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Improving Social and Economic Resilience Through Enhanced Regional Trade in Fish and Seafood

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Abstract

This paper provides a brief overview and analysis of the trade in fish and fishery products in the Caribbean Community, with a view towards promoting the expansion of intra-regional trade to improve food security and social and economic resilience. It considers the current status and trends in fish production, export, import and annual per capita consumption; the legal and policy frameworks for regulation of intra-regional trade; and impediments to the expansion of intra-regional trade; and then concludes with a few recommendations to improve intra-regional trade in fish and fishery products. These include further studies and policy measures to overcome the impediments identified and create a more conducive environment for seafood safety, transportation, and value addition and expansion of intra-regional trade, while ensuring sustainable use of the fisheries resources through the implementation of effective management and conservation measures.

KEYWORDS: CARICOM, fish and seafood, trade

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fish and fish products are among the most highly traded food commodity globally. According to the FAO SOFIA 2022 Report[i], during 2018 to 2020, an average of 61 million mt, or roughly 38% of global fisheries production, was traded, with a value of about US$150.5 billion in 2020. Globally, 225 states and territories reported trading activities in fisheries and aquaculture during 2020. The report said that from 1976 to 2020, the value of global exports of fisheries and aquaculture products (excluding algae) increased at an average annual growth rate of 6.9 percent. However, global trade in fish and fishery products experienced a decline in 2023. The total trade volume was estimated at 65 million mt, representing a 4.3 percent decrease compared to 2022. The export value also saw a reduction, falling to USD 175 billion from USD 178 billion in 2022 (FAO, 2024).

The fisheries and aquaculture sector makes an important contribution to the economic and social development of Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) / Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)[ii], in terms of food supply and food and nutrition security, employment generation, foreign currency earnings, and coastal development. Fish and shellfish are harvested mainly from the coastal and marine waters, with a small contribution coming from aquaculture production, which has vast growth potential. The catch is usually maintained fresh, chilled, or frozen and sold on the national, regional, or international markets for human consumption.

Relatively large quantities of fish and fishery products are imported into the Caribbean each year to satisfy local demand for food, whereas large quantities of fish and fishery products are exported to earn hard currency and maximize economic returns to exporters.

The countries considered in this paper are CRFM Member States: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. These States are either Members or Associate Members of CARICOM.

2. WHY INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE?

Increased attention to intra-regional trade may be justified on several grounds. Firstly, CARICOM is comprised of middle-income, Small Island Developing States (SIDs) that (apart from The Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname) have generally been net importers of fish and seafood (*Table 1*) and price takers with no influence on the world market[iii]. They are, therefore, very vulnerable to external economic shocks. According to Richard Bernal[iv], former Executive Director of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Mechanism, small developing economies are more dependent on international trade than large and developed economies. Imports are of critical importance in production and consumption.

Economic growth is, therefore, extremely dependent upon imports and consequently on import capacity, which is, in turn, a function of the quantum of foreign exchange inflows from exports and investments. Small developing economies, Bernal argues, have greater need for access to external markets than large economies, because the small size of their domestic markets and limited resource base cannot sustain economic growth. Unfavourable external developments in either imports or exports, including changes in trade arrangements, could lead to a collapse in export earnings or a surge in prices, precipitating prolonged periods of severe contraction in the wider economy. For example, in 2009, exports from Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica (two of

the main exporters in the CARICOM region), fell by 51% and 50%, respectively, due to the global financial and economic crisis[vi]. However, over the period 2018-2020, export volumes and values for both countries showed a steady increase, although the import bill was rising.[vii] An enlarged domestic market and vibrant intra-regional trade could reduce the vulnerability and dependency of CARICOM States on external trade.

Secondly, in consequence of the above, CARICOM States collectively have a massive annual food import bill of approximately US$5 billion[viii], which not only contributes significantly to the balance of payments deficit but also creates a dependency upon imported foodstuff for food security and nutrition and increases the vulnerability of the region to external shocks. In response to this significant import dependency, CARICOM Heads of Government have committed to reducing the region's food import bill by 25 percent by the year 2030. This initiative, known as "25 by 2025 + 5," aims to enhance food security and promote sustainable agriculture and fisheries development within Member States. Increased fisheries and aquaculture production and intra-regional trade would, therefore, contribute to improved resilience, reduced imports of fish and fishery products, and saving of foreign currency, improved balance of payments deficit, increased food and nutrition security, and reduced vulnerability to rising food prices and other forms of external economic shocks, such as pandemics or recessions.

