

Food Fright – The Silent Caribbean Crisis

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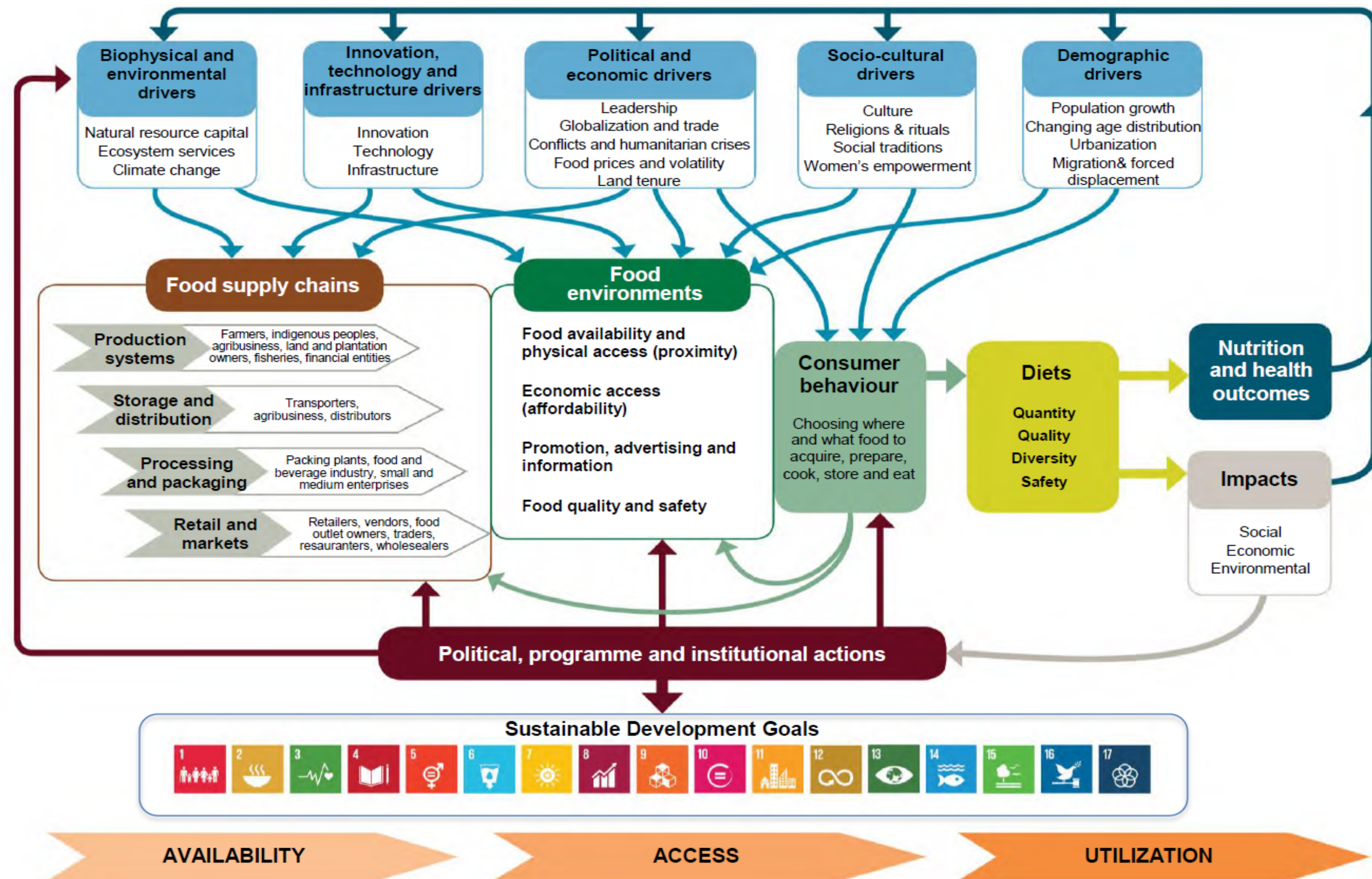
June 1st – 3rd, 2025



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
AT MONA, JAMAICA



Conceptual Framework of Food Systems for Diets & Nutrition (FAO, 2017)



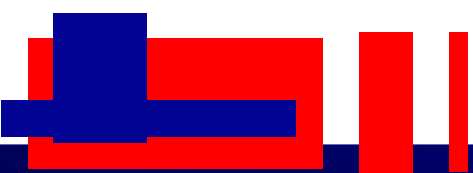
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL #2

Aims to:

- **2.1** End hunger and ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round by 2030.
- **2.2** End all forms of malnutrition, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

Four Major Pillars of Food Security

- Availability
- Access
- Utilization
- Stability



Food Insecurity

Marginal

Worry about food running out before having enough \$\$ to buy more

Moderate

Not being able to afford healthy food, often buying less food or lower quality food to make ends meet

Severe

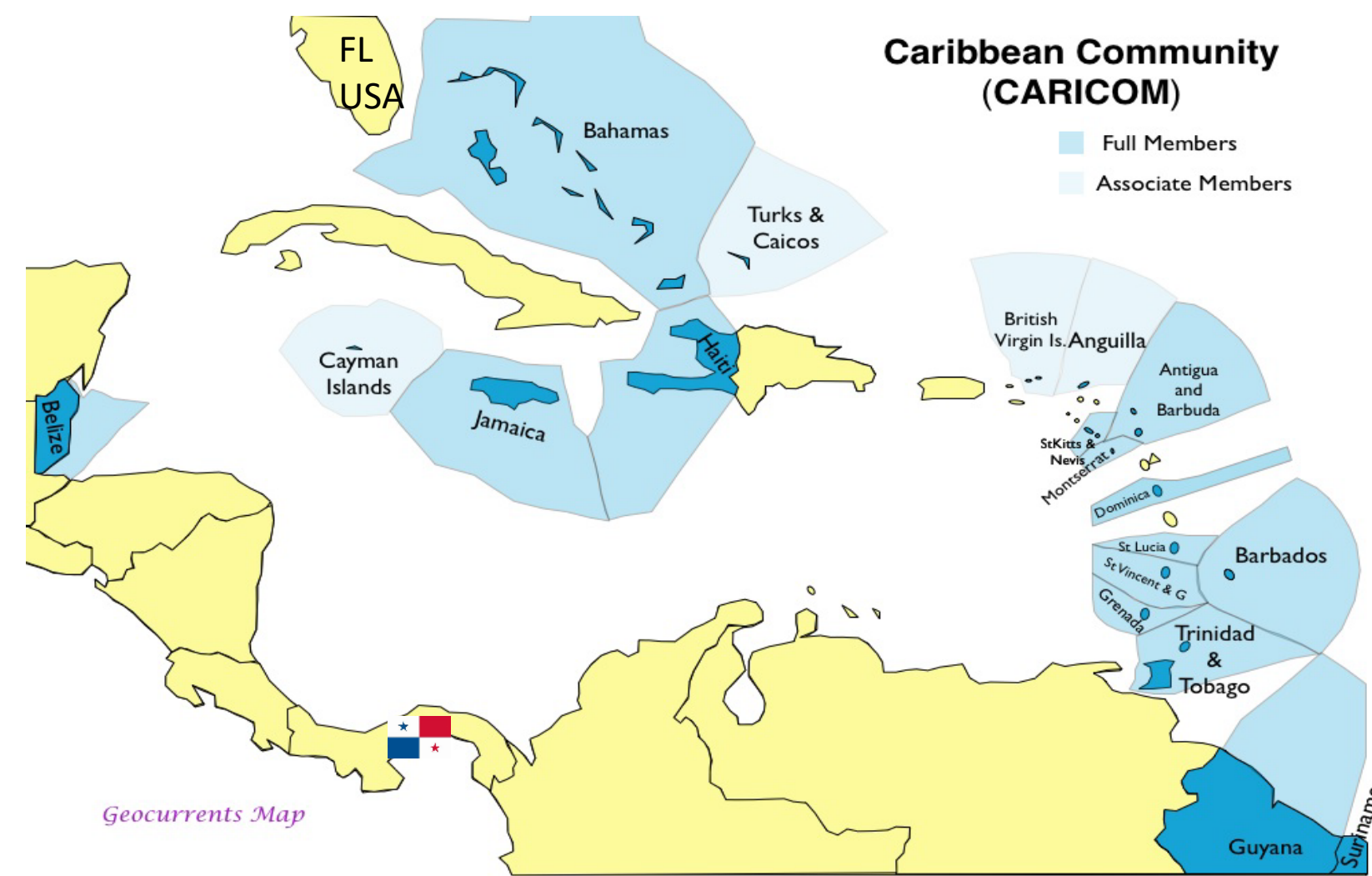
Running out of food, skipping meals, or going for days without eating




