

FAO INPUT TO THE 2024 REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL, “TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN SEA FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS” FOR THE SEVENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AS CALLED FOR BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN RESOLUTION 77/163.

Efforts of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in the wider Caribbean region

FAO’s work in the Caribbean region seeks to meet the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries by transforming aquatic food systems to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. Aquatic food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, and consumption of aquatic food products that originate from fisheries and aquaculture and parts of the broader economic, societal, and natural environments in which they are embedded (e.g., open oceans, coastal waters, wetlands, lakes, rivers, ponds, raceways, fields and tanks).

This transformation is guided by FAO’s ‘Blue Transformation’ strategy, which recognizes the importance of aquatic food systems as drivers of employment, economic growth, social development, and environmental recovery, which all underpin the SDGs. Blue Transformation further acknowledges that aquatic food systems significantly influence human, animal, and ecosystem health, including biodiversity, land and water use, climate, as well as other aquatic and land-based economic sectors. As such, their transformation requires a holistic and adaptive ecosystem approach, aimed at securing socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable value chains that help secure livelihoods, foster an equitable distribution of benefits and support adequate use and conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Key activities carried out by FAO in the region between June 2022 and June 2024 are enumerated below, and organized according to their contribution to relevant objectives and targets of Blue Transformation :

Effective management of all fisheries to deliver healthy stocks and secure equitable livelihoods

FAO continues to support the region to develop effective policies, governance structures and institutions to facilitate adoption and effective implementation of international instruments, regional coordination mechanisms, plans of action and guidelines to combat IUU fishing. In this context, it has convened regional meetings and workshops, including:

- The first PSMA¹ Regional Coordination Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama, 20 - 24 June 2022). Among others, the meeting was attended by participants from the **Dominican Republic, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama**, in addition to the Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (**OSPESCA**).

¹ As at 30 June 2024, there are 79 Parties to the Agreement, including 13 of the wider Caribbean Region: The Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

- A Regional Workshop on the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment (VGT) for Latin America, the Caribbean and North America (Barbados, 7-10 March 2023). To promote the benefits of implementing the VGT and to facilitate discussions amongst States. The workshop was attended by officers from **The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago**, in addition to the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (**CRFM**) and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (**WECAFC**).
- The second PSMA Regional Coordination Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean (13 – 17 May 2024, Costa Rica). Among others, the meeting was attended by participants from **Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**. The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Agreement.

Also, during the reporting period, FAO has provided technical assistance and training to **Honduras** to identify gaps in the effective implementation of measures consistent with the PSMA, complementary international instruments and regional mechanism to combat IUU fishing, review the national regulatory framework and the operational procedures and MCS mechanisms; **Saint Kitts and Nevis** to develop regulations to address gaps in the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Resources Act (FAMRA) 2016, identify the requirements for establishing a fisheries monitoring centre and develop an interagency cooperation framework to improve vessel registration and coordination among concerned authorities; **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** to develop a national interagency mechanism for port State measures, and draft a new Fisheries Act; **Trinidad and Tobago** to improve interagency coordination, strengthen port inspectors' capacity and support the development of catch documentation schemes; Panama to update the legal framework and MCS procedures, develop catch documentation schemes and review the national traceability system, and strengthen capacity on vessels monitoring.

FAO work in the region focuses on effective fisheries management systems to address ecological, social and economic objectives, and consider tradeoffs, including by promoting the implementation of fisheries management measures that support biodiversity, facilitate ecosystem restoration, strengthen climate change adaptation and build resilience to stressors. Other subregional or national projects within FAO efforts of mobilizing the climate finance community (Green Climate Fund and GEF) were implemented, such as the GCF Readiness and preparatory support projects in **Belize** (Enhancing adaptation planning and increasing climate resilience in the coastal zone and fisheries sector of Belize, which ended in November 2023) and **Saint Lucia** ("Improving the capacity of the Fisheries Sector in Saint Lucia to enhance resilience to Climate Change", Nov 2021-March 2024). Similar readiness projects and larger GCF and GEF projects are in the pipeline in several countries, in **Barbados** and the **eastern Caribbean**, the formulation of which started during the reporting period but expected to be implemented in 2025.