Thirdly, the gradual erosion of tariff preference provided to CARICOM States over their competitors in traditional markets, such as the EU, through the WTO trade liberalization process, is making fish and fishery products from the region less competitive in such markets[ix]. For example, CARICOM countries, like other members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), are beneficiaries of preferential access to the EU market under the Cotonou Agreement and the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). This trend is likely to accelerate as multilateral negotiations aimed at trade liberalization continue and tariffs and other preferential arrangements are diminished or eliminated.

Table 1. Trade balance for fish and seafood, average for 2019–2021 (Millions of dollars) for selected CARICOM & OECS countries[v]

Country	Avg for 2019-2021 (US$ mn)
Antigua and Barbuda	-8
Bahamas	57
Barbados	-25
Belize	23
Dominica	-1
Grenada	-2
Guyana	44
Haiti	-4
Jamaica	-105
Saint Kitts and Nevis	-3
Saint Lucia	-10
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	2
Suriname	26
Trinidad and Tobago	-28

Fourthly, the fisheries-specific rules of origin applied under the various trade arrangements, and the increasingly complex set of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) systems, labelling and quality standards applied, and sustainability certifications are making it increasingly difficult for CARICOM SIDs to compete internationally. It is a matter of fact that several CARICOM States (such as Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) have not been able to fully surmount the challenges posed by the comprehensive and complex SPS requirements of the EU well over two decades after their introduction and are thus effectively prevented from exporting to the EU market as they once did before the introduction of those measures. The primary reason for this is the inadequate level of human, financial, and institutional resources that countries must provide to satisfy the EU requirements that exported fish and fishery products comply with the standards required by their SPS regulations.

Fifthly, while tariff barriers are being lowered, the requirements for market access to developed countries' markets are getting increasingly difficult and onerous, owing to measures imposed by these states to achieve conservation, environmental protection, human rights, or other non-trade objectives, such as the EU regulation on illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing which entered into force on 1 January 2010; the dolphin protection standards and the International Marine Mammal Bycatch Criteria for U.S. Imports requirements under the US Marine Mammal Protection Act. The import provisions developed under the Act aim to reduce marine mammal bycatch associated with international commercial fishing operations, by requiring nations exporting fish and fish products to the United States to be held to the same standards as U.S. commercial fishing operations by having in place regulatory programs that compare in effectiveness to the U.S. standards. These measures will continue to pose major challenges for CARICOM exporters wishing to access these foreign markets.

Sixthly, the growing power of retailers who have been able to impose on exporters, increasingly stringent private quality standards for fish imports, including requirements related to eco-labels and other forms of certification, is yet a further impediment that regional exporters need to overcome to gain access to external markets in developed countries such as the USA and EU. Complying with such standards requires legal reforms and administrative systems, and practical changes in the conduct of fishing operations, which can be expensive and time consuming and add to the cost of exporting to external markets.

Finally, the intra-regional market may be used by exporters wishing to gain access to third country markets, as a launching pad to build capacity, improve competitiveness, and develop a record of accomplishment for exporting before venturing into the more competitive and more lucrative third country markets.

3. CURRENT STATUS AND TRENDS IN CARIBBEAN FISHERIES

3.1 Production

In 2020, total fishery production from domestic fisheries (EEZ and archipelagic waters) in CARICOM/CRFM countries was reported to be approximately 134,386 mt of which 131,025 mt came from marine fisheries and 3,361 mt came from aquaculture production. Total production has generally been declining since 2017, but preliminary data for 2022 were promising, and the initial estimates indicate an increase of about 2.15%, from 121,842 mt in 2021 to approximately 124,466 mt in 2022[x]. There is great disparity across Caribbean countries in the production of fish, with Belize, Guyana, and Suriname together accounting for almost 80% of total marine production in the region, and Belize, Haiti, and Jamaica together accounting for approximately 92% of aquaculture production.