333 million people across 78 countries face acute food insecurity in 2023
up from 258 million in 58 countries in 2022 (*World Food Programme, 2024*)



Emergence of the Silent Food Crisis in the Caribbean



- Agricultural sector contributions to food supply and GDP reduced/replaced
 - *Tourism, manufacturing, other sectors*
- Region imports ~60-80% of its food
 - *Strain on foreign currency & increased cost of goods*
 - *Increased threat of food insecurity FAO*
- 57% of region's population is 'food insecure' (WFP & CARICOM, 2022)
- 52% cannot afford daily cost for a healthy diet (US\$4.23) (PAHO, 2022)
- CARICOM introduced a "25% in 2025"
 - *initiative aimed at reducing the Caribbean food bill by 25 %2030?*



Urban Poverty & City Planning

- Many employed people experience poverty, too often because they can only find low-wage jobs and part-time hours.
- Challenged to afford/access nutritious food
- Lack of clean water, proper sanitation — exacerbates the problem
 - Results in more frequent illnesses, especially GI-related
- Creates a downward spiral especially for those already disproportionately affected

Avoid the cycle of stigmatizing poverty & hunger

Food Security & Livelihoods Impact

[COVID Pandemic Period]

- 70% Jamaicans went an entire day without eating
- 34% Skipped meals/ ate less than usual
- 72% Used \$avings to meet food & other needs
- 58% Had moderate to severe food insecurity




Caribbean Agriculture in the Face of Climate Change & Natural Disasters



- Agricultural sector is extremely vulnerable to hurricanes
 - Hurricane Maria (2017) devastated Dominica's agriculture (100% loss of crops)
- It is expected that climate change will herald in
 - Unpredictable weather patterns
 - Longer drought periods
 - More intense hurricanes
 - Unpredictable planting and reaping cycles

(State of the Climate Report, 2015).





Environmental risks on Food supply

- Increases in temperature will cause reduction in global crop yields of major crops
 - Maize, winter wheat, spring wheat, soybean and rice. FAO
 - Jamaica highly dependent on importation of wheat & rice
- Global projections are an increased risk of childhood malnutrition

(State of the Climate Report, 2015).

