

The Battle for Caribbean Health: A Cautionary Tale & A Roadmap for Resilience

Unpacking the collision of NCDs, Corporate Interference, and Climate Change in CARICOM.

Based on analysis from the Journal of Institutional Studies, PAHO, and the National Academy of Medicine.



The Caribbean is facing a “Syndemic”—a convergence of disease, profit, and climate.

THE CONTEXT

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are skyrocketing in the region, driven by a “nutrition transition” toward processed foods.

Simultaneously, climate change acts as a force multiplier, threatening the very infrastructure needed to treat these diseases.



THE CONFLICT

Progress is being actively stalled.

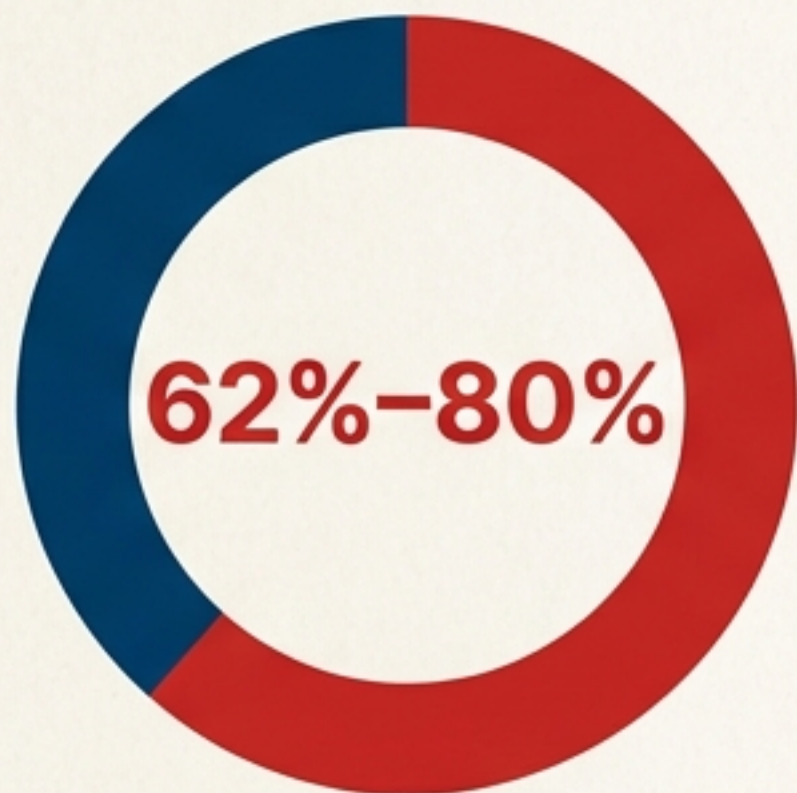
The barrier is not a lack of science, but aggressive interference from the food and beverage industry which has co-opted human rights language to protect commercial interests.



Bottom Line: This deck presents the evidence of this conflict and provides a 3-pillar roadmap for regional resilience: Regulatory insulation, Data integration, and Workforce mobilization.

The region is paying a high price in lives and GDP.

MORTALITY



of all premature deaths (ages 30–70) in CARICOM (excluding Haiti) are **caused by NCDs**.



ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$17.22 Billion

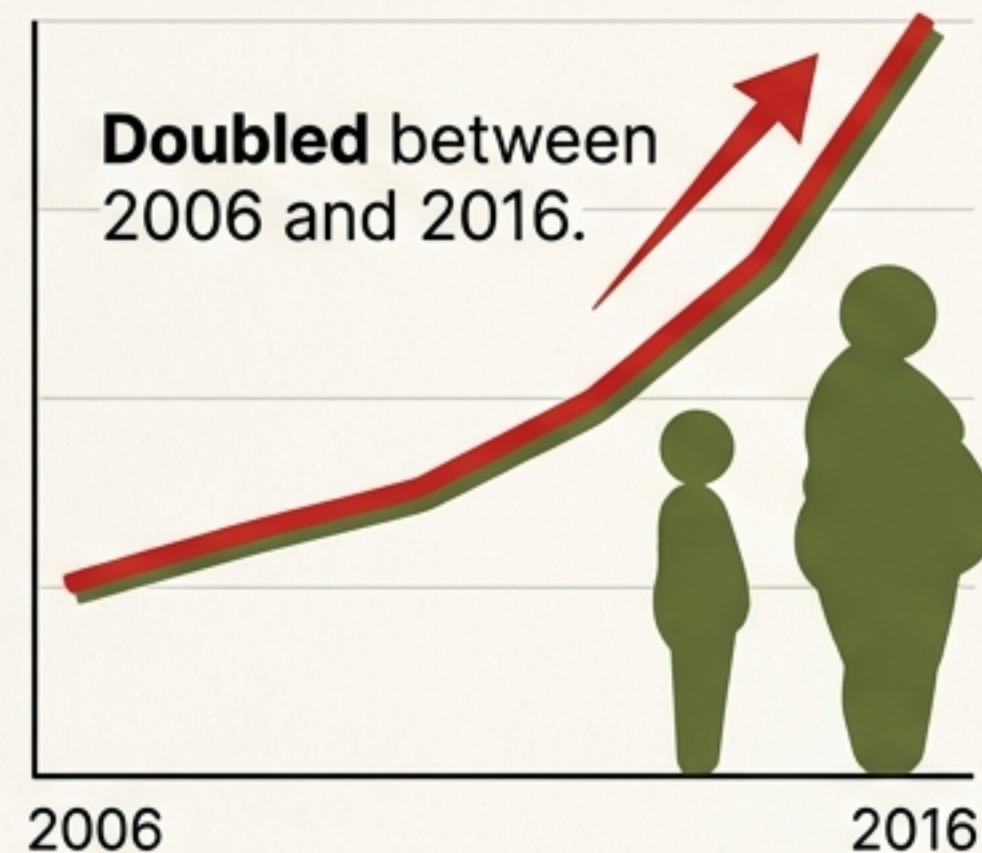
Projected Loss 2015–2030 (3.9% of Annual GDP).

Bds\$146 million lost annually to missed workdays.



