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Policy coherence, trade liberalization and obesity: A case study of New Zealand's trade objectives and development commitments in the South Pacific

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Policy coherence is considered essential for credible and effective policies with its importance in global health highlighted by its inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17.14. Despite pledging to support the SDGs, New Zealand had failed to implement any monitoring, analytical or reporting systems to measure policy coherence by 2016. This has implications given its leadership position in the South Pacific, which is experiencing a Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) crisis, as it assists smaller island nations with development and imports essential goods. A literature review was conducted to investigate the significance of the relationship between trade liberalization and obesity in the South Pacific. This was followed by a thematic analysis of New Zealand's regional food, trade and development policies. The review found that trade liberalization has facilitated a nutrition transition with the entry of nutritionally-inferior food products to Pacific nations, with reduced agricultural subsidies contributing to an increase in food-import dependency. The policy analysis indicates a lack of coherence exists between New Zealand's objectives to pursue trade liberalization and maximize export revenue with development commitments to reduce obesity in Pacific nations. The prioritization of economic objectives underpins the failure to achieve policy coherence in the South Pacific and New Zealand appears reluctant to accept responsibility for its contribution to the region's NCD crisis. Greater communication with island communities is needed, whilst monitoring and reporting systems must be implemented to guarantee coherence when developing future policies and to prevent a further deterioration in South Pacific NCD health outcomes.

Biography

Caroline Slevin is currently a MBBS student at the University of Edinburgh and completed her Bachelor of Medical Sciences degree in Global Health at the University of Edinburgh. She is passionate about issues in global health and is the previous Vice-President, and current Secretary of the Global Health Society in Edinburgh.

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