

On the road to reduce NCDs in Nauru

by James Yu, Chih-Chen Chou and Stacey Cain

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Participants in one of the cooking workshops held as part of the NCDs Prevention Roadshow
Photo Credit: Taiwan Technical Mission in Nauru

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus in early 2020, COVID-19 has become the most attention-grabbing disease in the world. Measures to contain the pandemic are breaking families apart, halting development and making our lives more challenging. Yet other diseases are still impacting patients globally, without the same attention. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are among them, and are a particular issue in Pacific island countries such as Nauru.

NCDs, including diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cancers, are often attributed to lifestyle. Unbalanced diets, smoking, alcohol abuse and being sedentary are the four main risk factors for NCDs. Not only can NCDs make us sick temporarily, or cause death, they can also worsen the quality of our lives over a prolonged period.

In Nauru, a high dependency on imported processed foods and limited cultivable land for food production make it harder for Nauruan people to fight against NCDs. Instead of having fresh vegetables and high-quality proteins, canned foods and rice are the staples of people's daily meals. Empty calorie foods with limited nutrients fill people's stomachs but damage their health.

Fortunately, more and more people and healthcare workers are now aware of the issue of unhealthy diets in Nauru. Residents and community leaders voluntarily participate in all kinds of NCD prevention activities, including workshops on nutritious and balanced diets, and sports such as the Nauru Australian Football League (NAFL) and road running.

The Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) in Nauru has been standing with local people and communities to fight against NCDs for years, starting its healthy diet work in 2012. TTM believes that serving healthy foods "from farm to table" plays a critical role in combating NCDs. Bringing freshly grown vegetables, fruits and fresh eggs directly to the dining table can save on household costs and increase the intake of

vital nutrients.

After many years of effort, TTM has successfully grown green vegetables in the Nauru soil by fertilising with self-made compost, and has raised hundreds of chickens for eggs in specially built coops to provide local poultry. Currently, TTM in Nauru is focused on steps to improve the quality and quantity of local plants and stock farming products, all with the goal of providing more high-quality foods to Nauruans for better nutrition.



Seedlings and supplies for families to start kitchen gardens (TTM in Nauru).

Additionally, TTM also conducts various activities to increase interest in growing foods and raising poultry. These have included a seedling giveaway for residents to grow vegetables in their backyards, workshops on farming and chicken raising, and farm tours for people interested in gardening as well as for students in schools. Some community leaders have also invited TTM to provide training to their school caterers on healthy meals. TTM believes that the Nauruan people can be supported to produce healthy food for themselves and the next generation.

In late 2019, TTM started a new activity called the NCDs Prevention Roadshow. The roadshow aims to educate local people on lifestyle risks in the hope of reducing the incidence of NCDs. It includes medical sessions, nutrition awareness talks, cooking demonstrations and health check-ups, with experts from different fields working together to support a healthier population.

Roadshows have already taken place in Meneng, Yaren, Boe, Aiwo, Buada,

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Denigomodu, Nibok, Uaboe, Baitisi, Anetan and Ewa districts, with enthusiastic community participation. In mid-2020, activities were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but they continued again as soon as it was safe for people to gather. TTM believes that the risk of coronavirus infection is not the only significant health issue facing Nauru. Controlling NCDs is urgent as well.

To enhance collaboration with local government and communities, TTM invited Naoero Public Health Centre and Nauru Rotary to join us. As the leader on NCD prevention in Nauru, Naoero (Nauru in local language) Public Health Centre has been working hard on NCD-related activities and in policy promotion, as well as providing clinic services, consultations, education programs and home health care.

Dr Don Kadir (Coordinator of NCDs Prevention, Naoero Public Health Centre) gave a talk to improve knowledge and share information on NCDs at the roadshow. TTM's nutrition specialist (and one of the authors of this blog), James Yu, gave a cooking demonstration using locally grown produce to prepare a healthy and balanced meal. Hand-hygiene lessons were delivered by Lisa Karl (Club President, Rotary Club of Nauru). After the talk and cooking demonstration, free seedlings and compost were given away to attendees in the hopes that inspired residents could start their own kitchen garden for vegetables and apply what they had learned from the roadshows at their own dining table.



A cooking workshop during the NCDs Prevention Roadshow (TTM in Nauru).

NCD prevention needs everyone to get involved! TTM will always be here to help. For more information about our activities, please follow our Facebook page: [Taiwan](#)

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