THE TREND

Childhood Obesity

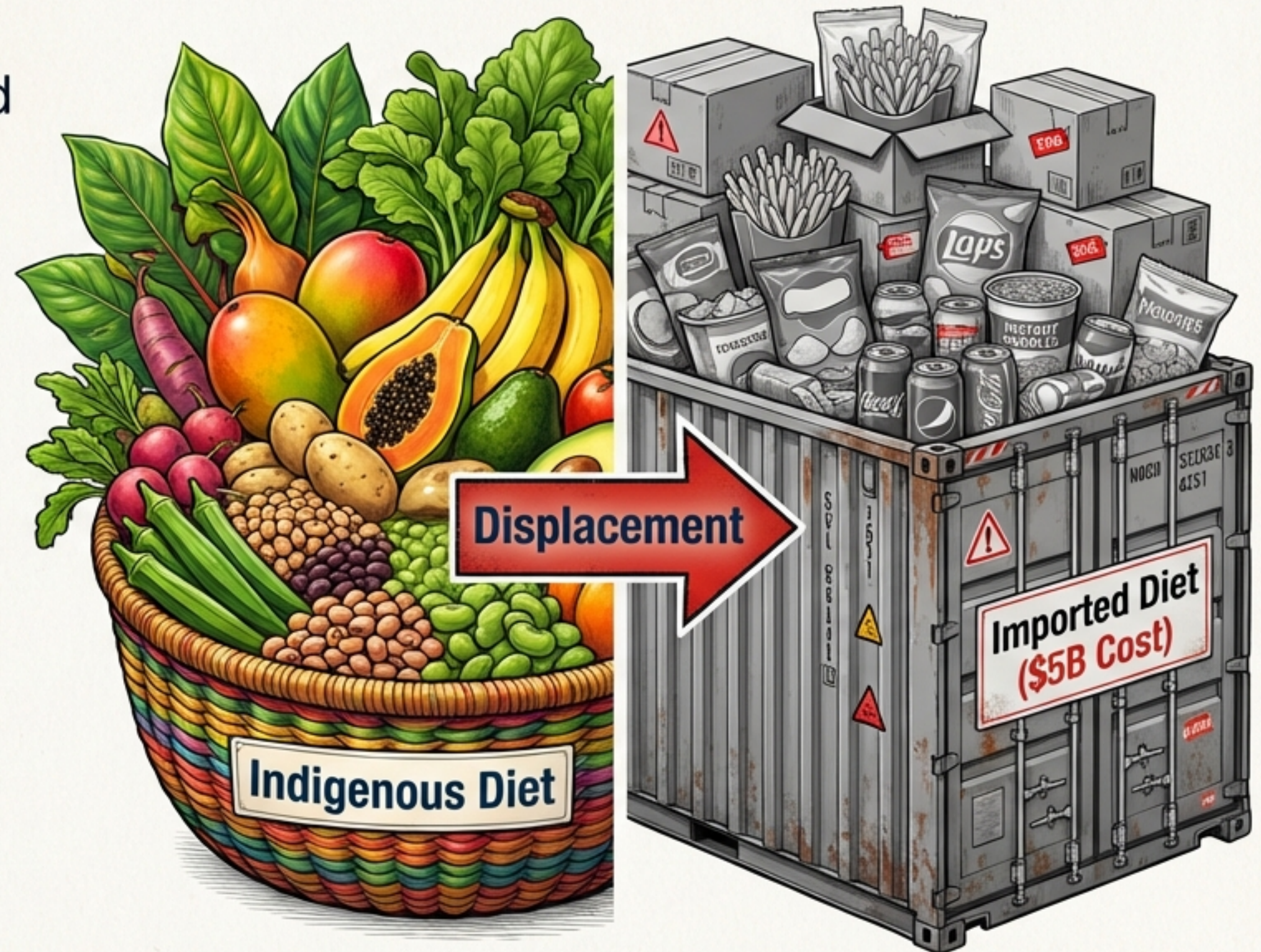


Over 60% of adults are obese.

The 'Nutrition Transition': A trade outcome, not a lifestyle choice.

Since the 1990s, trade liberalization opened floodgates for ultra-processed foods. Indigenous diets rich in legumes, fruits, and vegetables have been displaced by energy-dense, nutrient-poor imports.

- CARICOM imports **\$5 billion** US dollars' worth of food annually (**25%** increase since 2015).
- In some nations, imports account for **>80%** of available food.
- Frozen potato imports increased by **76%** following US trade deals.



The Weapon of Choice: High-In Octagonal Warning Labels.



The Science: Black octagons are the “best performing system” (PAHO/WHO) because they:

1. Contrast effectively with colorful packaging.
2. Allow consumers to identify unhealthy products quickly.
3. Counteract the ‘health halo’ of industry claims.

The Mandate:

The Port-of-Spain Declaration called for mandatory labeling. CROSQ revised standards to align with these labels.

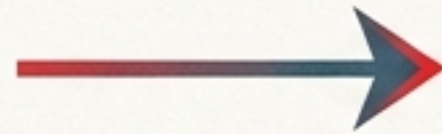
The Antagonist: The Industry Interference Playbook

The Cycle of Interference



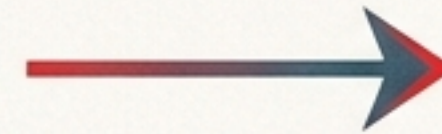
DELAY

Asking for “more studies” despite existing evidence.



CONFUSE

Promoting ineffective alternatives like Traffic Lights or GDA which confuse consumers.



OBFUSCATE

Using “health halo” claims to mask sugar, fat, and salt content.

Industry “worked assiduously to undermine CROSQ’s normative effort,” attempting to seize autonomy over the process.

The 'Human Rights' Hijack

The Myth

Industry Claim: Right to Participate



Industry claimed a "Right to Participate" in policy-making, positioning themselves as marginalized stakeholders who would be "most affected".

The Reality

Legal Reality: Duty-Bearers vs. Rights-Holders



Rights-Holders: Citizens (Right to Health)

Duty-Bearers: Governments (Obligation to regulate)

The Verdict

International law does not grant corporations an inherent human right to shape public health policy. Industry participation is a privilege, not a right.

The Jamaica Reversal: A Case Study in Influence

March 2021



National Mirror Committee (NMC) votes IN FAVOR of black octagonal labels.

Support from Ministry of Health, Academia (UWI), and Consumers.

June 2021



Heavy lobbying by Manufacturers Association leads to an "Emergency Meeting".



The Re-Vote



Consumer stakeholders inexplicably flip positions. The standard fails to reach the 75% threshold.

Re-Vote: [Voting details - 75% threshold not met, specific numbers as described].

A cautionary tale of how **commercial power** overrides public health evidence.