Domestic fish production includes high value, low volume species such as Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*), the Caribbean Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*), various species of penaeid shrimp, snappers, groupers and tunas that are harvested mainly for export to hard currency markets in the USA, Canada, and the EU.

Belize was the only country which reported high seas production during 2020, with a total estimated production of approximately 160,700 mt.

Table 2. Fisheries production in metric tonnes by CARICOM/CRFM Member States for 2018, 2019, and 2020

MEMBER STATES	2018			2019			2020		
	Marine Prod (mt)	Aqua-culture Prod (mt)	Total Prod (mt)	Marine Prod (mt)	Aqua-culture Prod (mt)	Total Prod (mt)	Marine Prod (mt)	Aqua-culture Prod (mt)	Total Prod (mt)
Anguilla	758		758	758	-	758	835	-	835
Antigua and Barbuda	3,165	10	3,175	3,165	10	3,175	3,165	20	3,185
Bahamas	10,915	7	10,922	9,865	5	9,870	7,433	6	7,439
Barbados	1,697	26	1,723	1,492	26	1,518	1,517	26	1,543
Belize	216,107	50	216,157	213,143	560	213,703	186,899	565	187,464
Dominica	762	-	762	783	-	783	854	-	854
Grenada	2,725	1	2,726	2,632	1	2,633	1,813	1	1,814
Guyana	41,388	307	41,695	39,087	243	39,330	39,987	138	40,125
Haiti	16,350	1,430	17,780	16,350	1,560	17,910	16,350	1,560	17,910
Jamaica	15,346	1,616	16,962	13,475	1,150	14,625	12,875	918	13,793
Montserrat	30	-	30	30	-	30	25	-	25
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1,047	1	1,048	655	1	656	647	2	649
Saint Lucia	2,091	15	2,106	1,845	17	1,862	1,424	17	1,441
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	2,374	-	2,374	1,760	-	1,760	2,124	13	2,137
Suriname	44,963	110	45,073	37,451	110	37,561	29,772	37	29,809
Trinidad and Tobago	13,233	7	13,240	12,983	53	13,036	12,913	4	12,917
Turks and Caicos Islands	2,231	1	2,232	924	1	925	1,297	-	1,297
Totals	375,182	3,581	378,763	356,398	3,737	360,135	319,930	3,307	323,237

3.2 Fish Consumption

Fish plays an important role in food and nutrition security, providing a vital source of protein and minerals in the diets of Caribbean people, particularly the poor and vulnerable members of society.

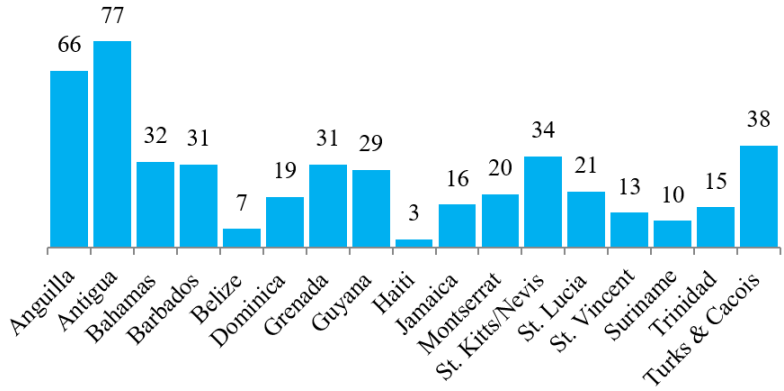
The rate of increase of global consumption of aquatic foods (excluding algae) outpaced population growth with an increase averaging 3.0 percent from 1961 to 2019, with annual per capita consumption reaching a record high of 20.5 kg in 2019[xi]. The COVID-19 pandemic had a noticeable adverse impact on per capita consumption rates, and although preliminary estimates point to decline for 2020, a subsequent return to the growth trajectory was expected. At the global level, the per capita consumption for fish and seafood was reported at 20.5% in 2019, with 75% coming from finfish. The per capita consumption rate for the Latin America and the Caribbean was estimated at 6.4 kg.

