
- Thank you HCC and all the panellists! This was excellent!
- Thank you all organizers, panellists and attendees. Quite informative.



- Thank you all, it was really informative and interactive, not forgetting the entertainment, relaxation and the exercise.
- Very well-executed Conference. Thank you all.
- Thank you HCC for inviting me to this conference, all presenters were great, very interesting and very informative.
- Thank you Team HCC and all chairs and panellists. Keep up the momentum and we will win the battle!
- It's been a wonderful day filled with great food for thought and strategies to move forward. Thank you so much HCC. Great Job!
- Very good conference, thanks to everyone!
- Very well done!! Wonderful conference!!
- Great to see the young people. Excellent job.
- Great conference! Well done HCC!
- Congratulations! Well done!
- Such a great experience attending and participating in this virtual conference!
- Very informative, well done.
- An excellent conference, as usual. I have come to look forward to your presentations. Thank you: excellent presenters, hosts, timely topics, great engagement. Thanks to those who worked behind the scene. Great job!

After the conference, the HCC Secretariat conducted an online assessment of the event. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, lauding the virtual platform as satisfactory and the sessions as informative, high quality, and timely. Overall, 69% of the 48 respondents rated the conference as “5”—on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 was the highest—and 31% rated it as “4”, with many indicating that they enjoyed all aspects of the event. Asked which aspects they particularly enjoyed, some respondents singled out the health breaks, while others cited the technical content of the conference and its “Caribbean signature”, while suggestions for improvements addressed the large number of, and connectivity and navigation to, the lunchtime conversations; the short time frames for presentations; and the packed agenda.

A summary of the responses to the online assessment is in **Annex 3**.



# Recommendations

Many recommendations were mooted at the virtual conference, and, in common with the TNA-NCDs, they are **relevant to all key stakeholders** in accelerating healthy food policies and improving food and nutrition security in the region, according to the roles, responsibilities, portfolios, authority, and scope of work of the respective stakeholders.

The main recommendations from the conference align with the *mission of the TNA-NCDs*,<sup>2</sup> which is “to enable people-powered action that galvanises bold political leadership and policies for NCD reduction in the Caribbean, to address the social and other determinants of health, enhance human security and human capital, emphasise prevention, and enable integrated action across themes, sectors, and disciplines”. The recommendations also align with the *five priority areas of focus in the TNA-NCDs*: life-course prevention; social inclusion and participation for policy development; people-centred, equitable health systems for universal health; partnerships, networks, and resource mobilisation; and accountability for decision-making.

The main recommendations from the conference are presented as follows, framed in the TNA-NCDs’ priority areas of focus.



## Life course prevention

- Analyse existing school nutrition policies and develop a model that can be adopted or adapted by countries throughout the region, in collaboration with intergovernmental technical cooperation agencies and CSOs.
- Continue to prioritise childhood obesity prevention, which encompasses healthy food policy, food and nutrition security, and enhanced physical activity, advocating for a suite of policies that includes fiscal measures, such as SSB taxation, especially in light of the economic downturn in Caribbean countries occasioned by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; *front-of-package nutrition warning labels* based on the octagonal ‘high-in’ system; *healthy school environments*, with bans on the sale and promotion of SSBs and HFSS products, and mandatory physical activity; and *restriction of the marketing of unhealthy products to children*.



## Social inclusion and participation for policy development

- Increase the use of social and other media to sensitise various audiences, including PLWNCDs, youth, and policymakers, to issues related to healthy food policies, food and nutrition security, and NCD reduction. Such issues include the need for multisectoral, whole-of-government, whole-of-society, health-in-all-policies approaches that place those most affected by the policies at the centre of their development; target and involve persons in conditions of vulnerability to address the social determinants of health and reduce inequities; and promote the progressive realisation of the right to health and other human rights.
- Build the capacity of youth to participate in policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and advocate for their greater involvement in doing so, including through Healthy Caribbean Youth; and national and Caribbean regional youth parliaments; and [CARICOM Youth Ambassadors](https://caricom.org/caricom-youth-ambassadors/).<sup>65</sup>
- Build the capacity of PLWNCDs to participate in policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and advocate for their greater involvement in doing so, including through the Our Views, Our Voices programme.
- Promote the formation of national alliances and coalitions of entities working to accelerate healthy food policies and food and nutrition security, and reduce NCDs, to achieve strength in numbers, empowerment, and influence, thereby facilitating invitations and access to policymaking spaces.
- Determine mechanisms to allow, and advocate for, wide stakeholder participation—including by civil society—in the current review of the CARICOM CET and the region’s SPS measures, which aim to, respectively, facilitate intra-regional trade and harmonise regulations, thereby improving the region’s self-reliance and resilience for food and nutrition security.
- Identify and implement the appropriate mechanism for informing the CARICOM Secretary-General Designate of the recommendations of the conference, as a contribution to CARICOM’s prioritisation of these issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its commitment to food and nutrition security in the region.

<sup>65</sup> <https://caricom.org/caricom-youth-ambassadors/>.





## People-centred, primary health care-based health systems for universal health

- Take advantage of the outcomes of the May 2021 Caribbean Regional Dialogue on Food Systems and the July 2021 UN Pre-Food Systems Summit to develop and promote Caribbean perspectives for input into the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, and solidify national, regional, and international support for, and contributions to, strategies to enhance healthy food policies and food and nutrition security in the Caribbean.
- Encourage and support NNCDs to amplify multisectoral actions in support of healthy food policies and food and nutrition security, including convening meetings at political and technical levels, involving a wide range of stakeholders, to examine issues related to the UN Food Systems Summit, foster policy coherence across sectors, and prepare national input into regional strategies and positions, aligned with the outcomes of the Caribbean Regional Dialogue.
- Explore mechanisms to enhance NNCD functioning across the region to facilitate recommendations for improvement in areas such as prioritisation of issues to be addressed; strategies to tailor and implement global recommendations; and expansion of NNCD partnerships with regional and international technical and development agencies and organisations to facilitate resource mobilisation.



## Accountability for decision making

- Emphasise monitoring and evaluation as an essential component of the policy development cycle, to demonstrate successes, challenges, gaps, and lessons learned, advocating for the use of simplified methodology and advances in technology wherever feasible, without sacrificing scientific rigour and accuracy of results.
- Advocate for, and facilitate the development of, Col policies by government entities and CSOs, to guide their interactions with the private sector, guard against and counter industry interference, and contribute to good governance, using HCC and CARPHA Col policies and the WHO toolkit for the development of policy for nutrition programmes as models.



## Partnerships, networks, and resource mobilisation

- Advocate for enhanced partnerships among development agencies, CSOs, and national, regional, and international financing institutions to mainstream gender in agriculture; enable inclusion of women and youth farmers throughout the region in programmes that inform and educate them on their role in improving regional health, nutrition, and food systems; and encourage their development as agripreneurs, providing them with greater and equitable access to resources, including land, financing, technologies, and protection from hazards.
- Seek synergies with climate change mitigation and adaptation advocates to address issues related to food and nutrition security and NCD reduction, collaborating with various agencies and partners as appropriate.
- Establish closer links with SIDS in the Pacific and other regions, taking advantage of the outcomes of international fora such as the SIDS in Health Summit and the WHO youth-focused discussion on food and nutrition security in SIDS, both held in June 2021, to collaborate in identifying local solutions, building local capacity, and improving local ownership to increase local food production, resilience, and sustainability.
- Map the private sector at national level to determine possibilities for collaboration in achieving healthy nutrition and food and nutrition security goals, exploring the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships with healthy commodity industries in support of health.
- Revitalize partnerships between public health and media/journalism, including building the capacity of the media to become subject experts and present balanced views on healthy nutrition, food and nutrition security, and other NCD reduction-related health topics.
- Collaborate with the Law and Health Research Unit that was launched in early July 2021 at the UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados,<sup>66</sup> to explore and strengthen the role of legislation in enabling rights-, equity-, and evidence-based policy development for healthy food, and food and nutrition security, in the region, including the use of opportunities provided through WTO agreements.

<sup>66</sup> Barbados Today online. New bedfellows: health and law find research home at UWI. Published July 8, 2021. Available at: <https://barbadostoday.bb/2021/07/08/new-bedfellows-health-and-the-law-find-research-home-at-uwi/>.



# Conclusions

The virtual conference was a resounding success, based on comments from the moderators, panellists, participants contributing to the chat box, and organisers, as well as those who completed the post-conference assessment, all of whom were unfazed by the few and brief technical glitches that occurred. The topics presented and discussed during the five sessions addressed the breadth of issues critical to accelerating the development, implementation, and assessment of policies aimed at improving food systems and healthy nutrition in the Caribbean region.