FAO started in 2023 the implementation of two GEF 'sister projects' in support of the CLME+SAP priorities by countries sharing the shrimp and groundfish fisheries in the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem. The project "Strategies, technologies and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries (REBYC-III CLME+)" seeks to manage bycatch and reduce discards in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems, thereby promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities while ensuring the conservation of marine

living resources. **Barbados, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago** participate in the project. The second project “Enhancing capacity for the adoption and implementation of EAF in the shrimp and groundfish fisheries of the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem (EAF4SG)” seeks to advance adoption and implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in the shrimp and groundfish fisheries in the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem. **Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago** participate in the project. Inception meetings of the two projects were held in February 2024 with the full participation of stakeholders from the region. The REBYC-III CLME+ and EAF4SG projects are implemented in partnership with the University of the West Indies in a timeframe of 48 months.

To further increase awareness and understanding of climate change impacts and vulnerability, a regional vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) framework was developed. VCA carried out in Eastern Caribbean countries has informed project activities and is being used to support further project developments and activities by governments as it identifies scope of work of importance to stakeholders. FAO also supported the inclusion of climate change adaptation and disaster risk management considerations in the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. As a result, several countries have since undertaken a review of their fisheries policies, plans and legislation to incorporate climate change adaptation and disaster risk management considerations. With the global pandemic disruption of the whole agri-food system, fisheries policy review exercise in some Caribbean countries considered recommendations to strengthen its application during and after COVID-19.

The work of FAO facilitates regular monitoring and reporting, development of innovative data and information systems, and implementation of fisheries management plans, strategies and measures:

Through the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (**WECAFC**), collaborative activities were undertaken with the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (**CRFM**) and the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (**OSPESCA**) to generate scientific advice for sound policy and management plans for the sustainable development of marine resources. Among the issues attracting particular attention are the management of spawning aggregations; the effective conservation, responsible management and trade of queen conch, flying fish, shrimps and groundfish, spiny lobster; the sustainable use of moored/anchored fish aggregating devices; and decent working conditions in small scale fisheries.

With support of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) through NOAA-Fisheries, two regional workshops were organized to address conservation and sustainable management of queen conch and spawning aggregations fisheries. A Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management Plan: Focus on Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper (FSAMP) developed was endorsed by members at the 18th Session of **WECAFC** in July 2022. Through the same partnership between CFMC and **WECAFC**, the first meeting of the joint working group on flyingfish-dolphinfish was convened in June 2024 which discussed among others the strengthening of the collaborative framework with the regional organizations, and among members regarding: i) identification of priorities related to dolphinfish research and management, including improved data collection and a regional stock assessment, ii) implementation of precautionary management measures, iii) and establishing the practical arrangements for operation of this joint WG.

“Support to the Secretariat of **WECAFC** in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance” with a specific component on Increased knowledge of and

experience with offshore fisheries using aggregating devices in the **WECAFC** region and another which delivered meaningful information source, the “Review of the biological data, spatial distribution of the stocks and ecological connectivity between areas beyond national jurisdiction and exclusive economic zones in the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission region” (<http://www.fao.org/3/cc9103en/cc9103en.pdf>) to inform strategic reorientation decision-making by the Commission. This project also led to the development of important conservation and management measures on fisheries using the anchored Fish Aggregating Devices, endorsed at the 19th session of **WECAFC** held in September 2023:

- Caribbean Regional Anchored (or Moored) Fish Aggregating Device (aFAD) management plan.
- Guide for improved monitoring Anchored (or Moored) Fish Aggregating Device (aFAD) catches and improved assessment of aFAD impact on stocks.
Best practices of Anchored Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Fisheries Volume V – Anchored FAD Fish Governance with application to other fisheries in the Wider Caribbean

“Strengthening the Scientific basis to the secretariat of **WECAFC** for an effective implementation of priority actions of the Programme of Work agreed at the 17th Session of the Commission” to support the celebration of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022 and the **WECAFC** Working Group on Queen Conch to advance data collection efforts for sustainable queen conch fisheries and conservation management. The pilot queen conch activities conducted in Jamaica provided recommendations for refined feasibility study and proposed enhancements to the industrial fishery data collection system across all fishing grounds of the country.