Annual per capita consumption of fish is high in most CRFM Member States, ranging from 77 kg in Antigua and Barbuda and 66 kg in Anguilla at the higher end, to 15 kg in Trinidad and Tobago and only 3 kg in Haiti. Average per capita consumption in the CARICOM countries was approximately 30 kg per annum in 2009, based on figures compiled by the CRFM Secretariat (Figure 1).

The Inception Report prepared by the JICA-funded study to prepare a Master Plan for Coastal Fisheries Development reported an annual per capita consumption of 32 kg in 2008[xii]. That figure was well above the then estimated worldwide average of 18 kg reported by FAO and underscores the importance of fish and seafood in the diet of the people of the Caribbean and the consequent high demand for fish and fishery products within the region.

A closer examination of the data, broken down by countries, reveals significant differences in terms of fish production, trade and consumption in the region. Although accurate and detailed information on the subject is lacking or unobtainable during the limited time available for this study, the possibility exists that in some of the smaller countries, tourism may be influencing the demand for fish, and the indicator of per capita consumption could be overestimated.

Figure 1. Annual Per Capita Consumption (kg) for CRFM Member States

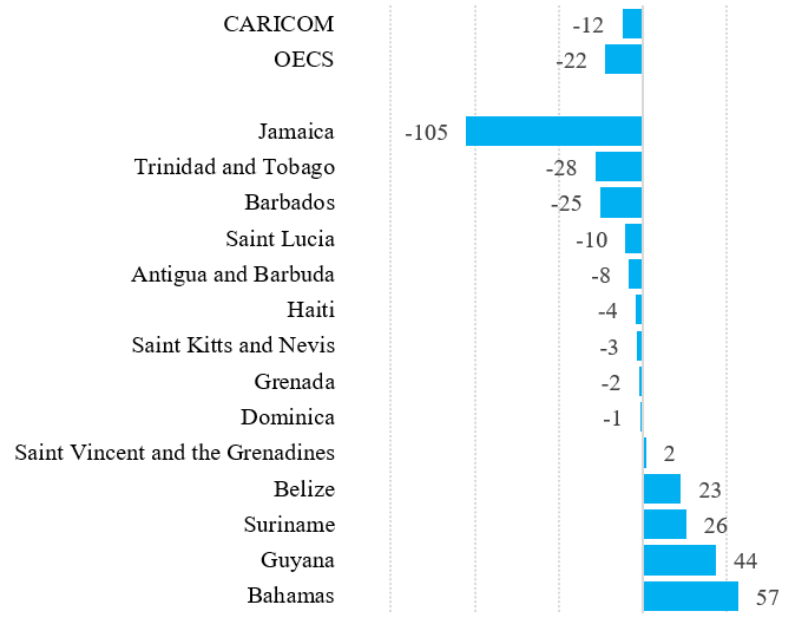


3.3 Trade in Fisheries Products

High-value species such as lobster, queen conch, shrimp, tunas, snappers and groupers are exported to earn hard currency, whereas lower price products, such as dried, salted, and canned fish are imported for food security. The data also suggest that lower price species are traded intra-regionally. There seem to be significant opportunities for expansion of intra-regional trade in fish and fishery product among the CARICOM States.

The CARICOM region and OECS subregion generally had a negative food trade balance for fisheries and other aquatic foods for the period 2019 and 2020, but the estimates for the period 2019-2021 placed the overall balance at US$0.9 million, indicating nominal improvement.[xiii]