As importantly, the presentations and discussions gave rise to recommendations that key stakeholders use in advocacy, presentation of papers and policy briefs, and other types of interactions with high-level policymakers, in efforts to reverse the perceptions of lack of political will and delays in the development and implementation of evidence-based policies. They can also be addressed by government, civil society, the health-supporting private sector, and development agencies, at national, regional, and international levels, aligned with the *Transformative New NCD Agenda for NCD Prevention and Control in the Caribbean*.<sup>2</sup>

CARICOM's history of innovative decisions and advocacy for the promotion and defence of the health of the region's people, especially to reduce the burden of NCDs, cannot be allowed to fade into obscurity. The knowledge, experiences, and wisdom shared at the HCC virtual conference *Our Food, Our Health, Our People: Accelerating Healthy Food Policies to Tackle NCDs* will not allow our leaders to falter at this critical juncture in turning back the ever-growing threat to sustainable development posed by non-communicable diseases and their risk factors.



HEALTHY CARIBBEAN COALITION

[www.healthycaribbean.org](http://www.healthycaribbean.org)



[facebook.com/GettheMessage/](https://facebook.com/GettheMessage/)



[instagram.com/healthycaribbean/](https://instagram.com/healthycaribbean/)



[youtube.com/HealthyCaribbean/](https://youtube.com/HealthyCaribbean/)



[twitter.com/healthcaribbean/](https://twitter.com/healthcaribbean/)

vfairs lounge





Annexes

vfairs exhibit hall





# Annex 1

## Virtual Booths



Booth 1 – Small-Scale Farming, Big Impact

This booth explored strengthening of community and household level food and nutrition security through strategies such as backyard and community gardening and engaging a new generation of young agripreneurs.



Booth 2 – Innovative Food Solutions for a Healthier Caribbean

This booth focussed on and showcased innovation in the food manufacturing sector to generate healthy sustainable food using locally grown ingredients.



Booth 3 – Building Political Support for Food Policy

This booth focused on sharing and leveraging the experience of Parliamentary Front against Hunger and malnutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean to: advocate for and develop policies and laws relevant for food and nutrition security; ensure proper budget allocation for the implementation of policies and regulatory frameworks; and support proper monitoring and accountability for policies and laws enacted.



Booth 4 – The Power of Digital Advocacy

This booth reflected on the use of digital platforms as powerful advocacy tools especially within the context of resource limited settings where civil society organisations have increasingly relied on digital platforms to reach their audiences. The virtual world created by COVID-19 has further necessitated innovation in digital advocacy. This provided an opportunity for sharing of lessons learned from civil society-led digital advocacy campaigns in the Caribbean.



Booth 5 - Marketing to Children

This booth reflected on regulation of marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to Caribbean children as a critical piece in reorienting food systems towards healthy diets for children. Participants discussed the scope of child-targeted marketing of ultra-processed foods and the region and the challenges and opportunities for the introduction of rights-based regulation to protect children from predatory marketing of unhealthy commodities in various settings including on digital platforms.



Booth 6 – Research Speaks

This booth focussed on data-driven decision-making. Participants discussed findings from assessments undertaken in supermarkets and school settings, and explored how the evidence has been used and can be further used to inform policy-making.



Booth 7 – Sugar Tax in Bermuda

The Team from Imperial College London and Public Health England continued their Session 2 presentation on the evaluation of the Bermuda sugar tax. Providing an opportunity for participants to learn more and ask questions about the effectiveness of the tax and lessons learned for future planning, especially for other Caribbean islands considering implementation of similar fiscal food policies.



Booth 8 – Food, Climate Change & SIDS

This booth took a closer look at the connections between climate change and food systems within the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Participants discussed short, medium and longer term challenges and solutions including double and triple duty actions which have multiple benefits for both human and planetary health.



Booth 9 – Human Rights, Law & NCDs

This booth provided a space for participants to discuss how the law, using a human-rights based approach, can be used as a tool to create health-supporting environments through the design, implementation and enforcement of NCD prevention and treatment policies with a focus on healthy food policy. Participants also discussed how the law can be used as a tool for accountability within various contexts, including preservation of basic human rights such as the right to adequate food and the right to health.



Booth 10 – Civil Society FOPWL Social Media Movement

This booth showcased one the most successful, highly coordinated, regional civil society led-campaigns – the regional campaign to build public and policymaker awareness and support for front of package nutrition warning labels (FOPNWL).

# Annex 2

## Notes from lunchtime conversations

### OUR FOOD, OUR HEALTH, OUR PEOPLE Accelerating Healthy Food Policies to Tackle NCDs July 1st, 2021 Lunchtime Session Notes

Room #: 1

Room Title: Local small-scale farming makes a big impact: case studies from across the region

Speakers: Ms. Juanita James, President, [ABDA](http://antiguadiabetes.com/),<sup>67</sup> Mr. Alpha Sennon, Agripreneur, Founder and Executive Director, [WHYFarm](https://whyfarmit.com/),<sup>68</sup> Trinidad and Tobago

HCY Assistant: Ms. Eden Augustus

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<p><b>Ms. Juanita James</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a strong backyard gardening program in Antigua and Barbuda.</li> <li>There tend to be peaks in participation in times of crisis.</li> <li>The project focused on families of persons living with diabetes, and was supported by many organizations, including HCC. The project’s timing was impeccable since persons had a lot of free time and there was a specific interest due to the pandemic since many persons perceived that increased fruits and vegetable consumption would boost the immune system.</li> <li>A variety of fruits and vegetables was grown, specifically those that matured quickly to encourage first time gardeners. Seedlings, planter boxes, and other equipment were provided. The participants themselves supported by keeping in touch through a WhatsApp chat.</li> <li>A positive outcome is that the project was initially four months but has been ongoing for more than a year).</li> </ul> <p><i>Challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inability to sustain water.</li> <li>Limited site visits.</li> <li>A bit of a fall-off due to schools/places of employment reopening, less time to maintain the garden.</li> </ul> <p><i>Benefits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables at the household level.</li> <li>The production of local fruits and vegetables grown without pesticides.</li> </ul> <p><b>Mr. Alpha Sennon</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We Help Youth Farm (WHYFarm) has many ongoing projects.</li> <li>One of the projects specifically engages children and youth through agriculture education, via stories or comics, featuring superheroes such as “Agriman” and “Photosynthesista”.</li> </ul>

<sup>67</sup> <http://antiguadiabetes.com/>.

<sup>68</sup> <https://whyfarmit.com/>.



Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A major focus of WHYFarm is promoting local agriculture, emphasising the BIG impact that small scale farming can have, hence the rhyme “plant one tree and you can eat free, that will guarantee food security.”</li><li>• Another focus is to assist others to move away from the mentality that farming requires large quantities of land—“why not farm in a sneaker, bottle, bag, or refrigerator.”</li><li>• There is another initiative related to WHYFarm that promotes a community garden, where the garden is maintained by selling some of the produce.</li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Q1: Were there any curricular changes made to support the WHYFarm initiative?</li><li>• A1: There has not been any specific or direct curricula changes, however, discussions have been done with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education. The focus is on re-energizing agriculture and working with the teachers to do so since Agriculture is on the curriculum. Curricula / policy changes may take some time so WHY Farm plans to launch a school of “Agricoolture” in October.</li><li>• Q2: Soil fertility – how important it is to sustainable farming and how can do it yourself testing be done for personal farms?</li><li>• A2: The soil is where it all starts, so treating and understanding your soil is imperative. It is also important to know the acidity or pH level of your soil. A simple pH meter can be bought, or you can hand test the soil by dipping your finger and testing to see if the soil is hot. If the soil is hot, it means that there is micro-organism activity, or good soil to use.</li><li>• Q3: How do you control for monkeys (other animals) destroying or taking produce from the garden?</li><li>• A3: Fencing is one solution, however monkeys can climb very well. Another solution is to create cages over the beds.</li><li>• Q4: Which animals/insects are useful to the garden? Are all classified as pests?</li><li>• A4: All animals/insects need to survive, some are there to eat other pests and then some are there to eat your plants. For example, caterpillars are known for eating plants, however they turn into butterflies. So, it is important to get rid of pests, but also to understand the cycle. One recommendation is to grow things alongside the main vegetation for the pests to feed off. Using marigold flower or neem oil can also be helpful to get rid of pests.</li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To increase the quality of the soil, cured manure can be added in a 3:1 ratio (3 parts soil and 1 part manure).</li><li>• It is important to mix your soil and create a porous mixture so that the water would not be trapped and rot the plant’s roots.</li><li>• Persons may be able to get support from the Ministry of Agriculture to create their own backyard garden in various countries, so it is something worth looking in to.</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the COVID-19 environment specifically, it is important to grow our own food. There are perceived benefits of increased fruit and vegetable consumption, and persons may now have more time to do so.</li><li>• It is important to investigate the level of support that one can gain from the government, since existing programs may be in place.</li><li>• It is important to understand that we do not need large portions of land or equipment to start growing our own food.</li></ul>
Closing Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A need to produce a portion of what we consume and to push towards the production of local food.</li><li>• Keep on growing herbs and fruits and vegetables.</li></ul>

