

Nutrition education needed to reduce NCDs in Vanuatu

Education on nutrition is one way of addressing the problem of non-communicable diseases, says Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce member Carolyn Ernst. Ms Ernst was invited to attend the Private Sector Dialogue Preparatory Meeting in Auckland from 6-8 August.

The meeting was organised by the Pacific Cooperation Foundation (PCF) in association with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO).

The closed-door meeting was open to the media to interview the delegates from each of the Forum Island Countries during the networking event held in the afternoon on Day 1. *Pacific Periscope* spoke with Ms Ernst about the impact of non-communicable diseases (NCD) on ni-Vanuatu communities and what the private sector could do to assist to bring down the high rate of NCDs.

Carolyn Ernst is a partner in two businesses in Vanuatu: Eden on the River, Eco-Tourism Business and Yo’Ku Farm, a small commercial free-range piggery. She has lived on Efate for more than 30 years. She and her husband manage the farm and ecotourism project on 18 hectares of land bought at Rentapau in 2005. Aside from this she takes a hand in accounting for other small businesses and landscaping.

It’s a busy life for this member of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce.

Ms Ernst said the causes of NCDs was quite complex with a wide range of

reasons for the increased number of NCDs in Vanuatu.

The region is vulnerable to cyclonic weather resulting in disaster with damaged homes, infrastructure and food and water sources.

When Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu in March 2015 and crops were damaged, rice was distributed widely through relief agencies. People did not prefer local foods, instead choosing “white man” foods that they see as better Ms Ernst said. “We are now seeing spikes in the diabetes rates due to too much rice distributed in months following Cyclone Pam— Many NGOs have no understanding of the people’s needs,” Ms Ernst said.

Cooking for the family is generally done by women who are in some cases also the income earners outside the home. Culturally men don’t work in the house. Even in urban areas, women still do the cooking, so rice and a can of fish rather than root vegetables is a quicker option for meals she said. Produce at the local market can also be very expensive she said.

More education on nutrition and first aid was needed as often people with diabetes left cuts and sores untreated leading to a high rate of amputations, Ms Ernst said.

Ms Ernest believes Aid Donors needed to work together more.

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