Negril, Jamaica – Beach showing severe & irreversible shoreline erosion

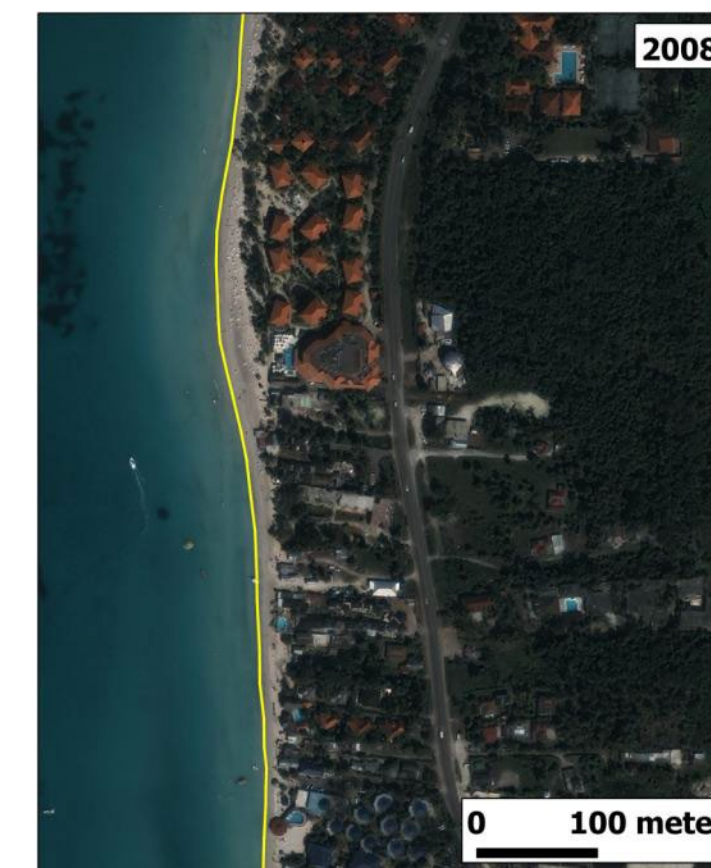
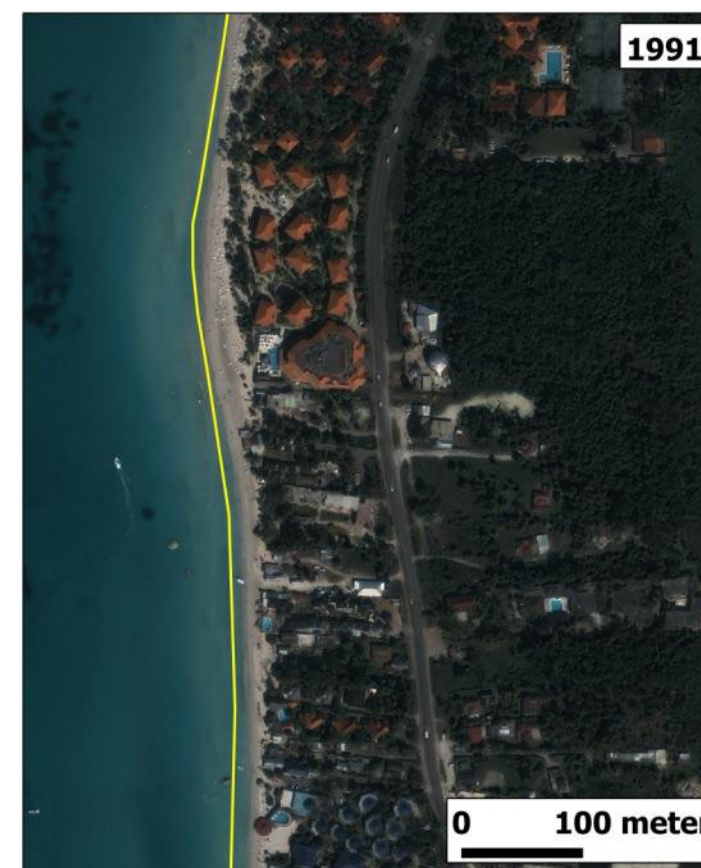
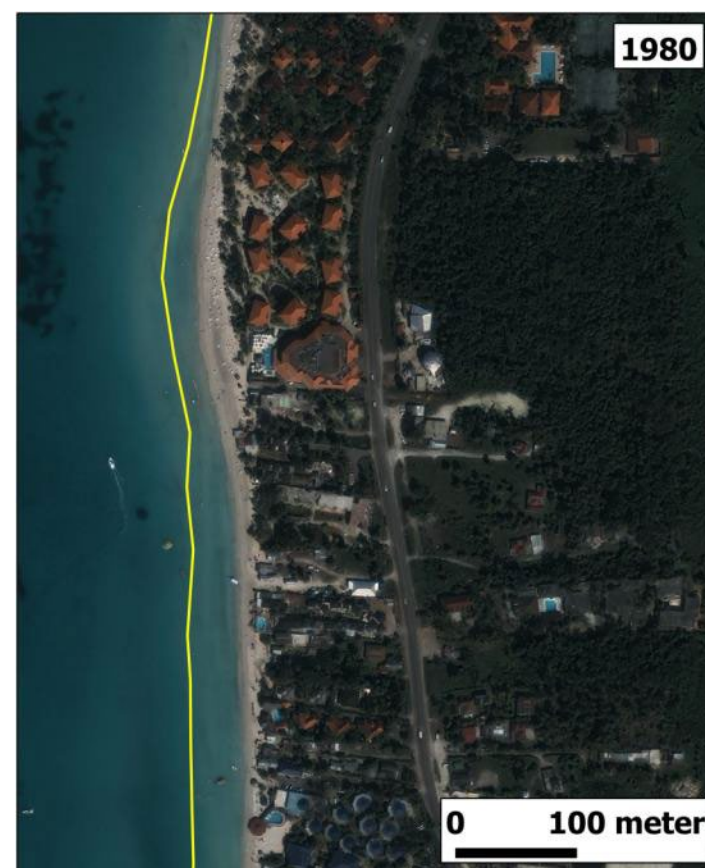
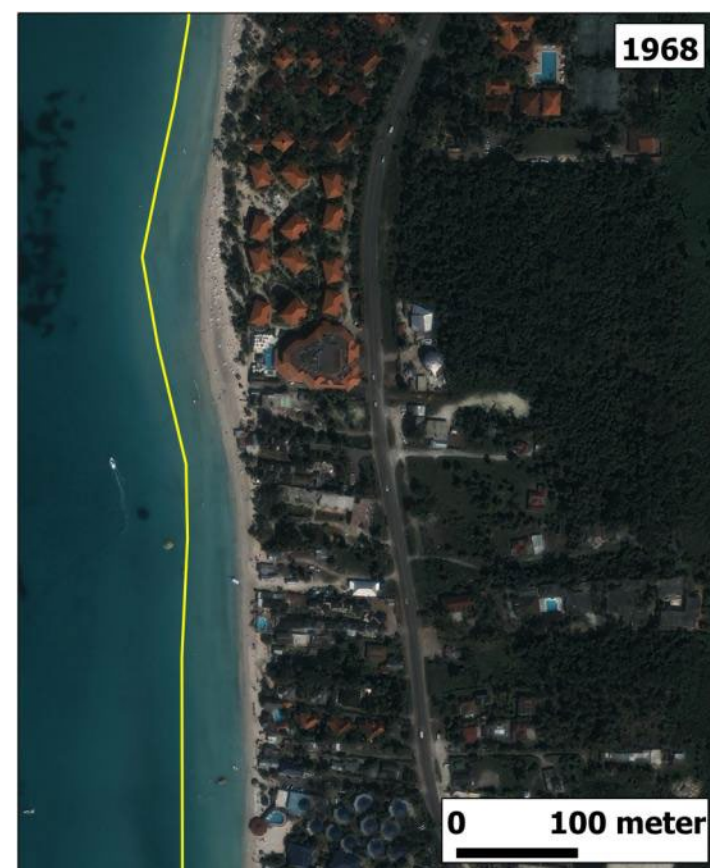
Impact on tourism

RiVAMP (GoJ and UN Environmental Programme)

The **YELLOW** line represents the shoreline at the stated year

The **RED** line is a projection of the shoreline change

0.5 metre and one metre per annum



1968



2008

Projected@20y



Mal-nutrition in all its forms

Urgent need for healthy food

- Products
- Standards
- Policies

- 1:2 adults, 1:3 children overweight or living with obesity
- Chronic non-communicable diseases

Diabetes
Hypertension
Cancers

CVD
Stroke

75% of deaths

73% of premature deaths (i.e. 30-70yo)

- Exposure to unhealthy, ultra-processed food & beverages - widespread

Karen Marie Portaleo's Tootsie Fay-fat lady series

Hunger & Hidden Hunger

- Hunger at 17.2%
- Undernutrition remains problematic for some groups
- Hidden hunger with micronutrient deficiencies Globally
 - 1 in 2 children <5 y are deficient in either iron, zinc, or vitamin A
 - Risks of stunted growth, poor cognitive development, and a weakened immune system
 - 2 in 3 women of reproductive age (15-49 years) suffer from iron, zinc, and folate deficiency
 - Risks of complications during childbirth, increased maternal mortality, and babies born with low birth weights, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

2024 Lancet Global Health Report



Shifts from traditional diets - a driver of the worldwide rise of NCDs & hidden hunger