**Room #: 2**  
**Room Title: Innovative food solutions for a healthier Caribbean**  
**Speakers:** Mr. David Neilands, Former British Foreign Service Officer and Advertising Executive, Barbados; Mr. Jody White, Nutritionist, Personal Trainer, Founder of [Slimdown 360 Limited](https://www.slimdown360.com/),<sup>69</sup> Trinidad and Tobago  
**HCY Assistant:** Ms. Renee Thomas

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<i>Current concerns:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food import dominance</li><li>• Loss of foreign exchange</li><li>• Increased consumption of processed foods</li></ul> <i>Food security in the region—key concerns:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Availability</li><li>• Accessibility</li><li>• Utilization</li><li>• Stability</li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can access to healthy foods be improved? (Availability on shelves, cost, etc.)</li><li>• How can interested groups or organisations create opportunities by creating healthy food products?</li><li>• How can CARICOM leaders reduce the food import bill and support intra-regional import/export of regionally-produced products?</li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve opportunities for farmers and agripreneurs to strengthen their local capacity.</li><li>• Increase access to funding for small businesses focused on creating healthy food</li><li>• Implement policies that promote regional export of local foods.</li></ul>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.slimdown360.com/>.

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foster cooperatives with farmers to create healthy products that are affordable on our markets.</li><li>• Implement policies to encourage restaurants to utilise locally produced products (e.g. sweet potato fries).</li><li>• Implement policies that encourage the purchase and sale of local healthy foods over imported heavily processed foods.</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The region can improve the quality of food products and reduce the food import bill by working together.</li><li>• Increased investments in agriculture and agro-processing can help empower farmers and other members within our community.</li><li>• Policy makers should take action and implement policies to help support the growth and development of cooperatives and other businesses that produce healthy food products.</li><li>• Opportunities can be explored for foreign exchange such as selling products in the U.S. in stores such as Whole Foods, or online at Amazon.</li></ul>

Room #: 3

**Room Title:** Leveraging Fronts/Alliances of Parliamentarians to build political support for food policy

**Speakers:** Ms. Laura Tucker-Longsworth, Past President and Founder of the Belize Cancer Society, Past Speaker of the House of Representatives, Belize; Mr Luis Lobo, FAO Secretariat for the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger; Mr. Fransen Jean, Food Security Officer, FAO

**HCY Assistant:** Ms. Charity Dublin

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborative work between civil society, government and academia is an important to help ensure effective policies, programs, and interventions.</li><li>• More alliances and coalitions should make efforts to develop agendas for SDG 2.</li><li>• Building more SDG 2 fronts and alliances in the Caribbean is critical.</li><li>• Key Commitments of Parliamentary Fronts Against Hunger (PFH) include<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The human right to food</li><li>2. Plurality is a focus and political differences are set aside.</li><li>3. Gender equity</li><li>4. Work with key partners and international agencies</li></ol></li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Q:</b> How often does Parliamentary Fronts Against Hunger (PFH) get the opportunity engage with policy makers?</li><li>• <b>A: Laura</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PFH was established in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Education as such the PFH supports and assists these ministries and other agencies with achieving goals. This helps to ensure that initiatives are achieved through effective legislation.</li><li>• The organization does not work in isolation. This provides a great opportunity for parliamentarians do be seen differently and as champions for health,</li></ul></li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p>wellness and NCD prevention. PFH helps ministries get the legislation and budget needed to achieve goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Q:</b> Are there any examples of policies put forward by other countries in region that would have been aided by parliamentary fonts?</li><li>• <b>A: Luis</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborative work between different actors is important and a budget is needed to achieve results.</li><li>• There are many examples of how parliamentary fronts are working towards achieving specific policies regarding SDG 2.</li><li>• An example would be school feeding program across the region which help address hunger and malnutrition. Fronts have been very important in this regard.</li></ul></li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not applicable</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parliamentary fronts present an opportunity for encouraging collaborative approaches to safeguard population health.</li></ul>

Room #: 4

**Room Title:** Digital advocacy: a powerful civil society tool for change

**Speakers:** Ms. Jill Greenberg, Digital Media Consultant, GHAI; Ms. Sheena Warner-Edwards, HCC Communications Officer; Ms. Abi Begho, President, [Lake Health and Wellbeing](https://lakehealthandwellbeing.com/),<sup>70</sup> St. Kitts and Nevis

**HCY Assistant:** Ms. Dorial Quintyne

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<p><b>Ms. Jill Greenberg</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital marketing deals with behaviour change and prevention while digital advocacy focuses on industry denormalisation and new policies.</li><li>• We focus a lot on behavioural change (digital marketing) but digital is a tool we can use to transform society and demand accountability from the food and beverage industry.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Sheena Warner-Edwards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The HCC has been using digital advocacy to create healthier food environments through policymaking. They have used digital advocacy as a tool by tagging policymakers and creating high quality content to capture the attention of government and laypersons.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Abi Begho</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lake Health and Wellbeing’s “You’re Sweet Enough” campaign is aiming to advocate for policies to reduce sweetened beverages consumption. It has gained the attention of the target audience by giving the campaign a strong identity with a simple message. They created a variety of digital assets and gave the campaign enough time for the public to digest the information.</li></ul>

<sup>70</sup> <https://lakehealthandwellbeing.com/>.

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Through our digital advocacy efforts, are we changing the thinking of not only the powerless (public) but also the powerful (policymakers)?</i></li><li>• <i>What are the costs associated with using social media platforms to promote digital advocacy?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Even though digital advocacy isn't free, it doesn't have to be expensive. Although Facebook requires you to pay to boost your post, you can do it with US\$5.00 a week and still have an impact, so do not be deterred.</i></li></ul></li><li>• <i>What are the effects or backlash of tagging and calling out policymakers on social media?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>We tag policymakers in educational posts and policy acts. And they have responded by re-sharing and re-posting. Tagging is used as a form of positive accountability; it does not have to be aggressive if you use the right tone and tenor.</i></li></ul></li><li>• <i>In the Caribbean which platform has the furthest reach?</i><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <i>Facebook has been the most effective platform because we can boost our posts and reach a very large audience. It is also easy to measure your engagement and you can target your posts to very specific audiences.</i></li></ul></li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use digital advocacy to directly engage with policymakers e.g. tagging, callouts and direct conversation.</li><li>• Be on the lookout for public speeches made regionally or globally and use those to produce high quality content.</li><li>• Remember not to let technology overshadow the human element and use the personality of your influencers in a creative way.</li><li>• All organizations should invest in their social media and allocate a budget for digital campaigns.</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital advocacy is a tool we can use to transform society and demand accountability from the food and beverage industry.</li><li>• We can use digital advocacy to make policymakers aware by tagging them in social media posts.</li><li>• Social media must be a part of an integrated plan of communications and advocacy. It is a cost-effective resource that advocates can use to reach various target audiences.</li><li>• Government policy is needed to increase individual responsibility, as the environment has a great impact on making the healthier choice the easier choice.</li></ul>

Room #: 5

Room Title: Tackling marketing of unhealthy foods to children in the Caribbean - where do we begin?