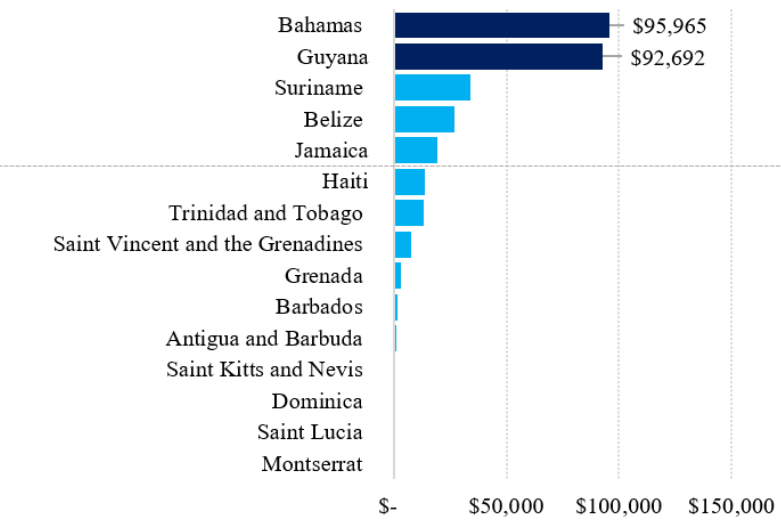
Figure 2. Food Trade Balance - fisheries & other aquatic foods (2019-2020)



3.3.1 Exports

Over the past few years, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, fisheries-related exports have been on a general upward trend, after a marked decline from 67,824 tonnes in 2019 to 55,472 tonnes in 2020. Although fish for food accounted for 99.9% of these exports, the region also exported fish for bait as well as live ornamental fish for breeding or rearing. Over the period 2019-2020, fisheries-related exports averaged

Figure 3. Value of Exports by Country in USD (2020)



US$263.7 million annually. Preliminary estimates for the period 2021-2022 placed the average for the two-year period at approximately US$300 million.

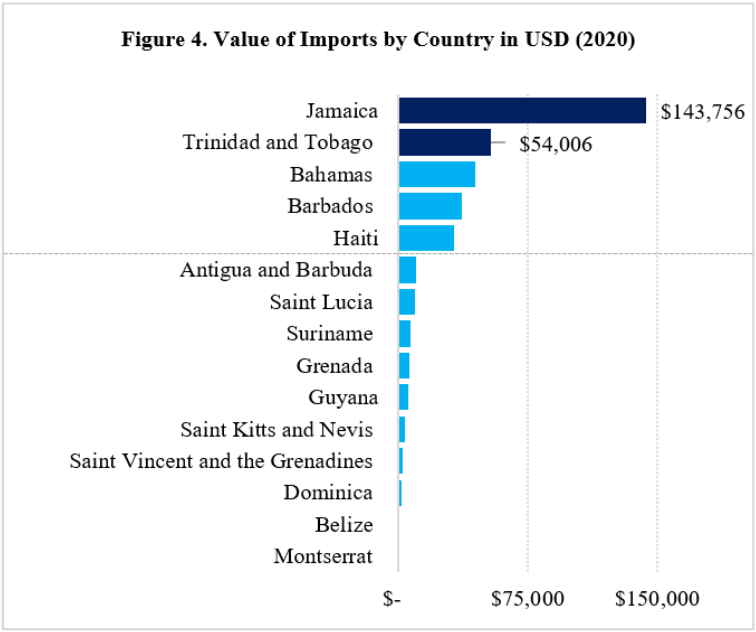
The top 5 exporters were The Bahamas, Guyana, Suriname, Belize, and Jamaica, which together accounted for 87% of the value of exported fisheries related products.

Chilled, fresh, and frozen high-value species such as shrimp, lobster, tunas, queen conch, snappers and groupers, which command premium prices on the international market, were the main export products. The main export destinations were the USA, Europe and Asia

3.3.2 Imports

The import bill for fisheries products continues to substantially exceed export earnings in most CRFM Member States. During 2019 and 2020, the region paid out an average of approximately US$336.9 million annually for fisheries exports but received an average of 99,000 mt annually for fisheries imports. This was a notable rise from the average for the previous 2 years, estimated at approximately 84,000 mt. As was the case with exports, 99.9% of the total fisheries imports was for food. *The top 5 importers were Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas, Barbados, and Haiti.*

Figure 4. Value of Imports by Country in USD (2020)



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4. INTERNATIONAL/REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRADE IN FISH

The international framework for sustainable development, management and conservation, and international trade in fish and fishery products consists of, *inter alia*, the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC) and associated international instruments such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (hereinafter the FAO Code) that establish the principles and standards for sustainable development, management, and conservation of the resources; the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and associated treaties administered by the WTO, which are mainly concerned about trade regulation; and the FAO/World Health Organization (WHO) Codex Alimentarius Commission that provides the international standards for food hygiene, contaminants, food technology, food import and export, microbiology, and fishery products.

