



Policy Brief

Keeping fish on Caribbean tables

Implementing regional and global fisheries instruments and policies

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Executive summary

The fisheries sector in the Caribbean Community is facing unprecedented challenges, which could result in severe reductions in the availability of locally harvested seafood. The societal benefits from fisheries to Caribbean societies are both significant and critical to Caribbean life and identity, supporting communities and providing livelihood opportunities in direct production for more than 118,000 Caribbean nationals.

Threats to fisheries include:

- Investment projects which damage or remove/limit access to fisheries ecosystems and resources.
- Agenda driven management and conservation measures, including marine spatial planning.
- Debt for nature initiatives.
- Irresponsible practices eg. IUU
- Climate change impacts

These require focused attention, in order to secure local seafood for Caribbean households, and for Caribbean societies to maintain and increase societal benefits from our fisheries. The moderate consumption of fish and seafoods can improve heart function and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, improve cognitive ability and the symptoms of inflammatory diseases, arthritis and psoriasis. The omega-3 fatty acids may also reduce the incidence of depression and postpartum depression in pregnant women. Some fish and seafood may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline in the elderly. In babies it contributes to vision development and nerve growth in the retina. The benefits directly support the drive to combat malnutrition, obesity and the related conditions of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Key Message (SSF Guidelines Objective 1 & CCCFP Objectives A and C)

Fish and seafood directly contribute to human health and a reduction in the public health bill, while providing livelihoods, generating economic activity, and addressing poverty.

The security of Caribbean fisheries should be a key target for Caribbean leaders to embrace, in light of the reality that the benefits derived from the fisheries sector cannot be had by any substituted activity.

Context

Several Caribbean countries are embracing direct foreign investment as the means to boost economic activity. This has resulted in



Policy Brief

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development projects which negatively impact fisheries ecosystems (YIDA International Investment project



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Antigua and Barbuda is one example) and compromise the national ability to secure fisheries. These have serious implications for local livelihoods, and the resources that provide healthy and nutritious food.

There is an increasing drive from international groups to drive conservation agendas in the region. These are rationalized using international conventions, without clear local context and adequate participation from local and national stakeholders. The results are seen in the push for marine spatial plans, debt for nature promotions (being considered by some Caribbean countries including Barbados), and the increase in restrictive fisheries management measures being promoted, to the detriment of fishing communities.

The issue of irresponsible practices, both within and outside of the fisheries sector also impairs our ability to secure fisheries. These include inappropriate harvesting techniques, such as using dynamite and electricity in harvesting, the detrimental practice of using ecologically dangerous agricultural chemicals, and the physical altering of natural

ecosystems to develop tourism-related and other projects.

Climate change presents an increasingly serious challenge, as the impacts compound the existing threats to sustainable fisheries (as seen in recent hurricane impacts in 2017 from hurricanes Irma and Maria). The sector has consistently demonstrated the ability to restore livelihoods and societal benefits in a much quicker time than most other sectors, due to it being primarily constituted by multiple small-scale operators, thus lending flexibility, adaptability and resilience.

Blue economy buzz has private investors wooing governments to marginalize small scale fisheries in favor of large investments in the ocean space. This is not founded in the reality that over 90% of the human actors in the “blue” space are small scale fishers (Kenya Blue conference 2018). Many of the large-scale proposals are harmful to small scale fisheries and the ecosystems that are foundational (such are ocean-based aquaculture).



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Global pandemic being experienced (COVID 19) has clearly underscored the need to



Policy Brief

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secure Caribbean fisheries and dependent livelihoods, as the need for locally produced food and locally based economic activity is critically realized. Caribbean small-scale fisheries directly contribute to societal resilience to global events and climate change impacts, and the need to secure them should be a priority.

**Key message (SSF Guidelines Chapter 5a
CCCFP Article 9)**

No negative impacts to small-scale fisheries to be embraced in all national and regional initiatives, and a focus on integrating, improving and developing the fisheries sector is incorporated into any blue economy or other related national development.

Pathways to solutions

The fundamental issue of securing Caribbean small scale fisheries can be addressed using guidance that is already accepted by the Caribbean Community and this is found in the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP), and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). Both policy documents were embraced in 2014, and the SSF Guidelines was incorporated into the CCCFP by Caribbean leaders in 2018.

The guidance embraces, inter alia, the following:

- Responsible governance of tenure, securing fishers access to fisheries and related resources.
- The ecosystems approach, to ensure that ecosystems are maintained or enhanced and economic, social and environmental sustainability is promoted.
- The participatory approach to governance, incorporating fishers into the management process.
- Value chains post-harvest and trade.
- Gender equity and equality.
- Sanitary and phytosanitary issues.
- Climate change.

The critical missing link is leadership and the focused implementation of these guiding instruments. Caribbean leaders can and should ensure that responsible implementation is promoted for the surety of sustainable societal benefits from our fisheries is realized.

**Key message (SSF Guidelines Chapter 13 &
CCCFP Article 7)**

Immediate focus on the responsible, participatory implementation of CCCFP, and the SSF Guidelines is needed to secure small-scale? Caribbean fisheries.

Policy recommendations

Promote regional and national policy to secure Caribbean small-scale fisheries.



Policy Brief

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Implementing regional and global fisheries instruments and policies

“No negative impacts to fisheries from national or regional initiatives.

Implement the CCCFP and the SSF Guidelines, with initial focus on:

- 1. Participatory and responsible management, including having fisheries stakeholders at the national and regional decision-making levels. (SSF Guiding Principle 6)**
- 2. Responsible governance of tenure, and securing access to fisheries resources by small-scale fishers. (SSF Chapter 5)**
- 3. Enhancing value-chains and developing markets and trade, particularly regional trade. (SSF Chapter 7)**
- 4. Gender equity and equality. (SSF Chapter 8)**
- 5. Climate Change and Disaster risk reduction. (SSF Chapter 9)**

The goal of securing Caribbean fisheries and the perpetual benefits to Caribbean communities deserve dedicated and focused attention. Our people are precious.

Acknowledgements

This communication product has benefited from the generous support of the ‘*Creating an enabling environment for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries*’ of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – FAO Umbrella Programme for the Promotion and Application of the SSF Guidelines (FAO SSF Umbrella Programme) Created by the CNFO

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