

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Ultra-Processed Foods Are Not In Alignment With The School Nutrition Policy

The Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (BCOP Coalition); The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB); The Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) and The Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners (referred to herein after as “Civil Society”) recognise the importance of responsible sponsorship in supporting youth sports and athletic programmes across Barbados. Events such as the National Primary Schools’ Athletic Championships (NAPSAC) provide vital spaces where the talent, energy and potential of our young people can be nurtured in positive and healthy ways.

Sports is more than competition. It is one of the important environments where children develop lifelong habits related to health, nutrition, discipline and physical fitness. These habits, when established early, can persist well into adulthood and contribute significantly to healthier communities.

For the above reasons, responsible and carefully aligned sponsorship of school sporting events is essential — particularly when commercial messaging can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted by young audiences.

Civil Society notes that under the phased implementation approach of Barbados’ School Nutrition Policy, certain products may not yet fall within the list of items currently considered non-compliant. However, this transitional phase should not obscure the central principle of the policy: school environments must ultimately be protected from the promotion and alignment of ultra-processed foods (UPFs).

Civil Society also takes this opportunity to clarify an important principle: ultra-processed foods are not consistent with the intent of the School Nutrition Policy, regardless of whether they fall within transitional phases of implementation. The policy’s guiding objective is to reduce children’s exposure to foods high in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats and to promote healthier food environments in schools.

This position is consistent with the strong recommendations of the World Health

Organization, which has repeatedly warned of the harmful health impacts associated with high consumption of ultra-processed foods, particularly among children. It is also aligned with recommendations from UNICEF which highlight promotion and marketing of unhealthy food and beverages as in conflict with children’s enjoyment of their rights to health, life and development, among others.

While the phased approach provides time for adjustment, the purpose and long-term direction of the policy is clear. As the policy reaches its full implementation stage, the promotion or alignment of ultra-processed foods within school environments will not be consistent with its objectives.

Civil Society’s concern therefore lies not only with specific products, but with the broader messaging that may arise when brands associated with ultra-processed foods are linked to school spaces. In particular, where brand identities are closely associated with completed meal offerings that fall outside the spirit of the policy, it risks creating confusion about the standards Barbados is working to establish.

Civil Society recognises that private sector engagement in youth development should occur and this must be within clear regulatory frameworks that ensure such engagement is consistent with children’s health and rights.

Barbados stands at a critical juncture. The decisions made today will influence not only the health of individual children, but also the sustainability of the country’s healthcare system and the well-being of future generations.

Protecting Barbadian children through strong policy implementation, responsible partnerships and meaningful education is not an abstract ideal — it is an investment in the nation’s future.

Not only is full implementation of the School Nutrition Policy necessary, but the speed and consistency of its implementation is also critical to its success. Rapid implementation is essential to protecting a generation of Barbadian children and to ensuring that schools remain spaces that nurture potential, reinforce healthy choices and support lifelong well-being.

