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Session 5: Nutrition, health and non-communicable diseases

Food security is achieved through adequate access to food, but more specifically it is achieved through access to *nutritious* food—quality rather than simply quantity. For many SIDS joining global supply chains and culture of fast and packaged food, the issue of *quality* of available food is critical, and the health implications are serious.

Healthy eating habits must be promoted through nutrition education and can only be made possible through food systems that give the consumers the opportunity to eat healthy, well balanced meals. Public policies play an important role in ensuring that these conditions are met and in countering the rising trend of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that is a growing concern in many SIDS. Cardiovascular disease is, for example, the leading cause of death in the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean suffers from the greatest prevalence of NCDs in the Americas.

The SAMOA Pathway recognizes the severity of the non-communicable disease crisis in many SIDS and approaches the issue in a holistic manner, calling for action in the context of food security and nutrition but also in the sections on health and on culture and sport. Some of the most urgent and time-bound language in the Pathway is dedicated to the issue: paragraph 73 reaffirms the commitment to support SIDS to “take urgent steps to establish, for the period from 2015 to 2025, 10-year targets and strategies to reverse the spread and severity of non-communicable diseases.”

Agenda 2030 likewise sets ambitious targets on nutrition and non-communicable diseases, including Goal 2 and its target 2.2: “By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.” Target 3.4 states: “By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment...”

The challenges of poor nutrition and non-communicable diseases are complex and will be overcome only with integrated and holistic policies and actions, with ministries of health, education, agriculture, environment, social development, trade and finance working in cooperation and complementarity. In addition, local and indigenous knowledge—learning from an era that was often free from the health problems experienced today—will be vitally important.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are strategies for engaging in a whole of government approach to combatting non-communicable diseases in SIDS? What are the roles for SIDS themselves and for partners?
2. How can SIDS raise their nutritional standards and health outcomes in the face of the economic and cultural pressures of a globalized world?
3. How can governments create an environment that supports healthy eating choices by consumers?