



PR#181-23

PRESS RELEASE

Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools, Healthy Belize Initiative to be Piloted in Schools

Belmopan, August 15, 2023.

The *Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools, Healthy Belize* initiative is a program developed to promote good health and nutrition in schools. It involves the gradual restriction of sugary drinks, creating enabling spaces for health and nutrition, and increasing healthy lifestyles in schools.

Statistics have shown that 35.8% of adolescents ages 13-15 are obese, 7% of children under five are overweight, and 15% of children under five are stunted. In addition, 66.9% of adolescents consume a sweetened drink each day. A recent survey conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization within six primary schools in Belize shows that 93% of students consumed one or more sweetened beverages per day.

Premised on those alarming statistics, one of the key objectives of this program is to encourage healthy habits within the school system by reducing the sale of sugary drinks and unhealthy snacks and promoting healthier food options in schools. It will allow for better development of children and adolescents and decrease the risk of diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Key activities for *Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools, Healthy Belize* include:

- Sensitization sessions with teachers, students, school community, parents, and the business community.
- Nutrition education sessions for students and the general school community.
- Media campaigns for healthy eating and general nutrition promotion.
- Talk shows and media rounds.
- Training sessions with teachers, cafeteria managers, and vendors.

- Engagement with the pilot schools to promote proper nutrition and good eating habits and foster a culture of healthy lifestyles.

The various activities under this program will result in healthier habits, healthier students, healthier teachers, healthier communities, and a healthier productive nation.

This initiative will be piloted in 18 schools within the Belize District and will gradually be rolled out to other schools within the country. It is being spearheaded by the ministries of Health, Education, and Agriculture in partnership with UNICEF, PAHO, and INCAP.

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