Unprocessed and Minimally processed Foods



Processed Foods



Ultra-processed Foods



High Consumption of Unhealthy, Ultra-processed foods & Sugary beverages



- Direct causal relationship between children's exposure to marketing and obesity (*Norman et al., 2016*)
- Energy dense, lacks important nutrients, hyperpalatable, large portions, etc
- Caribbean nationals among the highest consumers of sweetened drinks globally
- Pervasive marketing, exposure & access
 - TV, radio, online, newspaper, packaging, schools (*Ferguson et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2020*)
 - *Wholesale clubs, fast-food restaurants, food-centered culture*

Commercial Determinants of Health



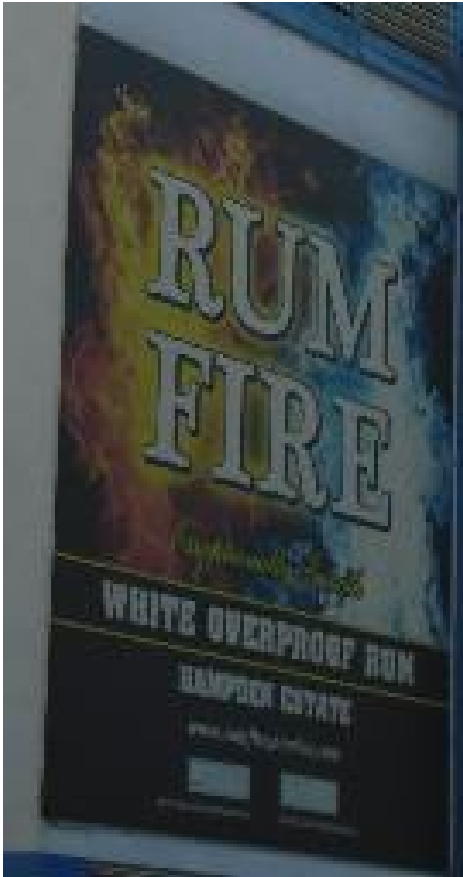
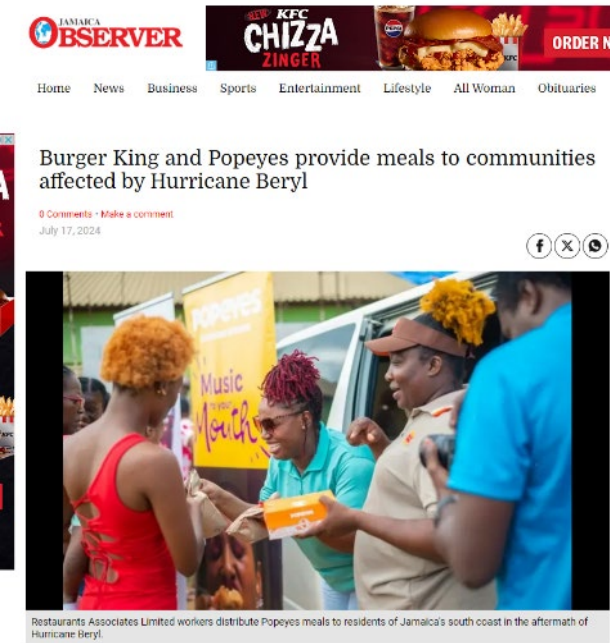
Survival of the fattest
Jens Galschiøt & Lars Calmar, 2002

- Undue corporate & commercial interests over health
- Food corporations often support charitable hunger relief while also holding power over key drivers of food insecurity (ie access, availability, etc.)
- Donations include surplus food, but very often are mostly unhealthy and ultraprocessed
- Corporate social responsibility?

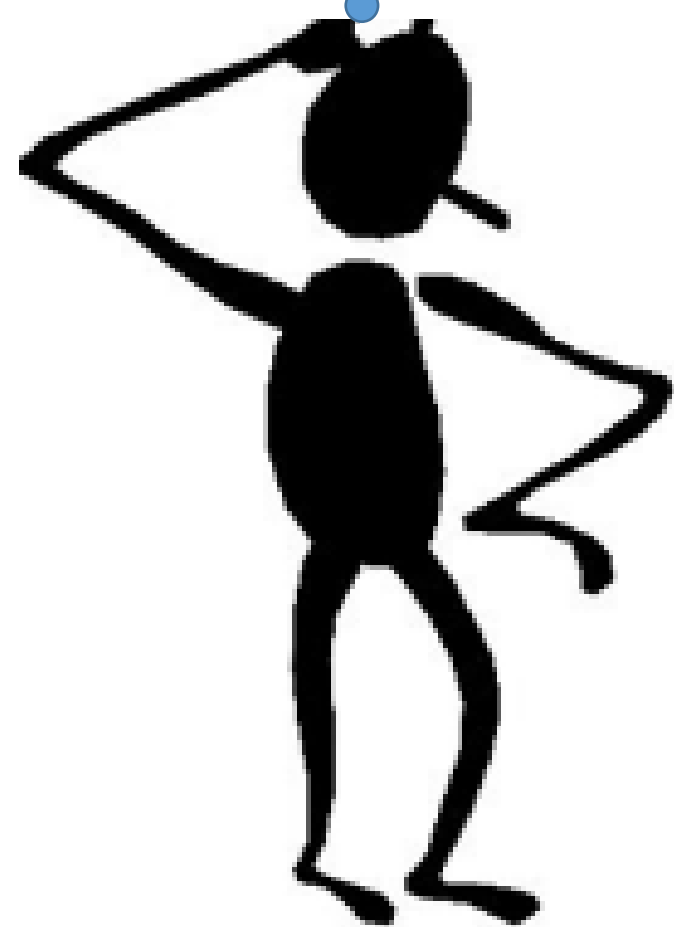
Children, women, high risk groups are primary targets of unhealthy product marketing

57 Chain Restaurants That Do School Fundraisers

✕ Conflict of interest!



Do we know what
we are eating?