Speakers: Ms. Danielle Walwyn, HCC Advocacy Officer; Ms. Karlene Morrish-Cooke, Communications Officer, HFJ  
HCY Assistant: Ms. Priyanka Lalla

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advertising and regulations for advertising—there are not many regulations enforced</li><li>• Branded support/promotions from fast food companies, e.g. sporting events, school activities and other sponsorships</li><li>• Why should we care? Looking at the effects on our young people's health as well as how they will be impacted later on in life.</li><li>• Adverse impact on lower income bracket. This is because unhealthy and fast foods are advertised as more affordable and accessible, which is ideal in this situation for many people.</li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For example, in Barbados a quick-service restaurant has promoted its fast food products in various outlets which attract children; they have even included poems and word games in ads to attract children.</li><li>• Schools have curriculums which support healthy eating and educate children about healthy eating habits.</li><li>• Growing your own food.</li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educating children</li><li>• Being more aware of what we say and do</li><li>• Sponsorship</li><li>• Be more aware of labels, and have clear labels</li><li>• Have our farmers step in, and promote our farmers and local produce</li><li>• Planting food/kitchen gardens</li><li>• Public health policies</li><li>• Working with CSOs and other organizations</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overall, our challenges mainly look at the information that is presented to young people and children.</li><li>• Our solutions also look at educating children about healthy habits and resources as well as providing these resources so that they can be as accessible as possible.</li></ul>



Room #: 6

Room Title: Research speaks—exploring the food environment in Caribbean schools and supermarkets

Speaker: Dr. Suzanne Soares-Wynter, Clinical Nutritionist, Caribbean Institute for Health Research, UWI

HCY Assistant: Ms. Stephanie Whiteman

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	This session aimed to give a snap shot of the food environment in schools and supermarkets in the Caribbean based on research that was conducted in both Jamaica and Barbados.
Discussion/Q&A	<p><b>Key points:</b> <u>Foundation for Local Policy Reform:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.It was found that diets in Jamaica were dominated by imported processed and ultra-processed pre-packaged foods with excess sugar, sodium, saturated fats and refined carbohydrates.</li><li>2.If NCD policies were implemented, it is estimated that it could save Jamaica JMD\$77.15 Billion over the span of 15 years (2017-2032)</li></ol> <p><u>The Research:</u></p> <p><b>PART 1</b> <i>Background:</i> The Jamaica Nutrient Facts Panel-Baseline study was conducted January -April 2018. It aimed to look at the composition of pre-packaged foods in Jamaica. The objective of the study was to identify which foods and beverages have unhealthy amounts of target nutrients.</p> <p><i>Results:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beverages made up the majority of products that were available within the supermarkets, of which the majority were considered to be “Juice Drinks”.</li><li>• Candies and desserts, sauces and spreads, snack foods and spices and seasonings were also very high in quantity.</li><li>• 12% of the labels on the products found were either misleading, missing or had erroneous information.</li><li>• Using PAHO’s model for nutrient profiling, at least 34% of packaged foods would have 1 warning label and 53% would have 2 or 3 warning labels. 17% of beverages and 57% of foods have a high sodium content.</li></ul> <p><b>PART 2:</b> <i>Background:</i> The School Environment Audit Study was conducted between November 2018 to April 2019. It was a cross-sectional study that aimed to assess the school environment and its impact on children’s nutritional status. The study was conducted in both Barbados and Jamaica. 24 schools were assessed in Barbados and 77 were assessed in Jamaica.</p> <p><i>Results:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most schools had water fountains for children to have access to potable water. There were also several food sources connected to the schools including canteens, tuck shops and mobile venders. There was also extensive ultra-</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p>processed food marketing and promotion, of which 50% was dedicated to sugar sweetened beverages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In primary school children (7-11 years old):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 1 in 3 were overweight/obese</li><li>- Fruit and vegetable intake was inadequate</li><li>- There was a high intake of sugar sweetened beverages</li><li>- The children meeting the dietary guidelines were the ones that had a lower percentage of body fat.</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>PART 3</b> Another research study was conducted in Jamaica entitled “Randomized controlled trial to examine the best performing Front-of-Package Labelling (FOPL) in Jamaica. The RCT examined 1206 adult shoppers at supermarkets across 9 parishes in Jamaica. It was determined that the Black Octagon Warning Labels performed best in: 1) helping shoppers to identify the least harmful product, 2) Supporting shoppers in purchasing the least harmful option 3) helping shoppers to correctly understand the nutrient content. Based on these findings, it was concluded that octagonal warning labels are the best performing FOPL option currently available for the Caribbean.</p> <p><b>Question 1: What are some examples of foods and beverages, available in retail, which would <u>not</u> carry a warning label?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unprocessed and minimally processed foods and beverages such as Raw fruits, vegetables, meats, products without added sugars, salts and fats, culinary ingredients</li><li>• Foods with high levels of processing would carry warning labels, e.g. dried fruits vs. candied fruits; unsweetened milks vs. sweetened milks; canned meats vs. raw or dried meats</li></ul> <p><b>Question 2: Did the researchers find food items with only foreign languages?</b> Yes, these fell within the 12% of food products that had nutrition labels. The basic labelling requirements now only require information on the label to be in English including the ingredients list and the manufacturing information. One of the things we have recognized that there are some products that are slipping through with foreign languages.</p> <p><b>Question 3: If you were to share recommendations with manufacturers or distributors regarding improving the quality of products available, what would you recommend?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Reformulating to use lower amounts of sodium, sugars and fats; creating new products (e.g. beverages from 20 years ago had 35% less sugars)</li><li>2. Include healthier ingredients to change the nutrient profile (fruits, vegetables, fibre); identifying markets and producers that have a high share of foods that do not require warning label</li><li>3. Market healthier/recommended products</li></ol>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p><b>Question 4: What are three key recommendations to improve school food environments that will impact children’s eating habits?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Improving beverage quality and reducing sugar content and portion sizes</li><li>2. Reducing competitive foods including snack and desserts – especially at meal times when recommended school meals are being served, also fundraising activities</li><li>3. Promote healthier options through increased exposure/marketing – water fountains, school farm gardens, nutrition curriculum</li></ol>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We would recommend that manufacturers try to reformulate their products or create new products.</li><li>• Distributors who are importing foreign product need to be a little stricter with the type of products they bring into the country.</li><li>• Increase the marketing of healthy foods.</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a clear need for a multifaceted and multi-sectoral approach for Healthy Food Policy Interventions. We need policies to protect the right to safe and nutrition foods and beverages, to improve the access to healthy alternative and to create healthier food environments.</li></ul>

Room #: 7

Room Title: Sugar tax in Bermuda

**Speakers:** Ms. Kelsey Case, Honorary Research Fellow and Public Health Consultant, Imperial College, London; Dr. Tazeem Bhatia, Public Health Consultant, Public Health England

**HCY Assistant:** Mr. Jared Spencer

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	Presentation will be a summary of the key findings of the evaluation of the sugar tax presented by Professor Franco Sassi and Dr. Virloy Lewin.
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not applicable</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The food and drink industry was NOT opposed to the sugar tax, but was more concerned with how it was going to be implemented, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the products which would be subject to the new tax.</li><li>• Local bakeries and products were a part of the exemptions of the tax imposed, so as to not constrict local food and beverage entrepreneurs.</li><li>• Even with the implementation of the sugar tax on sweetened beverages, non-sweetened beverages remained more expensive than the taxed beverages.</li><li>• This was the first research to combine both a qualitative and quantitative analysis on a sugar tax In the region, and would not have been possible without the private</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p>sector’s willingness to collaborate with research bodies and provide sales data, and the Department of Health providing public health statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sugar tax was coupled with the elimination of the 5% import tariff on fruits and vegetables; however, this had a negligible effect on the price of fruit and vegetables, given the price volatility of the sector.</li><li>• The sugar tax was very successful in generating revenue (\$5,000,000). However, in acting as a deterrent to the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages, it was not as effective as hoped. Motivating people to improve their diet requires a wide range of health promotion efforts in order to achieve the consumer behaviour change which is desired.</li><li>• The revenue generated was not reinvested into public health measures, but used for other initiatives.</li></ul>

Room #: 8

Room Title: Food systems, climate change, and SIDS

**Speaker:** Dr James Hospedales, Founder and Director, [EarthMedic/EarthNurse](https://earthmedic.com/earthnurse/),<sup>71</sup> Trinidad and Tobago

**HCY Assistant:** Mr. Christopher Laurie

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difference between weather and climate change</li><li>• Causes of climate change: human activity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 degree heating: 1 atomic bomb going off</li></ul></li><li>• Energy stored in the oceans --&gt; powering storms, hotter weather, droughts, more destructive bush fires --&gt; effect on agro-processes</li><li>• Link between health and environment --&gt; lacking in agri-food policies</li><li>• Paris Accord Agreement - NDC policies (Nationally Declared Contribution targets)</li><li>• Region lacking food security and sovereignty</li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bahamas - Hurricane Dorian; loss of native pine tree forests and introduction of pests; loss of indigenous crops/materials and cultural practices<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participant: We also several young Bahamians who have moved to vertical hydroponic farming in containers, which allows them to save their crops in the event of an approaching natural disaster. This has been embraced quite enthusiastically!</li><li>• I think also that Tourism, FDI, and cruise ships are contributing negatively to the ridiculous imports of unhealthy foods!</li><li>• Many persons have been switching to a vegan diet here and more businesses catering to selling these products are being formed. Our Ministry of Agriculture is greatly involved in encouraging and funding backyard gardening, but there is much more work to be done.</li><li>• The Ministry of Health also began a massive educational campaign on healthy eating before COVID-19.</li></ul></li></ul>

<sup>71</sup> <https://earthmedic.com/earthnurse/>.



Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Response to Covid-19 --&gt; increase in backyard gardening &amp; beekeeping</li><li>• Superstorms: impact on water supplies, health, housing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Audience: Given the threats of climate change on production - agriculture and fisheries - I see where in Jamaica there is greater emphasis on greenhouse farming and some efforts to re-establish reefs etc. to sustain the fisheries industry. These have been done largely for economic reasons. Do you think health practitioners/advocates have been making sufficient efforts to engage Ministers of Agriculture to help them realise that there are health gains as well? Sustainable fruits/vegetables/fish production helps to safeguard health as well.</li></ul></li><li>• Audience: I have been told, during a meeting on <a href="#">Doughnut Economics</a><sup>72</sup> in Barbados, that chemicals are needed and used by farmers because they cannot afford more earth-friendly products. How can we shift this? There are inexpensive ways that are kinder to the earth and better for our health.</li><li>• Audience: An amazing film to watch is 'The Need to GROW' which deals with all of the growing issues - please look for it online.<sup>73</sup></li></ul>
Summary	-

Room #: 9

Room Title: Human rights, NCDs and the law

**Speakers:** Ms. Nicole Foster, HCC Policy Advisor, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Law, UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados; Mr. Rashad Brathwaite, Lecturer, UWI, Cave Hill

**HCY Assistant:** Mr. Pierre Cooke, Jr.

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Human rights make political plans become reality.</li><li>• The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has provided guidance on the fact that States have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health.</li><li>• The obligation to respect the right to health means the state must “refrain from interfering directly or indirectly with the employment of the right to health”</li><li>• The language of rights gives civil society a way to enjoin governments from doing things which make the obesity epidemic worse.</li><li>• The obligation to protect the right to health requires States to take actions to prevent external parties from interfering with the right to health which gives civil society the language to call on government to put the necessary legislation in place over the marketing practices of outside parties which creates the obesogenic environments we are currently in.</li><li>• The obligation to fulfil the right to health requires states to adopt legislation and other legal measures that moves towards the full realization of the right to health.</li></ul>

<sup>72</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut\\_\(economic\\_model\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doughnut_(economic_model)).

<sup>73</sup> Available at: <https://grow.foodrevolution.org/>.

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a gap in our constitutions since there is no explicit right to health.</li><li>• There is no domestic incorporation of the right to health from the international human rights conventions.</li><li>• There has been evidence of cases where the right to health has been interpreted as a provision within the constitution and litigated in court.</li><li>• There is room for the right to health to be widely understood and interpreted as an implicit right in our constitution and open the door for a better understanding of the responsibility of governments to protect, respect and fulfil the right to health which extends to the treatment, care and prevention of NCDs.</li><li>• The rights which the right to health is closely connected to includes the right to food and water, to an adequate standard of living, to freedom from discrimination, to privacy, to access to information, and the right to benefit from scientific progress and its application.</li><li>• The right to health should be understood broadly as extending beyond access to health care and to include the social determinants of health.</li></ul>
Discussion/Q&A	-
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is needed for the expansion of the understanding of the right to health: CSO and Legal Profession partnering, human rights training of judicial officers and legal professionals.</li><li>• Front of Package Warning Labels to be understood as a human right. States should implement regulations to prevent the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages.</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The right to health places a legal obligation on states to respect, protect and fulfil their citizens’ well-being in that regard.</li><li>• We need more advocates and officials to understand ‘rights-based’ advocacy and use it as a tool in their advocacy arsenal.</li><li>• There is a lacuna in local jurisprudence on the litigation of the right to health and we are unsure how the court would respond in our region to a case based on the infringement of the external right to health.</li></ul>

**Room #: 10**  
**Room Title: Caribbean voices unite—building a civil society media movement in support of front-of-package warning labelling**  
**Speakers:** Ms. Kerrie Barker, Project Assistant, HCC; Ms. Tamara Marie, St. Lucia Cancer Society (SLCS), Member HCY Coordinating Team and HCC CSO Action Team; Ms. Chrislyn Lashington, Chief Executive Officer, [Lashington Agency](https://lashington.agency/),<sup>74</sup> [Grenada Cancer Society](https://www.facebook.com/GrenadaCancerSociety/),<sup>75</sup> [Grenada National Chronic NCD Commission](https://www.facebook.com/ncdcommissiongrenada/),<sup>76</sup> Mr. Shahad Ali, Public Relations, Marketing and Media Professional, [Trinidad and Tobago NCD Alliance](https://www.facebook.com/ttnca/),<sup>77</sup> Ms. Heather Usher Reneau, Senior Administrator, [Belize Cancer Society](https://www.facebook.com/BelizeCancerSocietyOfficial/).<sup>78</sup>  
**HCY Assistant:** Ms. Simone Bishop-Matthews

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The campaign involved a social media component and rallying and lobbying for the accelerated implementation of octagonal front-of-package labelling (FOPL).</li><li>• To highlight products “high in” critical nutrients of public health concern such as salts, sugars and fats based on the PAHO Nutrient Profile Model.</li><li>• The online and offline movements due to the CSO’s strategies and actions helped to spearhead this regional campaign.</li><li>• Each speaker gave general remarks and was asked to discuss the successes, lessons learnt and challenges of the campaign in their respective countries.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Tamara Marie</b> <i>Successes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They were able to garner support from local government, Ministry of Health (MOH) and the opportunity for the President of SLCS to participate in panel discussion to bring awareness to FOPL.</li><li>• •St. Lucia MOH put out an official statement showing its full support for FOPL and media houses picked up the campaign.</li><li>• Campaign materials were well-received; the Government of St. Lucia reposted the animated public service announcement on their social media page.</li><li>• They were generally pleased with their efforts.</li></ul> <p><i>Lessons learned</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local efforts play a huge role in strengthening plans put together by regional bodies.</li><li>• Every island has its own unique flavour, and having the CSO support locally better enables them to garner public support and forces the attention of our policymakers.</li></ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• • Time was one of the greatest challenges.</li><li>• • Tweaking strategies for different social media platforms.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Chrislyn Lashington</b> <i>General remarks</i></p>

<sup>74</sup> <https://lashington.agency/>.  
<sup>75</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GrenadaCancerSociety/>.  
<sup>76</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ncdcommissiongrenada/>.  
<sup>77</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ttnca/>.  
<sup>78</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BelizeCancerSocietyOfficial/>.

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social media is good on its own but great when used with other types of media.</li><li>• Social media was used in the campaign in Grenada, mainly Facebook.</li><li>• They took the conversation offline, with a photo opportunity at Houses of Parliament, having news stories generated on major television networks and radio conversations, which was simultaneously broadcasted on Facebook.</li><li>• 98% of Grenadians access Facebook on their mobile phones so they took this into account when creating their assets for social media.</li></ul> <p><i>Successes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social media helped to broaden the awareness and getting messages across.</li><li>• They created an infomercial video and ensured that the first shot of the video was something to capture their attention or disrupt their regular scrolling patterns.</li><li>• A mango was thrown behind the camera and had the main host catching it in the video; this movement disrupted the typical selfies and photos being posted on Facebook.</li><li>• The use of influencer marketing, familiar faces and places resonated well with the Grenadian market.</li><li>• A well-known TV personality and cricketer were used as the main actress and actor in the infomercial respectively.</li><li>• The two-month campaign provided a good opportunity for the CSOs in Grenada to continue this engagement post-campaign.</li></ul> <p><i>Lessons learned</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The use of familiar faces and places in the campaign materials resonated well with the Grenadian audience.</li></ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited presence and engagement on CSOs’ existing social media pages: Grenada Cancer Society and Grenada National Chronic NCD Commission.</li><li>• No access to one of the pages (Grenada Cancer Society) and account became compromised.</li><li>• They had to create an entirely new page for the Grenada Cancer Society, therefore lesser engagement as they now had to garner support for this new page.</li><li>• The NCD Commission was not that active on their social media page so that also posed an additional challenge.</li><li>• Time was also an issue, to create all the assets used and to have enough lead time for all their suppliers.</li></ul> <p><b>Mr. Shahad Ali</b> <i>General remarks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• He kept in mind that a lot of people impacted by NCDs are really old and more mature individuals.</li><li>• One question they addressed was the issue of adult literacy; at least in the context of Trinidad and Tobago where the last literacy survey was done in the 90s.</li><li>• In Trinidad and Tobago, there are over 1.4 million connected mobile devices, which means that the majority of the older population may not have access to these devices and information.</li></ul>



Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The use of a variety of mediums is very important because the content that they put forward should be adaptable to every person, not just a still image but also video with text and sound so that people can understand what is being conveyed.</li><li>• Facebook is constantly changing and it is important to continue to learn and grab those opportunities to become better at what they do.</li></ul> <p><i>Successes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They were able to adapt the information to appeal to the general audience, which he found was particularly challenging.</li><li>• They were able to make the information as palatable as possible for the general audience.</li></ul> <p><i>Lessons learned</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It was a great opportunity for them to learn more about their craft. He mentioned the Facebook Blueprint certification for practitioners who operate in a CSO fashion.</li><li>• It was also an opportunity to recognise room for improvement.</li><li>• The possibility of enlisting the help of journalists who are well versed in writing for a general audience and to help them adapt technical information so that it can be more palatable to a general audience.</li></ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It can be time-consuming to develop a variety of content.</li><li>• Making the information palatable or appealing to the general audience.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Heather Usher Reneau</b></p> <p><i>General remarks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Belize Cancer Society (BCS) is one of the chief advocates for NCD and obesity in Belize.</li><li>• Before executing the campaign, they quickly charted a plan of action which included sensitising all their leaders, key stakeholders, and government and opposition leaders.</li><li>• They made sure they got the buy-in from their House of Representatives and different ministries such as Ministry of Health and Wellness, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Bureau of Standards and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and then they created a national committee.</li><li>• This committee formulated all the campaign materials.</li><li>• They obtained consensus from persons and made sure to not step on any toes or invade anyone's territory.</li><li>• These materials need to be shared and promoted on all platforms so that all organisations can see what has been happening and the ones that are weaker can rely on the strengths of the ones that are stronger.</li></ul> <p><i>Successes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They were able to get buy-in and support from key stakeholders and ministries prior to the execution of the campaign in Belize so the message was received by all.</li><li>• Social media supported the campaign very well as it gave them an opportunity to expand their reach beyond the regular, captured audience for the BCS.</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ability to boost their posts allowed them to build their platform, interact with and integrate different persons.</li><li>• The campaign catapulted BCS forward and they will continue to promote the material because there was a lot of effort from all organisations.</li><li>• Lessons learned</li><li>• Stakeholder mapping needs to be done for any campaign in any country.</li><li>• Be aware of the political climate that you live in for any campaign.</li><li>• The importance of reaching out to the private sector, industry catalysts, as these are the people that often sit on the boards that they are advocating for and they may not be as receptive to the message.</li><li>• The importance of engaging with their vulnerable populations, persons with NCDs, our youth, community leaders and use them as advocates because their perspective is crucial.</li><li>• Efforts need to be intensified going forward for the next round of voting.</li></ul> <p><i>Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• She described the challenges as lessons learned.</li></ul>
<b>Discussion/Q&amp;A</b>	<p><b>Q:</b> Coming from a health or non-health background, do you think that the knowledge gained in this campaign influenced your own decisions in your own purchasing habits?</p> <p><b>Ms. Chrislyn Lashington:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I actually have a public health background and my family eats a lot of local produce so I was open to this campaign.</li><li>• Being open to this campaign made me even more aware of some of the items in foods.</li><li>• I did not realize that cereals had so much sugar, so much salt so it really made me focus more on some of the things that we drink and the amount of the critical nutrients that they have in them.</li><li>• It has deepened my awareness and I spread that to some people in my friend circle.</li></ul> <p><b>Mr. Shahad Ali:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I do not have a science background in health but I have some background in science so some of the information that was put forth to me, I understood the methods that needed to be taken and to understand the materials to put forth as well as make wise decisions.</li><li>• Personally, it's been a challenge. Of course, the systems that we're advocating for are not in place right now so it's really a matter of picking up that package and looking behind it, doing the additions, subtractions and divisions to understand exactly what you're about to consume which is very difficult.</li><li>• But in addition to all we're advocating for, we deal with a lot of cultural issues and I'm sure my Caribbean counterparts can relate.</li><li>• For example, a Sunday lunch will contain many starches which is a normal thing on a Sunday within the Trinidad and Tobago context and other Caribbean countries.</li><li>• Our emphasis or excessive use of particular foods tends to be a consistent trait among us all and it is something that we have to break away from.</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p><b>Q:</b> What role do schools and school systems play in developing curricula that will not just create awareness but change behaviour?</p> <p><b>Ms. Tamara Marie:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tying the whole FoPNWL, that is something that was instilled a lot in our campaign and getting people to realize that the FoPNWL is not just a silver bullet, it is part of a comprehensive set of food policies and so schools play an extremely important role.</li><li>• As a matter of fact, where we live, work, worship, these environments play a huge role in terms of changing our behaviours because we would like them ideally to be enabling environments.</li><li>• So again, tying in FoPNWL when you have products with these labels sold in schools and they are not being done.</li><li>• The role that schools play is super important in terms of encouraging the consumption of local produce, marketing of healthier products.</li><li>• We see FoPNWL as an enabling policy and the hope is that schools play a role by kind of fitting into that comprehensive food policy package.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Heather Usher Reneau:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Schools play an integral role in shaping our children with regards to nutrition education and having physical activity.</li><li>• But we have to look at the reality of it, our children are participating in energy-dense, unhealthy drinks high in fats and salts.</li><li>• The reality is the schools do not have the funding to continue to purchase and provide these healthy foods because they are expensive. So, they have to resort to these nutrient-poor foods that are cheaper and low cost.</li><li>• I believe that the governing role of the legislative body that we need to put our efforts into our governments.</li><li>• The governments are the chief catalysts and legislative bodies of any country and the Ministry of Education comes under our national government.</li><li>• If the Ministry of Health does not see the need as to why school curricula need to include more healthy options and the nutrition education needs to be added from very young, then we are in a serious situation because our governments are the powers that be.</li><li>• As people, we have to stop relying on just organisations and the Ministry of Health; we need to activate the power of people to let them know that we're getting sick and our kids are getting obese.</li><li>• We need to do something about it and demand these school policies be changed.</li></ul> <p><b>Q:</b> As a consumer, do you/did you experience acceptance or hesitancy for the implementation of FoPNWL?</p> <p><b>Ms. Heather Usher Reneau:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We got good acceptance from our society. Our government leaders know what needs to be done but we have to understand our political climate and the power of private sector and it goes back down to economics.</li></ul>

Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These companies fund our governments, schools and our churches. They help us with T-shirts and feeding programmes so it is something that we need to try to change as a people.</li><li>• As an adult, even I have issues with choosing foods so the FoPNWL even with a health background, does assist you in making better informed decisions.</li><li>• As Vonetta Nurse mentioned in the chat that yes, she worked on the campaign but she had in depth knowledge of these issues and trying to eat healthy but our bad habits get the better of us.</li><li>• So, we need our governments to regulate these obesogenic environments so put FoPNWL, restrict marketing to children, monitor vendors in and around schools and ensure that we are not providing this unhealthy stuff in our school feeding programmes.</li><li>• We have to start and it has to be now.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Tamara Marie:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For the most part, everybody was super supportive. Who doesn't want something that enables you to make healthier food choices?</li><li>• It was pointed out where people admit that they want to eat healthy but it's expensive and so again, in line with the fact that this is part of a comprehensive policy package to encourage healthier habits.</li><li>• We do have to take into consideration the supply chain, how we are subsidising local produce etc., so in terms of implementing the FoPNWL, everyone supported that and I think it kind of opened the can of worms where people were like 'okay, we will have that, but what else'?</li><li>• The more you get the public support on these things, the more they start to ask questions and the more they push the policymakers to a corner where they now have to start taking things into consideration.</li><li>• Soon after this campaign, and I'm not sure if these were already in the pipeline, our marketing sector in St. Lucia started to do the subsidised food hampers and boxes because the public is asking 'well I want to eat healthier or I know I should be eating healthier or local produce but it is expensive.'</li><li>• It echoes the sentiments that the local efforts make a difference and the more you grab the public's attention, the more you force your policymakers to kind of pay attention and listen.</li></ul> <p><b>Q:</b> We spoke about having public attention and as this was an online campaign, did you see any offline benefits such as recognition and comments from people as a result of the campaign?</p> <p><b>Ms. Chrislyn Lashington:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Based on the social media postings in Grenada, we actually garnered offline media support so there were two journalists who reached out to us to get a story on it based on what they saw on social media whether they were interested or some benefit.</li><li>• Putting the pressure on policymakers. For instance, at the beginning of last year, Grenadian government put a ban on sweet drinks and carbonated drinks and sweet foods in schools and that should have taken into effect last year but</li></ul>