Before discussing the trade issues that are the focus of this paper, it is useful to underscore that fisheries are renewable natural resources that must be managed to ensure that their sustainability and contribution to food and nutrition security are not compromised by irresponsible fishing and unregulated trade. Unregulated international trade has long been recognized as a threat to the survival of marine species that are not adequately managed[xiv]. Consequently, trade in fish and fishery products must be pursued together with proper resource management, based on the principles and rules enunciated by the LOSC and associated instruments, such as the FAO Code. The FAO Code also addresses the need for states to ensure that they pursue responsible policies, programmes, and practices to promote trade in accordance with WTO rules. In this regard, their trade and other policies must not result in obstacles to trade in fish and fishery products (Article 6.14).

4.1. World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO is responsible for setting and administering the regulatory framework for global commerce, including the rules regulating trade in fish and fishery products. In this regard, the WTO administers a series of agreements that are relevant, including, *inter alia:*

- The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the main regulatory framework for trade in goods, which provides for the liberalization of trade in goods through the gradual reduction of tariffs, conversion of non-tariff import restrictions into tariffs, and the elimination of trade-distorting domestic support;

- The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) which is aimed at ensuring that technical standards, regulations, and conformity assessment procedures do not create unnecessary barriers to trade (Countries can adopt standards they deem appropriate for human, animal, or plant health, or for the protection of the environment or consumers. However, WTO promotes the use of international standards and discourages methods giving to domestic goods an unfair advantage);

- The Agreement on the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) complements the TBT, and seeks to ensure a balance between protection of health and safety on the one hand and international trade on the other; and

- The Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM), which seeks to discipline the use of subsidies for products not covered by the Agreement on Agriculture, such as fishery products.

Additionally, the WTO administers a system for resolving disputes regarding trade among its Member States.

4.2. Other Trade Agreements

CARICOM countries have concluded a number of other unilateral and bilateral trade agreements, including, *inter alia*, the CARIFORUM[xv]/EU Economic Partnership Agreement, adopted by Cuba, Costa Rica, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. The CARIBCAN (CARICOM/Canada) and CBI (USA) arrangements also fall within this category. These arrangements set out specific conditions under which a free trade regime will be applied to selected goods and services, including fisheries. There are, however, exclusion clauses in some cases. For example, the CARICOM agreement with the Dominican Republic grants rates of duty for specified groups of commodities, excluding fishery products.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is a trade block comprising 34 countries in the Americas (excluding Cuba). The intent of the FTAA is, in effect, to extend the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico, and the United States to the wider Americas. However, the negotiations have stalled due largely to differences between the developed and developing countries, with developed countries seeking expanded trade in services and increased intellectual property rights, while the developing countries are seeking an end to agricultural subsidies and free trade in agricultural goods. In addition, questions on food and nutrition security, equity in treatment for all investors (local or foreign), and the proposed policy to limit fisheries to local citizens have been points of contention. However, if or when it is completed, the agreement could have significant implications for intra-regional trade, including trade in fish and fishery products, bearing in mind that even without such an agreement, North America is the main destination of fish exports from the CARICOM States.

4.3. The CARICOM Single Market and Economy

The principal governance framework for intra-regional trade among CARICOM States is the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas[xvi], which was signed by CARICOM States in 2001 and which entered into force on 1 January 2006. This Revised Treaty establishes the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and lays down principles and rules for its operation, including the settlement of disputes. The primary aim of the Revised Treaty is to promote economic development and boost trade by creating an enlarged internal market—without barriers—where the free movement of goods, labour, capital, and services, and the freedom of establishment is assured.