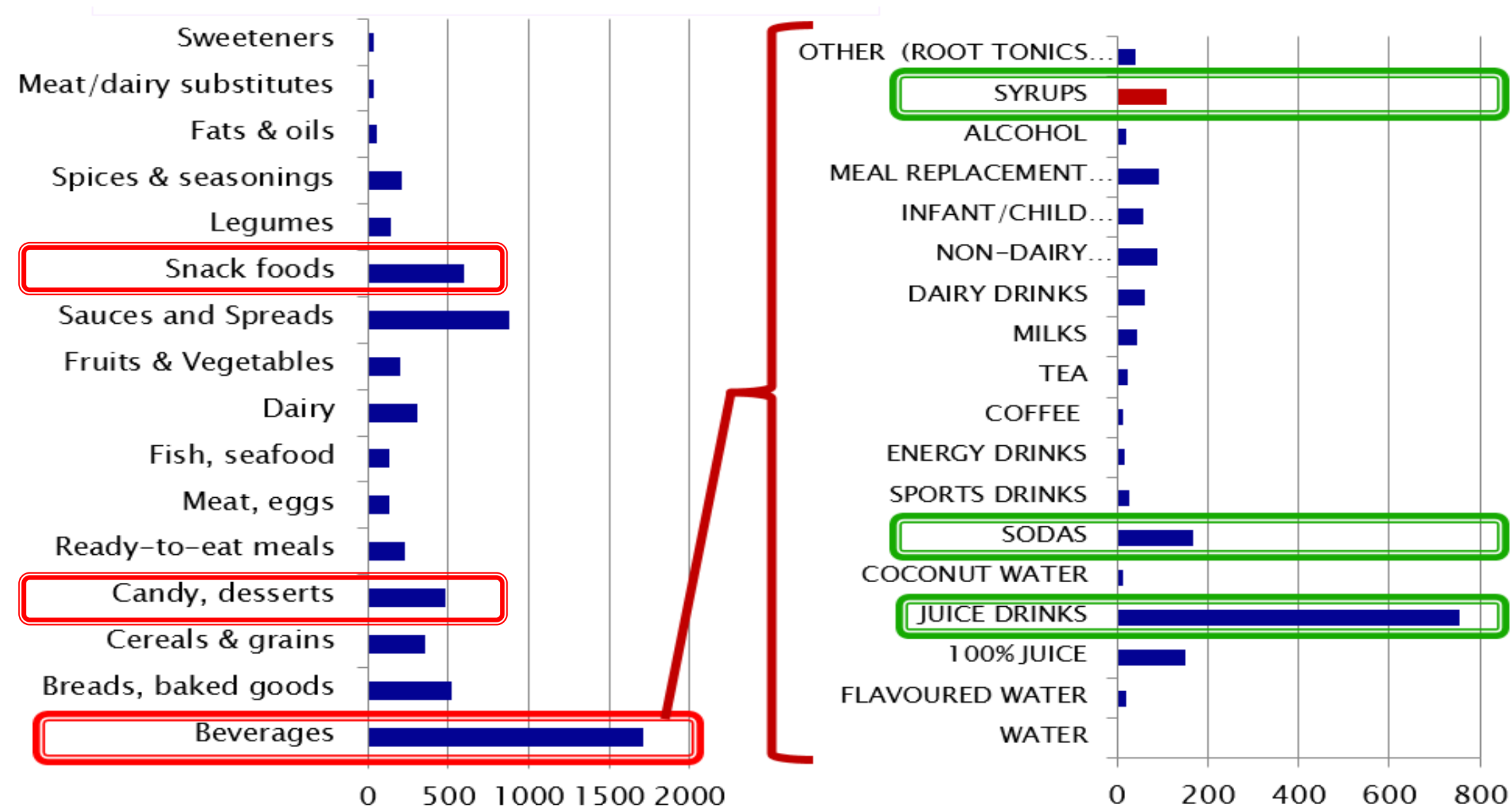


ART - DAN BERGER - CONCEPT - MIKE ADAMS

WWW.NATURALNEWS.COM



Unhealthy Retail Food Environment (Pre-packaged)



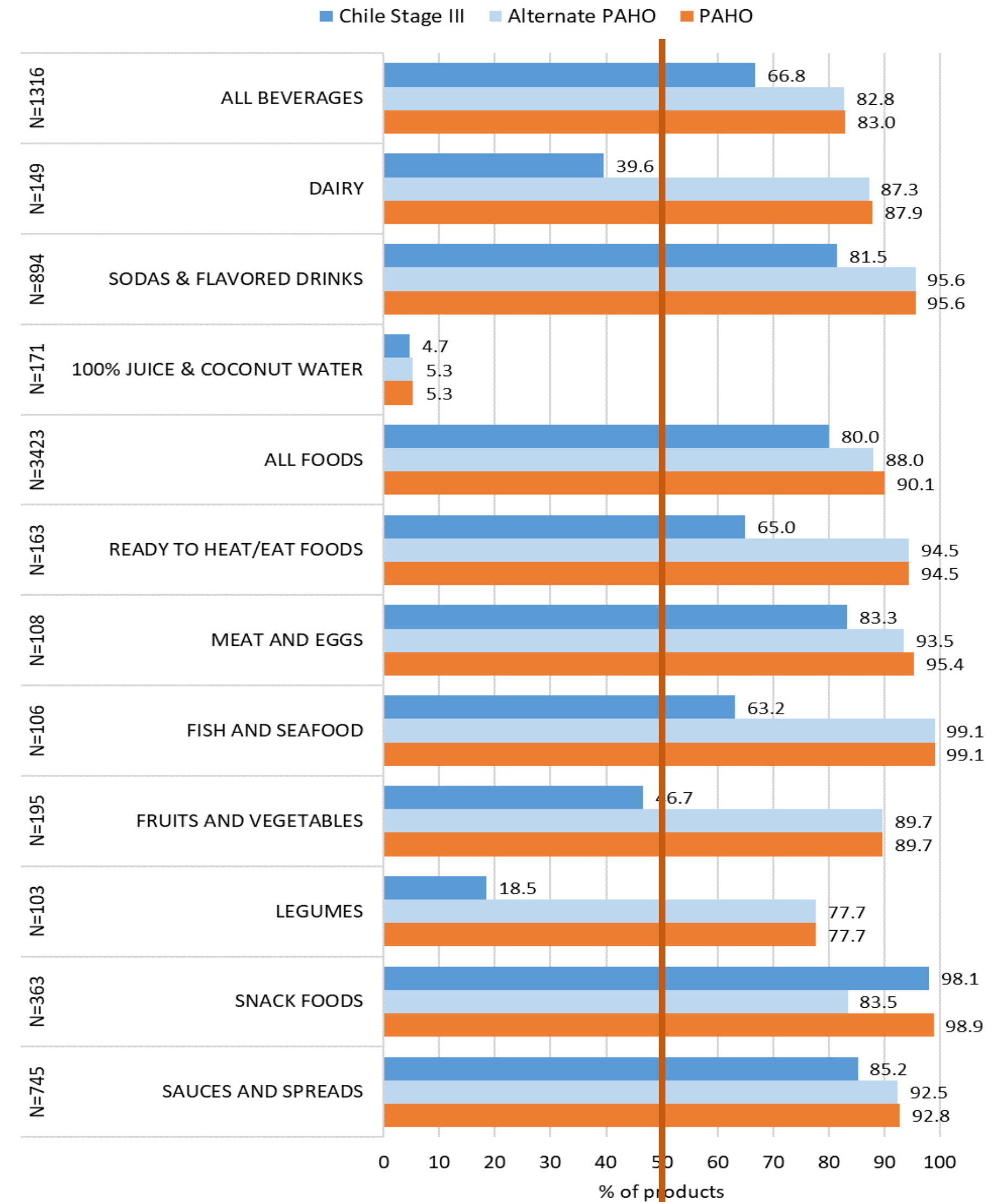
- Healthy choices are severely limited
- Majority sweetened beverages
- Pervasive marketing of unhealthy foods

Reference: Soares-Wynter, S. *et al.* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods9010065>

