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For Immediate Release

Heart and Stroke Foundation Committed to working with School Vendors to Bring Healthier School Environments

The Heart and Stroke of Barbados (HSFB) is forging a healthier school environment by working with school vendors and canteen operators as part of its Childhood Obesity Prevention Programme. HSFB held its first Vendors Training session at The St. Michael's School on Wednesday June 26th. The session was aimed at ensuring school vendors and canteen operators are fully engaged and informed about the health impacts of the excess consumption of sugary drinks and the nutritional content of popular snacks. It also sought to introduce them to healthier options for their menus and trays. The session was facilitated by Prof. Dr. Anne St. John, Lead Policy Champion with HSFB, Mr. Lennox Chandler, Chief Agriculture Officer of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and Ms. Stacia Whittaker, Public Health Nutritionist with the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

With a rate of 31% of our children being obese or overweight, HSFB is seeking to ensure that September brings a healthier school environment. This will be done in partnership with school vendors and canteen operators; specifically, in restricting the sale and marketing of sugary drinks in the six schools that are part of the Model school Programme. HSFB in its current campaign, is encouraging parents/guardians and policy makers to protect the nation's children by cutting out consumption of sugary drinks. Primarily, this is to be achieved by implementing policies restricting sugary drinks at schools and placing limitations on marketing of same to children. Children spend more than half of their time within school environments, and research shows that it is in the school environment that they are largely at risk to engage in unhealthy eating and drinking habits.

Currently the Barbados government carries a \$64 million health bill in the treatment of cardiovascular disease and diabetes alone. This is a bill Barbados can ill afford. President of the Foundation, Dr. Kenneth Connell, posited, "Barbados cannot continue to ride such a wave of unhealthy living and the alarming rate of obesity among our children. Therefore, HSFB is ultimately partnering with school vendors and canteen operators to ensure our children benefit from healthy food and drinks and our school vendors continue to do thriving business with healthier food options. Our school vendors and canteen operators are seen by students as part of their school family and therefore HSFB is committed to engaging the vendors as we build toward a healthier school environment."

Lennox Chandler Chief Agriculture Officer with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security spoke at the session, he expressed his concerns about the eating habits of Barbadians. He also

said, “The agriculture sector presents key opportunities for improving nutrition and health in Barbados. Poor diet accounts for a number of the challenges that we face. Much more must be done with the agriculture sector opportunities for a healthy society.” He also explained that at this juncture food sovereignty is key and this has more to do with the rights of people choosing what type of food they want and the move towards nutritious, wholesome food.” The Chief Agriculture Officer also advocated the development of community gardens and even back yard gardens to increase the food sovereignty of Barbados.

Also speaking at the training session, was President of BARVEN (Barbados Association of Retailers, Vendors and Entrepreneurs) Mr. Allister Alexander, who welcomed the efforts of HSF and applauded the session saying “this is a progressive and comprehensive approach to tackling this issue of childhood obesity. He noted, “This rollout training programme is one of more to come, which aim is to equip our food handlers to be competent and knowledgeable partners in this fight to secure the health of our most valuable asset, our children.” The BARVEN President explained, “The association is here to make sure that the transition to a healthier diet for our children is sensibly handled but this train is unstoppable. It’s a holy train, it’s holistic, it’s on its way – through this programme take in what you need for the journey, I’m glad you’re on board.”

-THE END-