FAO contributed to knowledge management in the region. Emphasis has been placed on awareness-raising regarding the current science behind sargassum blooms, building knowledge networks to drive further research on sargassum and working with countries and local and regional partners to develop related mitigation plans. Impacts of Sargassum on marine resources in the region and utilization initiatives were tabled at the 19th Plenary of **WECAFC** held in 2023, underscoring the multifaceted implications of sargassum and the need for collaborative efforts to study its impact on other Caribbean resources. The necessity of learning to coexist with sargassum and fully utilizing its potential was stressed, while acknowledging the importance of raising awareness about its increasing proliferation in the region. The need for the Commission to play a greater role in monitoring its implications for fisheries and coastal communities in the region, an increased scientific research and opportunities for commercialization were emphasized. Experience on development of sargassum management app and guidelines was shared. The Commission stressed the importance of keeping the Sargassum issue on the agenda of **WECAFC** moving forward.

The strengthening of fisheries data collection, analysis and reporting which underlies evidence-based decision making is supported under the umbrella of the **WECAFC** Fisheries data and statistics working group (FDS-WG). :

- 1) The Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) was approved by **WECAFC** 18 (July 2022). This DCRF serves as i) a capacity building tool which can be used by countries as a reference standard framework to set-up national data collection and information systems for all aquatic marine species, in support of national policies and reporting needs including for the provision of data to **WECAFC**; and ii) an instrument to support science based conservation

and management of marine biological resources under the mandate of **WECAFC**, the mandate and priorities of **WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA** Interim Coordination Mechanism (ICM), by implementing a modular task oriented data collection framework. Importantly, the DCRF includes **WECAFC** statistical subareas and divisions, and a priority list of reference species.

- 2) The regional coordination of efforts and investments in national capacity building for statistics data collection, resulted in 4 **WECAFC** Members receiving capacity building support through various projects during the period 2022-2024 (Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Saint Lucia, Guyana). Donors which supported these capacity building initiatives include GEF, IADB, and Japan.
- 3) The Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Information System (WECAFIS, the **WECAFC** regional database) published under the **WECAFC** website <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/data/wecafis/en/>, including statistics submitted for the first time by 8 countries for four Tasks of the DCRF, and 43 fisheries inventoried by 10 countries and published through FIRMS.
- 4) Two EU DG Mare funded projects are being implemented (2022 through 2025) in support of the evidence base for sustainable management and development of two ecologically and socio-economically important fisheries in the **WECAFC** region - the spawning aggregations and the spiny lobster, that feature how the FDS-WG framework can support assessments and management. These are “Improving ecosystem approach to fisheries by advancing fish spawning aggregation information gathering and increase of public engagement in the **WECAFC** region” and “ Enhance data collection and monitoring for sustainable spiny lobster fisheries and concurrently develop practical approaches to characterize illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) with focus on small-scale fisheries in the **WECAFC** region”.

FAO continues to support countries in the wider Caribbean region to ensure fishing fleets are efficient, safe, innovate and profitable and to ensure fishers and fish workers have equitable access to resources and services designed to enhance their livelihoods:

FAO has supported the development of mobile apps for improving early warning and safety at sea. Along with training and strengthening ICT for Safety at sea, a study on third party vessel insurance was completed, and Policy Brief developed.

FAO is developing a database of Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Social Protection Programs in Small-Island Developing States in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions to better support countries in articulating social protection systems with EWS to deploy anticipatory actions when responding to shocks.

FAO developed a background paper on Safety at sea, Social protection and Decent work in Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (**WECAFC**) and a draft action plan with the **WECAFC** secretariat for increasing the attention of the membership to safety, social protection and decent working conditions in fisheries.

Upgraded value chains ensure the social, economic, and environmental viability of aquatic food systems

The work of FAO contributed to developing efficient value chains that increase profitability and reduce food loss; transparent, inclusive and gender-equitable value chains support sustainable livelihoods; and facilitating access of fisheries and aquaculture products to international markets.

Under the FISH4ACP project², FAO has been supporting the upgrading of the mahi mahi value chain in the Dominican Republic. The upgrading process follows three main axis: improving governance of the mahi mahi fisheries, developing processing and marketing of mahi mahi products and strengthening the economic and social environment for value chain actors. Key activities ongoing comprise the development of a management plan for the mahi mahi fisheries, the assessment of a minimum landing size, the design of more sustainable FADs, supporting the inclusion of fisher household into the national security system, design cold chain improvement scheme as well as a nationwide strategy (“la ruta del dorado”) to improve mahi mahi marketing.