Pre-packaged Food Quality

- Majority of pre-packaged products contain harmful levels of salt, sugars & fats
- Nutrients of concern for NCD risk
 - 67-83% beverages
 - 88-90% food

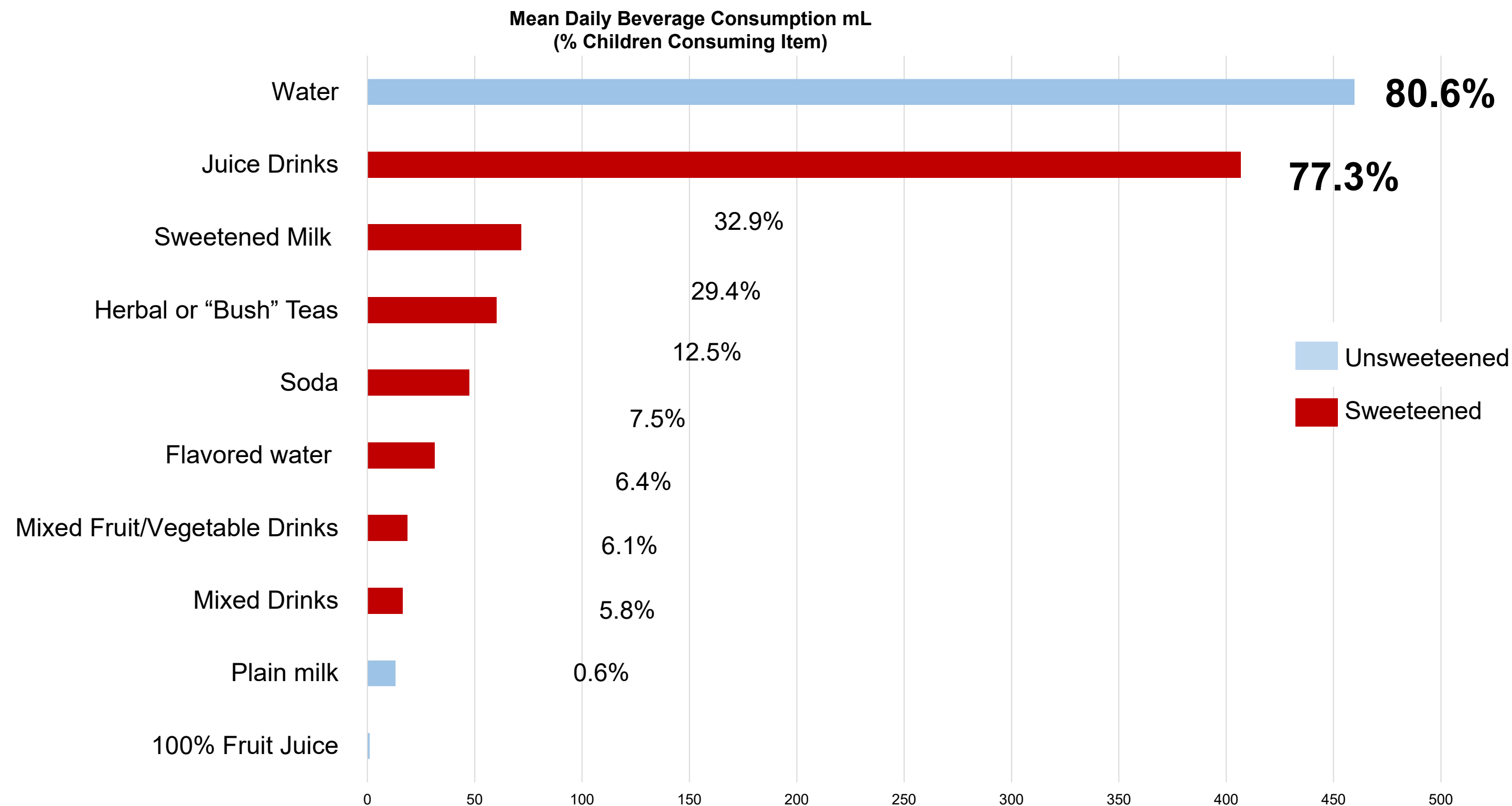
ULTRA-PROCESSED!



50%

JAMBAR Kids Study – Jamaican children’s daily beverage intake (7-12y)

Cross-sectional study (Jamaica & Barbados) – Foods, physical activity & influencers



**Mean Intake of
Beverage Sugars**
>16 TSP/day!

Inequalities & Disparities

*All ages and socioeconomic groups are impacted, BUT
hunger and diet-related diseases do not impact populations equally.*

- Vulnerable groups
 - Children
 - Low-income households
 - Pregnant & lactating women
 - Elderly
 - Individuals living alone, social/religious minorities
 - Persons with disability
 - Remote/rural dwellers
- *Gaps in the quality of health and healthcare across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups*

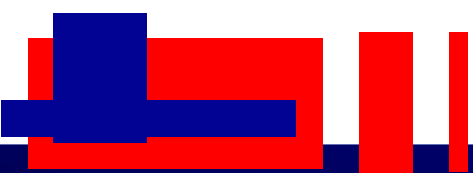


Social & Economic Consequences

- Stress, stigma & social isolation/discrimination
- Lower educational achievement
- Lower wages, unable to work at full capacity - *Lower job attainment, less likely to be promoted*
- Reduced self-esteem, susceptibility to depression, anxiety, etc.
- Impact on national economies - *Jamaica – U.S. \$425.3M due to obesity-related costs*



