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Foreword

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, in particular the Directorate of Human and Social Development, is pleased to be associated with this Teacher’s Guide which has been developed specifically for teachers of Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) in this region.

Our Caribbean children and youth have become increasingly vulnerable to new threats to their development and face, on a daily basis, many challenges for which they are ill equipped to cope. Problems such as sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, early and unwanted pregnancy, crime and gang violence, obesity and lifestyle related diseases, and emerging sub-cultures are related to the fundamental and complex changes in the socio-economic and cultural patterns of living. These problems are manifested both within and outside the school system and prevent our young people from maximising their true potential for learning and personal development, and influence their health and life opportunities.

In recognition of the negative impact of the escalating social problems on adolescents and youth and the increase in non-communicable diseases, there developed a growing acceptance, particularly by Ministers of Education and Health across the Caribbean region, of the need to strengthen the role of schools to address the situation by helping to reshape attitudes, values, practices and behaviour and addressing gender differences. It is within this context that urgent ‘Calls for Action’ have been made in several declarations and fora, including the Special Meeting of the Council on Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on the Education Sector Response to HIV and AIDS in 2006; the CARICOM Heads of Government at a Special Summit on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases in 2007; and more recently, in the final CARICOM Commission on Youth Development Report approved by the CARICOM Heads of Government in January 2010, all of which support the development of a comprehensive approach to Health and Family Education (HFLE). Also, in August 2008, Ministers of Education and Health from Latin America and the Caribbean called for a strategic multi-sectoral approach to strengthen the response to the HIV epidemic through the Mexico City Declaration on Sex Education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) is cited as one of the key interventions to increase awareness and change attitudes among children and young people as a means to adopting healthy lifestyles. To achieve and sustain this goal, we will heavily depend on the preparation of teachers. HFLE must therefore be part of the core of the professional preparation offered for all teachers.

Enhancing teacher competency is critical since the effectiveness of HFLE will ultimately rest on what they do in their classrooms, the social environments they create in schools and their ability to forge positive links between the school, home and communities. Equally important is the need to increase the volume of appropriate teacher resource materials to support teachers in the delivery of the HFLE curricula in the classrooms. In the past, HFLE teachers were not seriously considered in the development agenda, however. Now their realities, needs and capabilities are being recognised and accorded higher priority in the development of policy and practice.