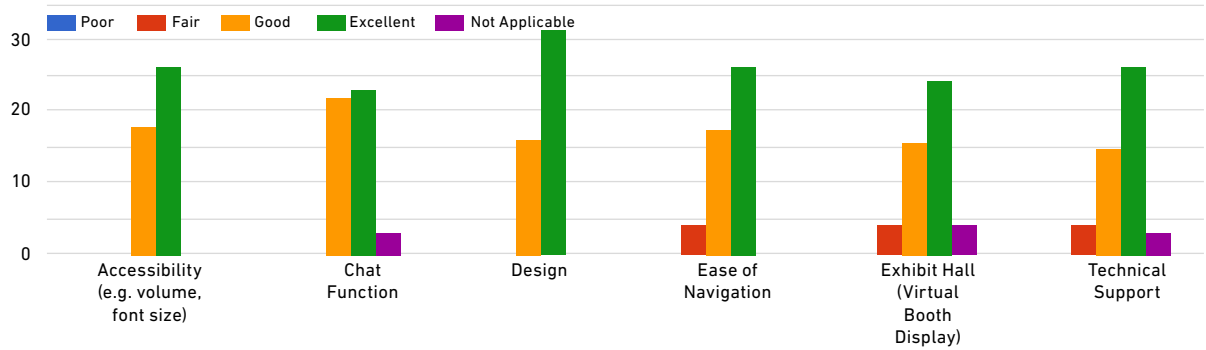
Session Component	Key Take Away Messages
	<p>the pandemic changed things but when we put the pressure on policymakers particularly in the Ministry of Education who did this, you can see a difference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I do think that having schools involved really make a large difference because the main two things are eating foods that are not right and lack of physical activity.</li><li>• Based on our statistics, we had more than 80% of children aged 11-17 years not having adequate physical activity. So yes, while parents definitely have to come into play and that was something that we saw in the conversations on social media where people said 'yea you could do this but it still goes down to the parents and the choices that we make for our children.'</li><li>• It takes so many different types of people in society to get this going and get it to a place that we want it to be.</li></ul> <p><b>Ms. Heather Usher Reneau:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The campaign made our work more visible, we had media asking for interviews or stories on the HCC and the body of work being done. Also, other CSOs were asking for sensitisation materials and doing sessions for them so that they can learn more about what the FoPNWL was in Belize.</li><li>• During the campaign, we earned four youth advocates, college students who now want to become a part of the HCC Youth, so I can say it was an absolute plus for us.</li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Know the local context or political climate of the country for any campaign.</li><li>• Use of influencer marketing, familiar or well-known faces and places to resonate with audience and help to push the campaign forward.</li><li>• Sensitise key stakeholders and government ministries, as this would be beneficial before the execution of any campaign.</li><li>• Engage with key stakeholders, ministries, and especially the private sector prior to any campaign—this is important to get their buy-in and support and avoid possible conflict or invasion of anyone's territory.</li></ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social media proved to be a very viable tool when it comes to health promotion, expanding reach and engagement and trying to change people's behaviour.</li><li>• Time was a common challenge to overcome among all the CSOs, to create a variety of materials and to give their suppliers and/or third parties involved enough lead time.</li><li>• We cannot rely solely on organisations or the Ministry of Health, we as a people need to do something for change and let our voices be heard.</li><li>• Increase involvement and engagement with persons with NCDs, youth, community leaders and vulnerable populations.</li><li>• FoPNWL is a part of a comprehensive food policy and not a silver bullet; schools or school systems and parents play essential roles in providing enabling environments and marketing the consumption of healthier, local produce.</li></ul>

## Annex 3

### Summary of feedback from conference attendees

The text and graphics below summarise feedback from 48 responses, as of 19 July 2021.

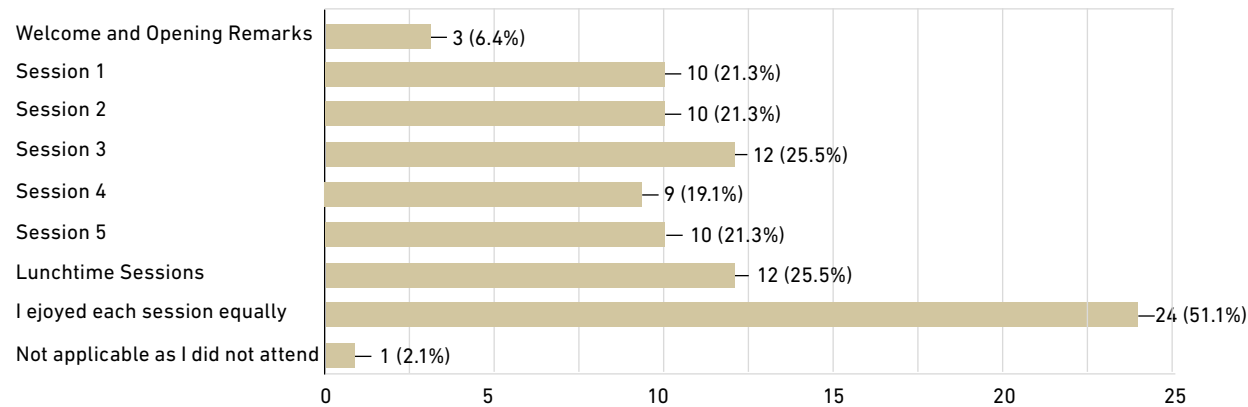
1. Please rate the following components of the vfairs virtual platform:



- Overall, feedback on the vFairs virtual platform was positive. For respondents who utilised the various features.
  - The accessibility, chat function, and design of the platform were deemed good or excellent by all.
  - 8% (4/48) of respondents indicated that the ease of navigation, virtual exhibit hall and technical support were only 'Fair'. The remainder of respondents who did utilise these components rated them good or excellent.
- Some respondents selected to provide additional feedback. Overall, those who responded were pleased with the look and feel of the platform. One respondent, however, stated that he/she felt it did not enhance the conference in any way. Comments:
  - Excellent platform, well set out and pleasing to the eye.
  - The virtual platform was really good. I did not visit the exhibit hall.
  - Excellent management of the break-out sessions, despite the technical challenges.
  - Interesting set up. I had fun navigating.
  - I like the virtual platform as many more persons could participate once they are told early enough and have the time to invite their friends and colleagues.
  - It was OK but did not enhance the sessions
  - It was amazing—I felt as if I was physically at the Conference
  - Have a technical crew on standby should incase any hiccups arise.
  - Very well presented. However, I did not like how one moderator in one of the morning session abruptly cut a speaker off.
  - The day was well spent. It was very informative and got to the crux of the matter.
  - The look and feel of the conference due to the use of the platform was excellent.
  - Exceptional, professional.

