

**Speech for Hon Charmaine Scotty, Minister for Health and Medical Services,  
Republic of Nauru Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting  
Starling Hotel and Conference Centre, Geneva. Sunday 21st May, 2017  
'Shifting the Paradigm: Communities, Ownership, Choice and Change'**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address this meeting on behalf of Republic of Nauru and my fellow Ministers for Health in the Pacific.

In 1948, when WHO was founded, the focus was communicable diseases, STIs, Maternal/Child Health, Nutrition, Environmental health and data collection on morbidity and mortality.

Reflecting on Health in the Pacific over the last few decades, we have made progress in some areas of our health systems but in other areas, some of us are still struggling despite commitments as Ministers to the various agreements.

We keep making strong statements at various forums to our commitment to improve the lives of our populations and yet despite our efforts, the data is saying we are not winning on a number of fronts.

In Tonga last year, we expressed our significant concern at the diabetes epidemic in the Pacific which was described as a Tsunami by my colleague from Samoa and where the Director General for SPC described the Pacific as the NCD capital of world.

It is not hard to see why this happened and how it crept up on us. In the Pacific for some countries, we went from a subsistence existence to access to wider global markets in financing, food, travel, manufacturing and production. We welcomed the fast food community, cheaper products and trade deals. Technology opened doors to education, business, communication and longer life but it is expensive to invest in.

The flip side was our people were the recipients of the consequences with a startling effect on health and mental health for which in my opinion we are not and still are not prepared.

As we all know, Health is affected on a number of fronts by our environments, climate change, food security, our ability to invest, workforce and our will to strive for a quality driven health system.

We stated we recognised the gaps, we were committed to targeted responses nationally, focus on early intervention and promotion and strengthening our health systems.

We applauded the achievements and pledged to empower our people that must involve families and communities.

When I reviewed the various report recommendations from meetings held over the last few decades, there are common repetitive themes throughout – Financing, Legislation, Implementation of programmes, Workforce, Data recording, monitoring/evaluation and access to data.

We all wish and are committed to providing universal healthcare and improving our health systems, we all wish to reduce the burden of NCDs,

Communicable diseases and STIs. We all wish to protect our children and improve maternal health. We all wish decrease teenage pregnancies and decrease violence against women. We all wish to have a sustainable future.

My challenge to us all, is, is it time to shift the paradigm and look at how we are approaching health.

In the Pacific Region, families have to cope with Cultural Norms for example, Remits, Poverty, Fast food and changing lifestyles, lack of ownership due to competing daily decisions.

Public Health has tended to deliver messages and develop strategies according to Donor will and the global strategies. The complexities are, there is a mismatch between strategy and deliverables because the food manufacturers have found ways to entice, use the words healthy, flipside caloric content as an example promote 97 %fat free as it is profit driven. There is a great series of documentaries on You Tube called 'The Men Who Made us Fat' – these give insight into the exponential drive of fast food and which can also be mapped against the exponential growth in obesity. Some countries still developing in the Pacific struggle to deliver Public Health initiatives and the Curative side of the system will always win the financial support.

Community voices are not really heard. Do Public Health staff believe/understand their own messaging, is it just a job. People will ask questions but staff cannot give logical answers behind why.

An example, communities attend the various international days do they understand the messaging behind the awareness programme or is it just that - attending, because food is there as the enticement, one of the things we are asking people to modify when we know it is much broader than that.

In my experience, once people understand the what and why of how their own biological system work and why they developed an NCD or what they need to do to prevent developing a long term condition, they start to make the change.

Personal ownership of health is the most complex type of ownership there is and I am sure if we look at ourselves you will all agree.

As we traverse from the 'womb to the tomb' the lifecycle is fraught with situational and adventitious circumstances and decision-making.

Adventitious issues such as Cyclones, and other natural disasters in the Pacific impact on lives, livelihoods and Public Health. Survivability becomes the priority.

Decision-making involves individual choices and change. How are we delivering our messages that will influence those choices and changes across our societies.

For Nauru as an example, all our food is imported mainly by sea, as by Air it is not economically viable – simple solutions exist some may say, but in reality, it is not. We cannot grow much because water is scarce for most of the year, therefore we rely on desalinated water deliveries at a cost, 90% of the time. We do not have livestock due to our harsh landscape.

Therefore our approach to solve the problem to achieve not only our National outcomes but Global imperatives is to appeal to our Communities for they may have the answers.

We need to partner with our Communities to ensure they do their part with the basics such as personal hygiene, immunisations, enjoy a healthy lifestyle and own their choices.

I say to you all, Community Voices Matter – for we are our future.

Thank you and May God Continue to Bless each and every one of you.

ENDS