The preamble speaks of the need to promote the highest level of efficiency in the production of goods and services to maximize foreign exchange earnings, achieve food security, and improve the standard of living of Caribbean people. The specific objectives of the Revised Treaty, as laid down in Article 6, include, *inter alia*, improved standards of living and work; full employment of labour and other factors of production; accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development and convergence; expansion of trade and economic relations with third States; enhanced levels of international competitiveness; and organization for increased production and productivity.

The key elements of the CMSE, comprising a market of about 14 million people, are:

- Free movement of goods and services by eliminating all barriers to intra-regional movement and harmonising standards to ensure acceptability of goods and services traded;
- Right of Establishment - to permit the establishment of CARICOM-owned businesses in any Member State, without restrictions;
- A Common External Tariff, which is a rate of duty applied by all Members of the Market to a product imported from a country which is not a member of the market;
- Free circulation of goods imported from extra-regional sources which would require collection of taxes at the first point of entry into the Region, and provision for the sharing

of collected customs revenue;
- Free movement of capital, through measures such as eliminating foreign exchange controls, convertibility of currencies (or a common currency), and integrated capital markets;
- A common trade policy or an agreement among the members on matters related to internal and international trade and a coordinated external trade policy negotiated on a joint basis;
- Free movement of labour through measures such as removing all obstacles to intra-regional movement of skills, labour, and travel; harmonising social services (such as education and health); providing for the transfer of social security benefits; and establishing common standards and measures for accreditation and equivalency; and
- A sophisticated and comprehensive dispute settlement system, including the Caribbean Court of Justice, to undergird the CSME.

Goods meeting the CARICOM Rules of Origin are traded duty-free throughout the region (except with The Bahamas, The Turks and Caicos Islands, and Anguilla[xvii]); therefore, all fish and fishery products originating[xviii] within the region should be traded intra-regionally, without restrictions. The CSME thus represents a highly developed and sophisticated policy, legal, and institutional framework aimed at promoting the expansion of intra- and extra-regional trade in goods and services. When arrangements are fully in place, there will be zero-tariff on fish traded intra-regionally, a Common External Tariff regime for fish entering from third States, and the Rules of Origin would be clear and uniform. However, notwithstanding these provisions, and although good statistics on the volume of intra-regional trade in fish and fishery product are unavailable, it is clear that the bulk of trade is external rather than internal, and the potential for internal trade is not being fully realized. The question that arises is, why? What are the impediments to intra-regional trade?

5. IMPEDIMENTS TO INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE

In this section, we briefly consider the main impediments to intra-regional trade in fish and fishery products in the CARICOM region. As noted earlier, CARICOM States, as Small Island Developing States, are heavily dependent upon trade for food security, and economic growth and development. Export earnings are needed to finance the importation of food items, energy, raw material, and machinery for manufacturing, as well as inputs for the tourism and other sectors. Thus States have adopted a policy of promoting external trade to hard currency markets wherever possible.

5.1. Non-Tariff Barriers

The existence of tariff barriers is not a major issue for intra-regional trade in fish and fishery products for States participating in the CSME, since goods meeting the CARICOM Rules of Origin are traded tariff-free. There are, however, several non-tariff barriers that impede intra-regional trade. Rankine *et al* (2005)[xix] reported in a study on trade liberalization and the fisheries sector in CARICOM States, that in many of the CARICOM countries, the tax regimes cater for additional charges on the movement of fish products. These include consumption tax, customer surcharge, and value-added tax (VAT). Environmental taxes, stamp duties, and licensing fees also fall within this category. He furthermore reported that the overall tariff regime for fish was considered discriminatory because, while fresh fish could enter most Caribbean countries duty-free, fishery value-added products attracted varying rates of duty, potentially frustrating trade in these products. Rankine *et al* (2005) also reported that the trade policy regime in some CARICOM states provided for incentives and support for the fishing sector. Some of these, he noted, might be viewed as 'subsidies' and deemed trade distorting. The interest of intra-regional

trade would be best served by the removal of such non-tariff barriers that impede the free movement of fish and fishery products among CARICOM Member States.