Finding Solutions,
Creating Opportunities,
Preventing Risks





The Human Right to Food

Food Security

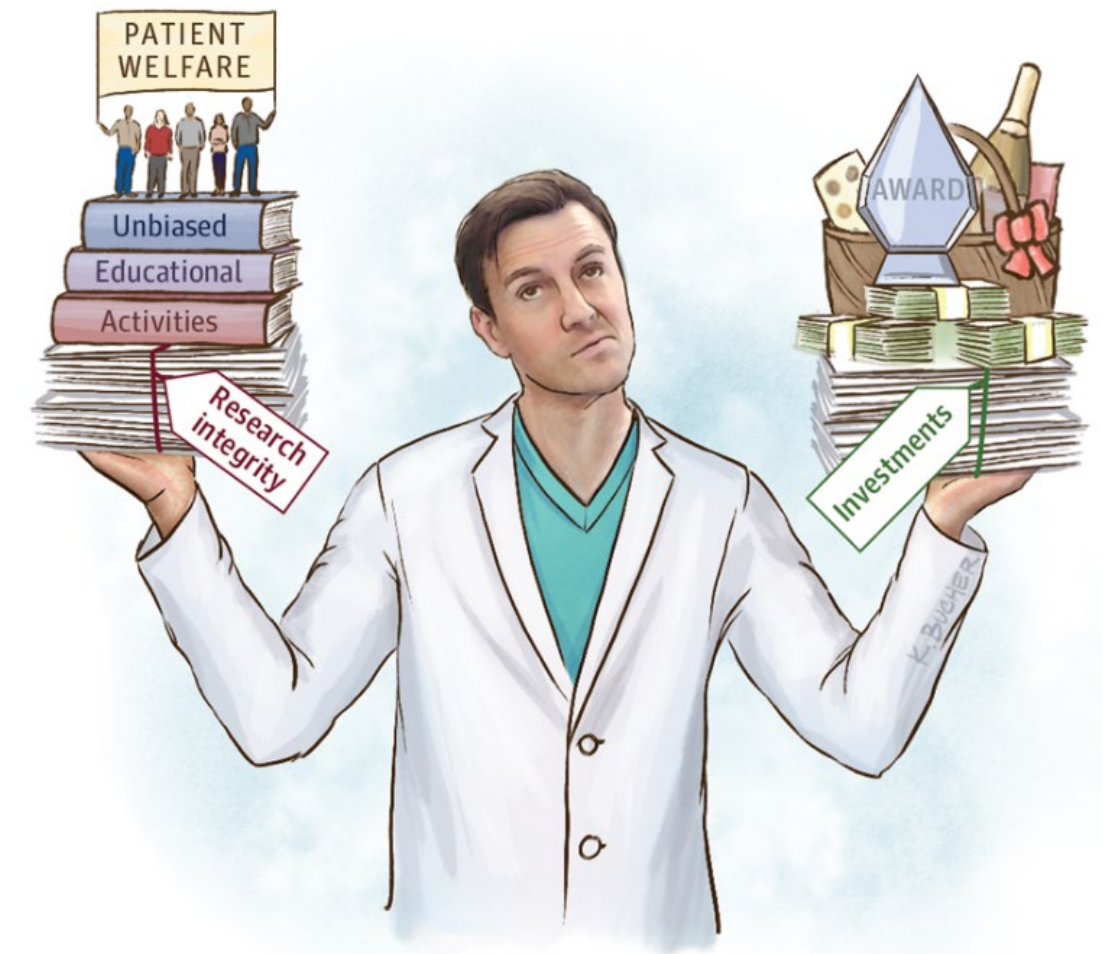
“When all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”

FAO World Food Summit, 1996

Healthcare Providers –avoid being a barrier

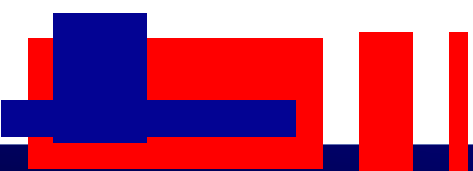
- hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, health professionals & insurers

- Designed to treat &/or support health
- Serve as strategic leadership & support for broader national health, food & environment policies
- Be an endorsement for health and avoid conflicts of interest
 - Food partnerships must avoid “brand halo” misconceptions
 - Given the adverse effects of unhealthy, ultra-processed foods & beverages, they should have no place in healthcare settings
(Richardson et al., 2022).



Malnutrition

- Child malnutrition (weight for age) is low at about 1% (2008-2018) (PIOJ, 2019)
- Between 2005 - 2017, the proportion of undernourished persons in the Caribbean region declined from 23.3% to 16.5%.
- TMRU Ward (UHWI) Closed in 2017
 - *Attributed to TMRU's success in leading the research and clinical trials that helped to eradicate child malnutrition in Jamaica*



Novel Outreach/Assistance Interventions

- Healthy Food Incentives
 - Vouchers, coupons, discounts (*fruits, vegetables, non-perishable healthy foods*)
 - Farmer's markets, retailers, special distributors
- Pre-assembled food packages
- Support expansion of social welfare criteria
- Support disaster response
- Support food policy initiatives, research & advocacy



Alleviating Food Insecurity in the Face of Disasters



Preventing malnutrition before it starts

Tracking & assessing nutrition information

Identifying and managing risks

Meeting basic nutrition needs

Coordinated distribution, access, availability

Providing & securing healthy food supplies

Food Standards & Safety



CARICOM REGIONAL STANDARD

Labelling of Foods – Pre-Packaged Foods –
Specification (Revision)

DCRS 5: 202X



Nutrition Facts	
about 6 servings per container	
Serving size	1 cup (140g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	170
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	16%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 5mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 22g	8%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 16g	
Includes 8g Added Sugars	16%
Protein 2g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 20mg	2%
Iron 1mg	6%
Potassium 240mg	6%

*The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

- Primary public education tool
- Important for consumer awareness
- Protects consumers AND manufacturers
- Product quality control & marketability
- Enforcement at ports
- Protects investments

Draft Standard on Prepackaged Foods – Being Updated

Draft Standard on Nutrition Labelling - NEW

Nutrition Facts

about 6 servings per container
Serving size 1 cup (140g)

Amount per serving
Calories 170

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 8g 10%

Saturated Fat 3g 15%

Trans Fat 0g

Cholesterol 0mg 0%

Sodium 5mg 0%

Total Carbohydrate 22g 8%

Dietary Fiber 2g 7%

Total Sugars 16g

Includes 8g Added Sugars 16%

Protein 2g

Vitamin D 0mcg

Calcium 20mg

Iron 1mg

Potassium 240mg

*The % Daily Value tells you how much a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. A diet day is used for general nutrition advice.

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

INGREDIENTS: Potato Flakes, Sunflower Oil, Unmodified Potato Starch, Rice Flour, and Less Than 2% of the Following: Mono- and Diglycerides, Sugar, Salt, Dextrose, Nonfat Milk Solids, Onion Powder, Whey, Monosodium Glutamate, Corn Starch, Sour Cream (Cream, Nonfat Milk, Cultures), Lactose, Partially Hydrogenated Soybean and Cottonseed Oil, Maltodextrin, Soy Lecithin, Citric Acid, Natural and Artificial Flavor, Malic Acid, Cheddar Cheese (Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes), Sodium Caseinate, Buttermilk Solids, Corn Syrup Solids, Artificial Color (Including Yellow 5 Lake, Blue 1, Red 40), Disodium Inosinate, Disodium Guanylate, and Lactic Acid.

CONTAINS MILK AND SOY INGREDIENTS.

- Nutrition Facts & nutrient declarations currently not mandatory
- Validity of health claims? (allergens, sugar-free, low-fat)
- Comprehensive ingredient listing

“High-in” Front-of-package Warning Labels



Simple. Obvious. Easy to understand.

School Nutrition Policies



#OUTOFOURSCHOOLS

OUT OF OUR SCHOOLS

Did you know that many of our schoolmates have an unhealthy diet, especially at school, and now 23% of them are overweight and/or obese?

One less sugary drink at my school may mean one friend less at risk of cavities or diabetes.

The solution is simple, right?

ACT NOW!