In Guyana, FISH4ACP is supporting the seabob shrimp value chain. More specifically it works with both the artisanal and industrial actors to adopt sustainable practices to maintain stock levels, improve fishing practices and build resilience of the sector. Specific attention is also devoted to increasing compliance with and enforcement of revised fisheries regulations and to improve data collection and coordination between VC stakeholders. In this respect, FISH4ACP supported the set up and adaptation of the CALYPSO fisheries information system. Artisanal actors are also supported in their efforts to access high value market and to adopt better food safety and quality practices notably via trainings developed and implemented by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM).

FAO led in Barbados an initiative which aimed at driving the circular economy by transforming fish waste from fish processing into feed and fertilizer. The success of this pilot work led to the integration of the fish waste utilization concept in the 2023-2033 Fisheries policy of Barbados, capacity development of women fish processors and young farmers for creation of alternative revenue streams to reduce vulnerability, some private investment and mobilization of extrabudgetary resources for upscaling at the national level starting in June 2024, with a regional outlook which would thus contribute to the realization of the Government of Barbados’ objective to cut imports bill (more than 90% feed used imported, within an ever price escalating global feed and fertilizer context), and the achievement of the twenty-five by 2025 commitment of CARICOM (reducing the extra-Caribbean large food import bill by 25% by 2025)..

FAO is working with the Cuban Government on the implementation of the USD 1.3 million GEF funded project: “Improving the management and protection of marine biodiversity in the Gulf of Guacanayabo, Cuba”. The project aims to promote biodiversity conservation in seascapes surrounding key biodiversity areas and a RAMSAR site in the Gulf of Guacanayabo, with a focus on six targeted species of fish and shrimp. It addresses the decline in shrimp populations, impacting upper links of the food web and species of global importance in the Caribbean.

² FISH4ACP is implemented by FAO in collaboration with the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), the European Union, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

By reducing fishing pressure on shrimp and other vulnerable species through improved fisheries management and alternative economic activities such as low-impact aquaculture and value addition of fishery products, the project aims to enhance ecological balance and biodiversity health in the Gulf of Guacanayabo. Recognizing the ecosystem's connectivity with the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem, the project aims to mitigate threats within the Gulf to stabilize ecological conditions beyond its boundaries.

Sustainable aquaculture intensification and expansion satisfies global demand for aquatic food and distributes benefits equitably

In 2021, FAO launched a digitized aquaculture library project to support information exchange and the identification of opportunities and means for the development of sustainable aquaculture in Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries.

Completed in 2022, the digitized aquaculture library connects CARICOM member countries and facilitates technical exchange and training on aquaculture systems and species with proven regional success. It also provides a toolbox to entrepreneurs and governments for diversifying and scaling up commercial operations. The library was built with information collected from fisheries and aquaculture officials, practitioners, researchers, and financiers of all 15 CARICOM countries. All information was validated by the respective member countries, and consent for the publication of individual details was granted. The library has two components: first, a downloadable registry of individuals and hubs in the public and private sector (including decision-makers, regulators, managers, businesspeople, financiers and practitioners) posted on FAO, **CRFM** and country websites;³ second, a publication list (including national plans, technical guides, factsheets and peer-reviewed publications) with online access to the CARICOM aquaculture library containing digital copies of Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts⁴ publications. The digitized aquaculture library continues to grow, strengthening the Caribbean aquaculture network, improving access to reliable updated information and increasing the opportunities to support sustainable aquaculture expansion. FAO and **CRFM** member countries have agreed on a process to update and maintain the library annually to keep it relevant and informative.

³ Notes available at:

<https://www.fao.org/fishery/services/storage/fs/fishery/documents/WECAFC/CARICOMDigitalLibrary.htm>

⁴ Note available at: <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/openasfa?page=1&f=collections%3D%22CARICOM%22#search>

SOURCES: FAO. 2022. Digital Aquaculture Library for the CARICOM Report. Appendices 4 and 8. FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean (Bridgetown).

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