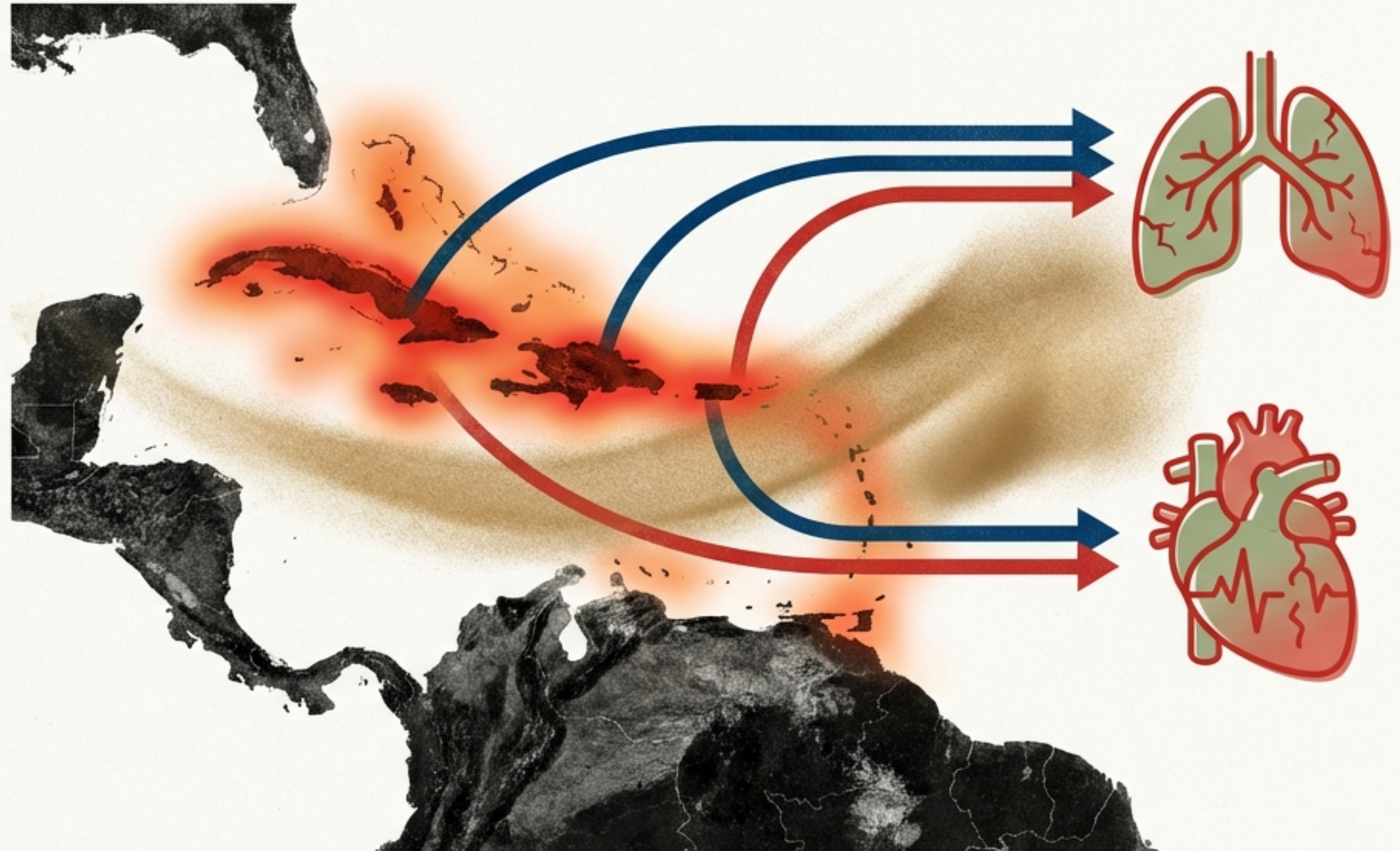
Force Multiplier I: The Climate Collision.

The Caribbean is one of the world's most climate-exposed regions.

The Connection:

- **Extreme Heat & Sahara Dust:** Directly **exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular conditions** (the same NCDs caused by diet).
- **System Shock:** Hurricanes and heat waves disrupt health systems, deepening inequities.

Source: NAM Climate and Health Research Innovation Workshop.



Force Multiplier II: The Hidden Poverty & Tech Gap.

The Illusion of Wealth: High per capita income classifications mask deep pockets of poverty in SIDS (Small Island Developing States).

