



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on Wednesday, February 20, 2019

[10:50 a.m. to 12:50 p.m.]

2nd Public hearing re: An inquiry into the current level of childhood obesity and the State's interventions to promote a healthy lifestyle among children.

Venue: J. Hamilton Meeting Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee members

The following committee members were present:

1. Mr. Paul Richards – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP – Vice-Chairman
3. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
4. Ms. Allyson West

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,
Community Development, and other Social Services)

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials were present:

Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

1. Mr. Farook Hosein - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
2. Mrs. Marcia London-McKellar - Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
3. Ms. Denise Arneaud - Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
4. Mr. Gabre McTair - Assistant Director, Physical Education and Sport
5. Mr. Earland Kent - Director, Youth Affairs

Ministry of Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

1. Dr. Simone Titus - Chief Technical Officer
2. Mrs. Nirmalla Debysingh-Persad - Chief Executive Officer, National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation

Diabetes Association of Trinidad and Tobago (DATT)

1. Mr. Andrew Dhanoo - President
2. Ms. Asha Samaroo - 1st Vice President

National Parent Teachers' Association (NPTA)

1. Mrs. Raffiena Ali-Boodoosingh - National President
2. Ms. Kari-Ann Mejias - National 2nd Vice President

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Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (MSYA)

- i. The MSYA supports the Ministry of Education (MoE) by providing technical assistance and guidance in the development of school sports programmes.
- ii. The MSYA also liaises with the Curriculum Division of the MoE to assign sports Coaches to schools through its coaching programme, as the need arises.
- iii. The MoE is directly responsible for the implementation of the Physical Education (PE) curriculum and assignment of PE Teachers. The MSYA must seek approval from the MoE before introducing sporting programmes in schools.
- iv. There is a need for increased focus on the implementation of physical education in schools.
- v. Approximately 15 Coaches were assigned to an unspecified number of Primary and Secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago.
- vi. In addition to facilitating participation in sports by the general student body, the coaches scout for talented student athletes who may progress further in Sport.
- vii. The respective national governing bodies of Sport liaise with the MoE to provide other general sporting opportunities to students. These opportunities also allow the Governing Bodies to scout for talented athletes.
- viii. The MSYA selects schools from a list of at-risk schools published by the MoE to participate in its intervention programmes that promote a healthy and active lifestyle. The criteria for determining “at-risk schools” is not limited to childhood obesity and includes various lifestyle/health factors which may be evident among the student population.
- ix. The Ministry’s intervention programmes address general healthy lifestyle topics. The Ministry is giving consideration to incorporating the elimination of childhood obesity as a specific objective in future intervention programmes.
- x. Presidents of the PTA units at the selected schools assisted with planning of the Ministry’s intervention programmes. The National President of the NPTA was not directly engaged in these projects.
- xi. Over the past three (3) years, approximately 3,000 persons have participated in the Youth Health Caravans initiative, 7,770 persons in the School Eduvans (Education Caravans), and 900 persons in the Adolescent Intervention Programme.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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- xii. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) provided a loan to the Ministry of Health (MoH) for the Health Services Support Programme.
- xiii. The MYSA is assisting the MoH to: identify sporting equipment to be purchased through the IDB loan; evaluate bids for the provision of the equipment; and to select relevant youth/sporting facilities where the equipment will be utilized.
- xiv. The *Healthy Youth TT* initiative is currently in its conceptualisation phase. Collaboration will commence with the MoH. Through this programme communities will be given access to sporting equipment at youth/sporting facilities at minimal cost.
- xv. Trainers will be assigned to the youth/sporting facilities to supervise and guide sporting activities.
- xvi. The National Racquet Sports Centre is primarily used for the training of national sport teams by the respective national governing bodies of Sport.
- xvii. Some of the governing bodies also offer in-school programmes for total student participation e.g. the National Badminton Association programme at select schools.
- xviii. The Table Tennis Association promotes general participation in table tennis at community facilities.
- xix. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of the sports programmes offered by the MSYA.
- xx. The staffing complement at the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, MSYA, is two (2) members. Additional staff will be recruited to facilitate the effective evaluation of the sporting programmes.
- xxi. The Ministry intends to enhance its future initiatives by establishing community-based health groups to continue the health activities that are introduced by the Ministry in respective communities.
- xxii. Youth Facilities are situated at six (6) locations: Basilon Street (POS), California, Laventille, Los Bajos, Malick and St. James.
- xxiii. Social media is used to promote the Ministry's sporting programmes. There are plans to recruit staff in the Communications Unit to improve the Ministry's social media strategy.
- xxiv. In 2019 the Ministry intends to commence the rehiring of Coaches and Sports Development Officers in schools and at community facilities, to develop programmes for school-aged children, young adults and the communities at large. Consideration will also be given to providing technical assistance to community sports clubs.