3. What was/were your favourite session(s)?

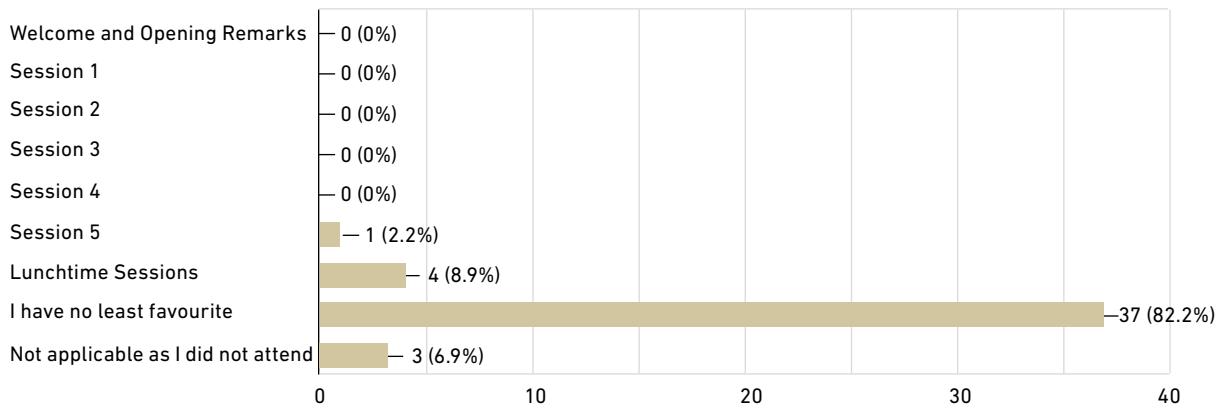
47 responses



- Participants were asked to indicate which sessions they preferred, and were allowed to select more than one option.
- About half of respondents indicated that they liked all sessions equally. For those who selected individual sessions, each of the 5 sessions was about equally popular.
- Some respondents elected to provide additional feedback. Comments:
  - Need less emphasis on health food; concentrate on healthy eating behaviours and the people. Healthy food policies need supportive nutrition professionals to effect same.
  - I joined late so I missed the Opening Session. I was away for two sessions but I thoroughly enjoyed the whole conference. I note that I can still login to the archive and view the sessions. Thank you.
  - I was not able to participate to most sessions due to the time difference.
  - All the presenters were good. They were well prepared and delivery was good. Knowledge gained from all sessions.
  - Practical ideas and suggestions were spoken that can be easily implemented.
  - The ‘level’ at which the presentations were delivered. It was easy to follow and understand.
  - The sessions provided modern approaches and insight to food safety and production. Also, outlined the relationship between food and the different sectors and industries.
  - Informative content, speakers were passionate and encouraging.
  - All the sessions dealt with different Caribbean Health issues which are interdependent.
  - The session topics were timely as we strive to build back better to improve health outcomes.
  - Very informative and was nice to receive current updates within the Caribbean.
  - All the sessions provided information that enhanced my knowledge.
  - The discussions were invigorating and informative.
  - These sessions helped me to refocus and gave me new applications to help in my professional scope.
  - Very informative.
  - The practical applications provided.
  - The sessions were very good and the panelists were well selected in terms of the variety of thoughts. Each session was of a high quality.
  - All sessions were of equal importance.
  - Although they were all good, I liked the introductory welcome and opening remarks by Sir Trevor and Maisha and I found Fitzroy’s presentation absolutely brilliant. Nicole Foster was excellent.

4. (a) What was/were your least favourite session(s)?

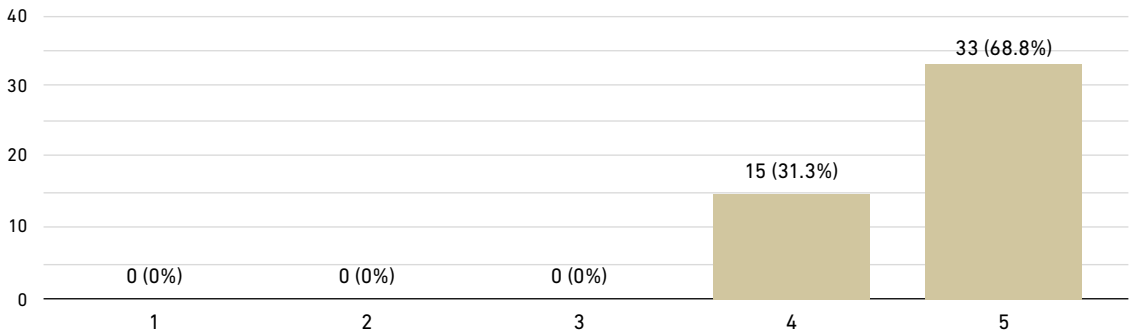
45 responses



- Participants were also asked to indicate which sessions were their least favourite and to elaborate.
- The majority who responded to this question indicated that they had no least favourite while a few selected the Lunchtime sessions and one selected Session 5. The additional detail provided by some respondents is shown below. Comments:
  - All sessions were well received.
  - All the sessions were enlightening.
  - None were least—enjoyed them all.
  - It’s not so much least favourite, but I wasn’t able to connect for the entire session.
  - N/A
  - See very first comment (“I enjoyed each session equally”).
  - Session 5 was not holistic in nature focused more on Jamaica rather than the entire Caribbean.
  - I had no least favourite, but as a panellist I had to leave the Lunchtime Session a little early to be in place for my session. I liked the small group feel of that session and the ability to have conversation. (*This person selected Lunchtime Session as their least favourite*)
  - It was difficult getting to the meeting room and I missed most of the session. (*This person selected Lunchtime Session as their least favourite*)

6. How would you rate the conference overall

48 responses









- Towards the end of the survey, participants were asked to rate the conference overall on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the highest. All respondents answered this question. The results were all positive with 31% (15/58) giving a score of 4 and 69% (33/48) giving a score of 5.
- Participants were then asked to indicate what aspects of the conference they particularly enjoyed and what aspects they thought could be improved.
- The individual responses were as follows. Comments:
  - Aspects enjoyed:
    - All.
    - I enjoyed the presentations and the information shared, the variety of speakers. The small, break out rooms at lunchtime where I was able to share experiences and ask questions and receive answers, and the slides for the presentations.
    - Good spirit.
    - The conference was very interactive, the site was very attractive and easy to navigate and the display booths were a great idea to highlight different organizations.
    - Having the session online and so well organised meant more people from around the world could participate.
    - Lunch time: Digital Advocacy.
    - I enjoyed the all of the conference from beginning to end and I hope that this will not be a once a year meeting but been implemented for at least more sessions per year.
    - Most.
    - The presentations were short.
    - Really great virtual format - so easy to navigate and quickly enter sessions. Great moderators.
    - ALL.
    - The breakout sessions at lunch.
    - The Health Breaks were very nice addition.
    - All the sessions that I went to, I enjoyed. I particularly was impressed with the expertise of the presenters! I learnt a lot from the questions asked in the discussion segments as well.
    - All.
    - Almost everything.
    - Really and truly this was the best event ever executed by the HCC.
    - Focus on implementation and sharing of practical solutions already implemented.
    - Structure of sessions and the content.
    - I enjoyed all the sessions.
    - All aspects.
    - It was virtual.
    - The clarity in the contents that were delivered. Very applicable.
    - The presentations and navigating the platform.
    - All of it. Only thing is I wasn't able to access lunch time session.
    - Organization and information covered.
    - I liked the Caribbean feel of the conference; the live pan and the Fit breaks etc. I thought as a global meeting, the Caribbean signature was excellent. The quality of the sessions was great and the information. The direction of the conversation was extremely significant I thought.
    - Technical content and Health and Wellness breaks.
    - The organization and the content of the presentations. I thought it was a genius idea to have a Pacific islander involved. I was impressed by the manner in which the chat was managed.

- Improvements:
  - None.
  - Too many lunchtime sessions that were equally important—want the information from all.
  - The timing for the presentations. Some presenters were cut off and I really wanted to hear where the presenters were going with the topics. It seemed like a tall order to present in the given time frame for some speakers. Some preferred to go through the slides while others gave a lot of good explanations and details which took up the given time. The time frame could have been adequate but depending on the speaker's style, time got away. If guidelines to speakers were not given, maybe some can be shared at the time of inviting them to speak.
  - Logging in instructions for lunch break session.
  - Navigating to the lunch time sessions.
  - Small group interactions.
  - Wish I could have attended more than one lunchtime session.
  - Maybe more time for the presenters and attendees to engage.
  - I would like to see more young people involved as they are the future.
  - Some of the slides, the writing was too small.
  - Not sure.
  - The fact that I could not be everywhere all at once; I would have love to have attended all of the sessions; but had to rely on feedback form my staff. Hence suggesting it could have been spread out over a 4-day period with morning and afternoon sessions.
  - Agenda is packed.
  - Participants going to the different rooms for the room sessions.
  - No suggestions right now.
  - Connectivity to break-out sessions needs to be improved.
  - The sessions could be lengthened and the conference could be over 2- 3 days.
  - Lunchtime session should have been longer to allow for answering questions.
  - No major issue here.
  - Assignments to meeting rooms.
  - I cannot suggest any.

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Cover image: Yensa Images  
Other images: vfairs virtual platform  
Design and layout: Ian Pitts

ISBN: 978-976-96774-2-5



The work of the HCC would not be possible without the support of our donors,  
Sagicor Life Inc. and FirstCaribbean International ComTrust Foundation.

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