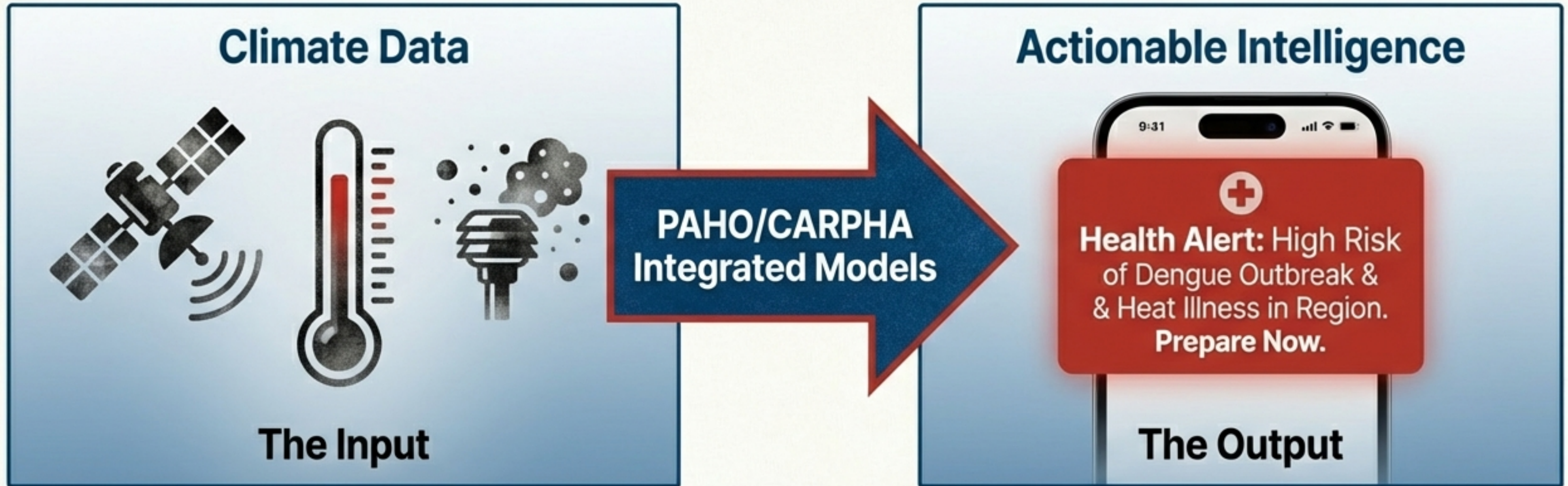
The Technology Gap: Lack of access to environmentally sound technologies on concessional terms stifles development.

Geography: Small island status acts as a “canary in the coal mine”.



“We... suffer disproportionately from the consequences of a rapidly changing climate.” — Belize Representative (CARICOM).

Strategy I: Early Warning Systems (EWS).



Concept: Early Warning for Early Action. Integrating surveillance to predict outbreaks.

Success Story: PAHO/CARPHA partnership.

- **Dengue Predictive Models:** Using climate data to predict disease spikes.
- **Heat & Dust Action Plans:** Warning health workers before respiratory admissions spike.

Strategy II: The 3-Pillar Framework for Research & Innovation



Strategy III: The Legal Shield (Trade vs. Health)

The Industry Bluff:

Warning labels violate
WTO technical barriers.

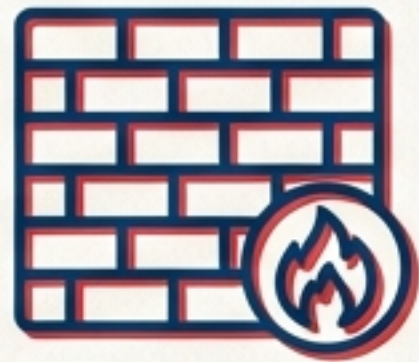


The Legal Reality:

- **TBT Agreement (Article 2.2):** Explicitly recognizes “**protection of human health**” as a legitimate objective.
- **GATT Article XX(b):** Exception for measures “**necessary to protect human life**”.
- **Precedent:** WTO rulings (US–Clove Cigarettes, Australia–Tobacco) confirm health measures are valid if they are **not more trade-restrictive than necessary**.

Strategic Recommendations for Policymakers

1



Insulate Policy

Exclude industry from the DEVELOPMENT of standards. Limit them to implementation discussions only.

2



Mandate FOPWL

Push through the 'High-In' labels. Voluntary measures have failed.

3



Integrate Systems

Merge meteorological data with health records for real-time alerts (EU/CARIFORUM Project).

4



Close the Tech Gap

Leverage South-South cooperation for technology transfer.

Conclusion: A ‘Whole of Society’ Approach.

The battle against unhealthy diets and climate threats cannot be fought in silos.

It requires shifting the framework from a Right to Profit to a Right to Health.

“The key operating premise is: Early Warning for Early Action.”

— Dr. Laura Lee Boodram, CARPHA.

