

Healthy lives, education and wealth: ecological relationships in social resilience

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A key feature of this special supplement of the *Pan American Journal of Public Health* is its focus on the state of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the Caribbean. The negative value chain impact is its effects on economic growth and childhood educational outcomes. Thus, there is an ecological relationship between interventions to support dietary diversity, improving successful transitions from school to work and economic growth in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Since the 2007 Declaration of Port of Spain the region has made insufficient strides towards realizing the vision of reducing childhood obesity. In 2015, the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) endorsed a 6-Point Policy Package (6-PPP) to promote healthy food environments and reduce the incidence of childhood obesity. The strategy supports the Caribbean Plan of Action to Prevent Childhood Obesity and the 6-PPP comprises mandatory food labelling, nutrition standards and guidelines for schools and other institutions, food marketing and portion sizes, nutritional quality of food supply (levels of harmful ingredients), trade and fiscal policies, and food chain incentives, particularly for fruits and vegetables.

In 2016, CARICOM Heads of Government received a report on the evaluation of the Declaration of Port of Spain and the 27 commitments made by 19 CARICOM Member States. Unfortunately, the least progress made was in the area of unhealthy diets and addressing the obesogenic environments children live, grow and play in; over 60% of adolescents in the region are either obese or overweight.

In 2021 the Intergovernmental Working group on unhealthy diets was formed and drafted a policy brief on the elimination of the importation, regional production and distribution of industrially produced trans fats in foods. This draft policy was presented to the 41st Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on Health in October 2021 and awaits the next joint COTED/COHSOD meeting for endorsement. The COTED and COHSOD Ministers have committed to working

collaboratively to address the critical issue of diet-related health and the economic burden of NCDs in the Caribbean.

Aligned with these efforts in 2017 CARICOM Heads of Government approved the CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy (C-HRD 2030 S). The C-HRD 2030 S attends to ecological contributions that the education system makes in sustainably reducing incidences of NCDs and mitigating the intergenerational impact of poor eating habits through curriculum reform. Thus, in 2019 with support from the Food and Nutrition (FaN) project, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) and the UNICEF, the CARICOM Secretariat undertook a review and revision of the 2013 Health & Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum with particular attention to the Appropriate Eating and Fitness theme. The revision was led by teachers and HFLE practitioners from the region. The project netted significant deliverables that were shared with the region: a HFLE Curriculum for the Early Childhood Level; a revised HFLE Curriculum for the Primary Level; and samples of lesson plans to support communicating HFLE competencies.

These were approved at the 38th Meeting of the COHSOD-Education (23-24 October, 2019). Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, there were delays with the implementation support component of the project, but during 2020-2021 the FaN project has been working with the CARICOM Secretariat and other partners such as the Ashe Company, Jamaica and Slow Foods Barbados to develop edutainment products and content to support the teaching and learning of the Appropriate Eating and Fitness theme within the HFLE curriculum across the Basic Education level. These products and resources again are being developed with guidance and support from teachers and in the case of the edutainment products, students.

The successful teaching of HFLE has been historically challenged by perceptions of teacher efficacy in HFLE, topics that are

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considered problematic with complex social dilemmas, and the poor availability of HFLE resources to support learning. Thus, the second phase of collaboration between the FaN project and the CARICOM Secretariat seeks to increase the availability of age-appropriate resources to support the teaching of HFLE in the region and significantly the design, content, and scope of these resources (edutainment products) would have been largely influenced by students from the region (teaching their peers).

The FaN project during its years of implementation has been making significant contributions to the NCD agenda in the region through its Improving Household Nutrition Security and Public Health in the CARICOM project. The realisation of dietary diversity in CARICOM demands inter-disciplinary partnerships as the collaboration between the FaN project and the CARICOM Secretariat demonstrates, and as the articles in this special supplement illustrate. 2020 initiated a decade of committed and accelerated action towards the SDG 2030 agenda, and the projects presented in this special supplement traverse disciplines that collectively, directly respond to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and, indirectly to SDGs 5, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 15. Beyond new partnerships and new ways of working, silos need to be perforated to allow for inter-disciplinary access, knowledge exchange and

solution generation. These are the ecological relationships in practice and policy formation that are critical to regional development. The CARICOM Secretariat renews its commitment to solicit the continued support and networking of actors and beneficiaries across disciplines and communities in the fight against NCDs. The health and wellbeing of the Community is everyone's business; let us unite our agendas. Healthy eating increases educational outcomes, promotes productivity, makes for happy people, and increases economic activity.

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