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- xxv. Consideration will also be given to providing greater assistance to the national governing bodies of Sport to facilitate their development programmes.
- xxvi. Notwithstanding financial constraints, the MSYA has provided grants to community organizations for the hosting of vacation sports camps.

Issues discussed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF)

- i. Representatives indicated that the Ministry has acknowledged that there is a need for increased efforts to promote local foods, host public education campaigns on healthy eating and to collaborate with the MoE with respect to the operations of the SNP.
- ii. Field officers of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) provide caterers of the School Nutrition Programme (SNP) with a list of certified farmers and descriptions of the produce sold at the Macoya Wholesale Market.
- iii. Previously, NAMDEVCO provided produce to the MoE for use as substitute ingredients for items on the SNP menus (e.g. green papaya as a substitute for Irish potatoes).
- iv. In the past, NAMDEVCO also provided ready-to-cook produce items such as pumpkin, dasheen and ochros to SNP caterers.
- v. Produce items recommended by NAMDEVCO were sourced from farms that are certified and monitored on a monthly basis by the Ministry. These farms are guided by Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).
- vi. However, farm certification and monitoring is not mandatory. Approximately 2,300 farmers voluntarily participate in monitoring.
- vii. The Ministry cannot verify the extent to which unmonitored farms conform to GAP standards.
- viii. Upon request, the NAMDEVCO hosts educational presentations at schools and other institutions to raise awareness of healthy and locally produced food choices.
- ix. Educational information is also disseminated through the Ministry's website and social media platforms (e.g. the Know What You Eat brochure, educational videos on local produce substitutes).
- x. NAMDEVCO manages nine (9) farmers markets across the island in an initiative to facilitate the sale and consumption of locally-grown produce.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
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- xi. There is currently no contractual obligation for SNP caterers to use local produce in their menu items.
- xii. The CEO also stated that, in collaboration with the MoE, consideration can be given to mandating SNP caterers to use local produce in their menu items.
- xiii. Although the MALF encourages agricultural activity through several incentives such as grants, free training and Youth Apprenticeship programmes, it appears that young people are generally disinterested in farming.

Issues discussed with the Diabetes Association of Trinidad and Tobago (DATT)

- i. Statistics on childhood obesity from the Ministry of Health (MoH) are published in the Global School Health Survey (GSHS) of 2007, 2011 and 2017.
- ii. The GSHS 2007 survey indicated that the total obesity and overweight rate among school-aged children was 1 in 3 children. The 2017 survey indicated that the rate increased to 1 in 2.
- iii. The DATT does not have the institutional capacity to collect primary data on child health.
- iv. The DATT has increased its efforts to target children at risk for diabetes. For example, social media is used for educational purposes, recruitment for programmes and for advocacy.
- v. Initiatives aimed at children include the Diabetes Awareness in Primary Schools (DEAPs) programme for students in Standard 3, and an educational programme with a school quiz.
- vi. Plans for a subsequent DEAPs programme included the training of volunteers to disseminate information about diabetes to students, parents and school personnel.
- vii. A programme budget was submitted to the MoH approximately three years ago. However, no funding was provided and the programme was stalled.
- viii. The DATT receives a government subvention of \$5,000 per month which is used for salaries and utility expenses. Other funding is sourced from corporate sponsors.
- ix. The DATT has produced and submitted to the relevant Ministries, a policy on students living with diabetes in schools.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
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Issues discussed with the National Parent Teachers' Association (NPTA)

- i. Workshops by Health Educators from the MoH between March – April 2017 sensitized PTA units on the health effects of sugary drinks consumption, following the sugary drinks ban in schools.
- ii. A Health Fair in June 2017 was held in Arima.
- iii. The prevalence of childhood obesity increased from 2.4% in 1999 to 13% in 2009, and 55% in 2017 among children aged 5 to 18 years.
- iv. There is low parental attendance at PTA meetings.
- v. The NPTA is collaborating with the MoH on the *TT Moves* programme and *Healthy Me TT* initiative.
- vi. The National President suggested that schools can partner with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and community clubs to host physical activities at community recreational facilities and school grounds.
- vii. The NPTA is pursuing greater collaboration with the National Principals Association and district School Supervisors in Primary and Secondary schools.
- viii. Insufficient attention is given to non-testable subjects such as Agricultural Science and 4H clubs, particularly in Primary schools.
- ix. Schools in rural areas tend to promote in-school agricultural activities more than schools in urban areas.
- x. There are plans to host health camps during the July/August vacation period in 2019.

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View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezOaIyvHZmk>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

February 28, 2019