LET'S GET UNHEALTHY FOODS AND BEVERAGES
OUT OF OUR SCHOOLS

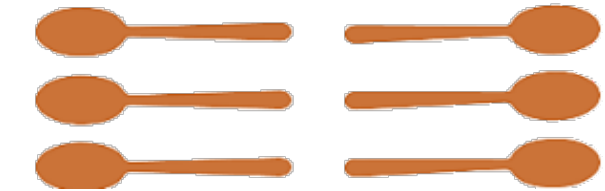
- National School Nutrition Policies – *Securing Safe & Nutritious Food for Children*
- Can play a valuable role in improving diet quality of school meals.
 - Supports growth, muscle & brain development (cognition, mental ability), satiety
- Opportunity for all children to meet at least 1/3 of daily requirements



Changing Hydration Choices



WHO Recommended Maximum
6 teaspoons

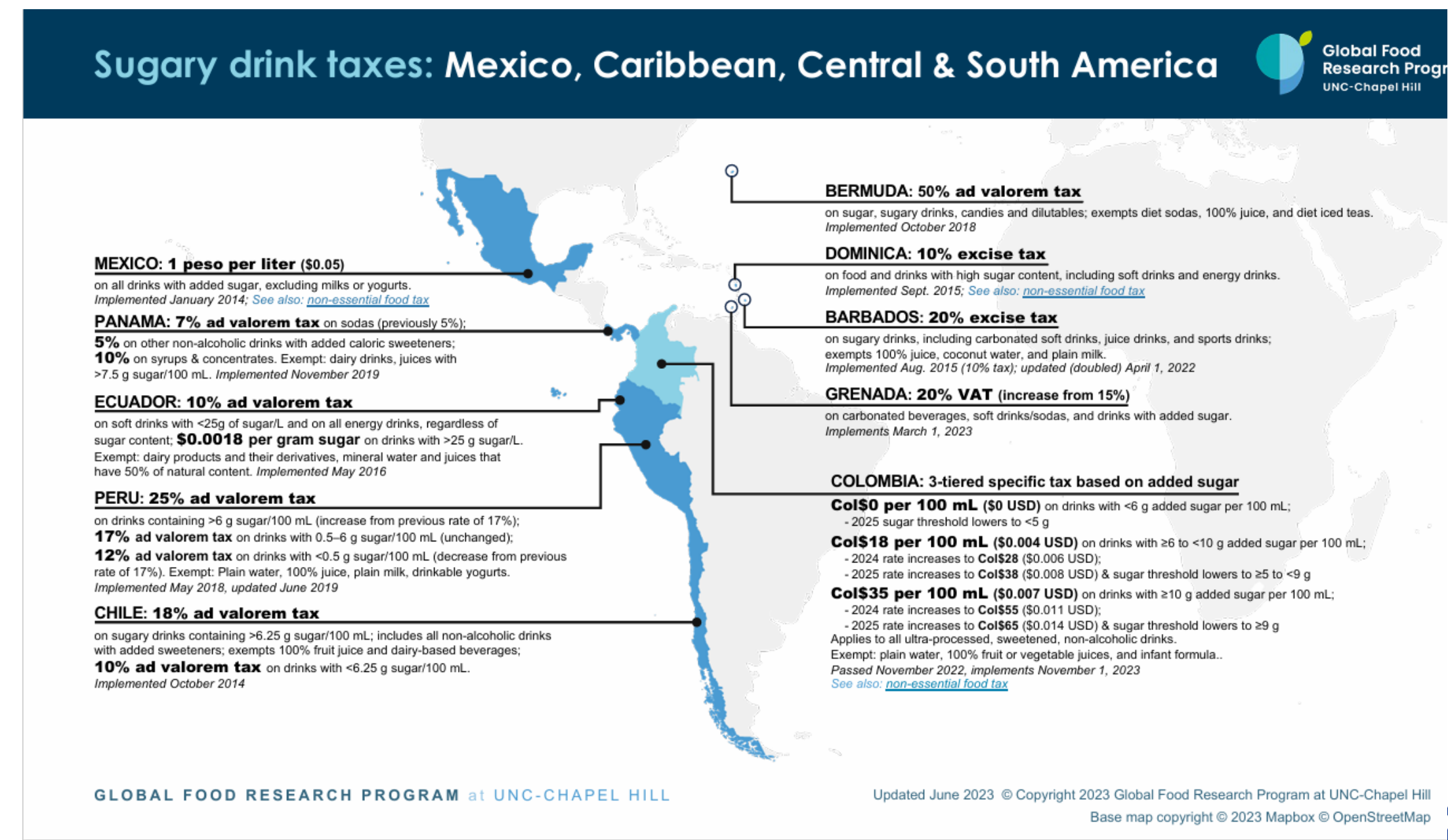


Fiscal Policies – a deterrent for harmful products



- Bermuda 50% *ad valorem* tax
- Barbados, 20% excise tax
- Dominica 10% excise tax
- Grenada 20% VAT

WHO – STRONG RECOMMENDATION



Worksite Wellness Programmes

- *Food insecurity linked to employee absenteeism & chronic health conditions*

Benefits:

- Offer support to at-risk employees
- Incorporate nutrition trackers into benefits programmes
- Provide a healthy environment model – work to home copy
- Provide financial support, in-kind donations, or partnerships



- ✓ Improve employee health & productivity
- ✓ Lower healthcare costs



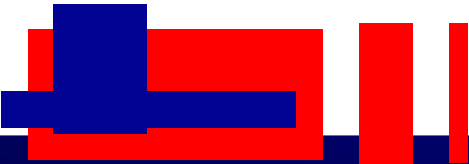
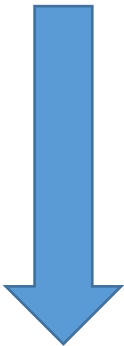
Public Education Promoting Healthier Dietary Patterns



Water
0 calories



Banana
80-100calories



Summary

- Food supply & costs
- Personal, social, cultural preferences
- Less resilient to repeated disasters
- Leveraging agriculture, trade & commercial partnerships
- Policy enforcement, political will
- Corruption, red tape, conflicts of interest
- Traditional diet norms eroded by unhealthy food marketing and fast-food landscape



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Recommendations



- Focus on bringing nutritious foods to areas/groups in need
- “Food is medicine” approach
- Provide nutritious food where it is most needed (schools, institutions, vulnerable communities/groups)
- Incentives promoting long-term, significant behavior change
- Advocate for & support public health initiatives
- Avoid stigmas & conflicts of interest when determining food security risks or interventions
- Multisectoral leadership, advocacy and accountability





Last words...

*Aim for Caribbean populations to have a **food secure environment** that supports the **adoption of healthful and sustainable eating and exercise behaviours**, for the main aim of **reducing disease risk**, and improve feelings of **well-being** and **productivity**.*

- Learning process
- Multisectoral partnerships are necessary
- Reduce burdens on health care systems and reliance on medical interventions
- We are all affected





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The LEGO Foundation



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