



Caribbean Private Sector Response to Chronic Diseases (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, 8–9 May 2008)

Background Paper for Healthy Foods: Import and Agriculture

A healthy population is an essential prerequisite for the economic growth and stability of the Caribbean.

CARICOM Heads of Government, in their 2001 Nassau Declaration, articulated the view that the health of the people is important for the creation of the region's wealth. This is the first time that they singled out the health of the people as an essential factor for the region's development.

The rapidity of obesity increase in the Caribbean is alarming. In the past two decades, obesity has grown by almost 400%. The main underlying cause of death in the region is due to illnesses related to obesity. Other chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCDs) such as cardiovascular disease (hypertension, coronary artery disease and stroke), diabetes and cancer accounted for 51% of all deaths in the Caribbean in 2000.

The Caribbean must seriously address the rising epidemic of obesity, which is the common factor associated with an increased risk of CNCDs.

Poor dietary habits and sedentary behaviors contribute to the problem of obesity. Some of the forces in our environment that also add to the problem are:

- ✓ Our local and cable networks advertise fast food, especially on children's programs
- ✓ Our food import policy encourages the high consumption of high energy dense, manufactured foods
- ✓ Our domestic agriculture policy lacks incentives for the production of fruits and vegetables which are affordable
- ✓ Our lack of education and promotion to the public in relation to healthy eating. For example, a low-fat diet, full of fruits and vegetables, but little salt can lead to a significant drop in blood pressure.
- ✓ The slow response to efforts to eliminate Trans Fatty Acids in our diets as well as
- ✓ In industrial use
- ✓ The lack of a planned physical activity program in our organizations and in our homes
- ✓ Food and beverage companies do not offer healthier food product choices (e.g. less saturated fat, salt and sugar and elimination of trans fat in our diet).

Based on these findings, the private sector is being encouraged to take a more active role in the reduction of CNCDs by implementing measures to reduce the risk of these diseases affecting employees as well as the wider community.

The following are some of the measures that the private sector can implement to ensure that they deal with this growing epidemic:

- √ Ensure that the entire private sector participate in a strong support for the elimination of Trans Fat and salt from the diet of our citizens.
- √ Promotion of greater use of indigenous agricultural products inclusive of fruits and vegetables and foods by our population.
- √ Labeling of foods or such measures as are necessary to indicate their nutritional content.
- √ Promotion and education of citizens regarding fruits and vegetables five times daily and the reduction of salt and sugar from all foods.
- √ Ensure that healthy food technology is improved.
- √ Ensure that pesticides are not over used in the farming of crops.
- √ Develop and implement policies in the workplace that will ensure that cafeterias.
- √ Serve healthy foods.
- √ Provide incentives to those employees who participate in weight reduction programs.
- √ Partner with public sector agencies and health nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the promotion and education of healthy eating.

April 2008