5.2. Local Protectionism

One of the main impediments to the expansion of intra-regional trade is protectionism, which refers to state policies or practices which protect businesses and workers within a country by restricting or regulating trade with foreign nations (Scott, 2019)[xx]. In the context of fisheries, national governments, in an attempt to protect the jobs and livelihoods of local fishers and fishing enterprises, sometimes restrict competition by creating barriers to the entry into their markets, or by discouraging the sale of fish and fishery products that are competitive with locally harvested fish within their jurisdiction. This problem often arises from concerns that (a) trade in the product in issue is not truly fair, (b) the quality and safety of the imported products are questionable, or (c) domestic fisheries have unique and special needs and should, therefore, be protected to ensure their viability. While protectionism may serve legitimate purposes, it poses an impediment to free trade, which may be incompatible with the CSME commitments. Accordingly, States would need to review their trade policies for fish and fishery products with a view towards eliminating protectionist policies and measures.

5.3. Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Requirements

According to the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), SPS measures should only be applied to the extent necessary to protect life and health and should not be more restrictive to trade than required to achieve such objectives. Compliance with SPS requirements regarding food safety is not only a problem regarding external markets such as the EU or USA, but also an impediment to intra-regional trade. Although regional standards are not as demanding, they are problematic because of lack of uniformity and uncertainty in their administration. Existing SPS systems in the region have been described as inadequate, outdated, and inefficient.[xxi]

The HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) Systems are recognised by international organizations such as FAO and WHO and have been adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the body responsible for implementing the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. While the HACCP Systems have been accepted by CARICOM States, implementing and maintaining them remains a challenge due to lack of human, financial, and institutional capacity in monitoring and inspection services and the unavailability of adequate laboratory services. There is a need for further investments in upgrading legal, institutional, and human capacity in many countries to comply with new food safety rules in the main export markets.

5.4. Domestic Capacity for Harvesting and Processing

Production of fish and seafood for intra-regional trade is also constrained by inadequate domestic capacity to harvest and handle catch, particularly non-traditional species, and satisfy market requirements in a competitive manner. Furthermore, in most CARICOM States, fishers and exporters and not organized in a manner that would facilitate cooperative action to address issues of common concern and the provision of technical assistance and support. These problems are partly due to poor organization among fishers, limited access to credit financing, widespread use of outdated and inefficient boat and fishing gear technology, as well as limited post-harvest technology to store and maintain quality and freshness of the catch. Overcoming

these constraints requires investments in training and capacity development within the industry as well as technology transfer. It also requires improved access to credit facilities for investment in appropriate technology.

5.5. Fisheries Management Capacity and IUU Fishing

The achievement of sustainable fisheries is a major concern of CARICOM States and the world community. Trade in fish is increasingly being linked to evidence that the traded species is harvested from sustainable fisheries in a responsible manner that is not detrimental to the survival of the species or of other species belonging to the same ecosystem. However, the management of Caribbean fisheries is a major challenge for most if not all States due to the large number of species, the significant data and information required for management decision-making, the small-scale, multi-species nature of the fisheries, and the limited human, financial, and institutional resources required for effective management[xxii].

Within the region, some fish stocks are over-exploited or fully exploited, whereas other stocks are underutilized or unutilized and are thus not making optimum contributions to the economic development of the countries. Further policy and legal reforms and investments in fisheries management capacity are, therefore, needed to ensure that all stocks are fully developed and effectively managed, using precautionary and ecosystem approaches to achieve optimum, long-term sustainable benefits now and in future.

An important component of fisheries management is a monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) system to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations and to identify, prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in waters under the sovereignty or jurisdiction of the coastal state. Widespread IUU fishing and illegal trade in fish through transshipment at sea[xxiii] is occurring in the Caribbean region and is yet another impediment to intra-regional trade in fish and fishery products. This is because it has harmful consequences on the economic viability of the fisheries, the sustainability of the resources and marine diversity as a whole, and the economies of countries. It undermines the efforts of countries to use and manage their fisheries and associated ecosystems in a sustainable manner and to ensure optimum sustainable benefits.[xxiv] Further reforms in the national policy, legal, and regulatory systems and the strengthening of MCS capabilities are needed to combat IUU fishing and to ensure optimum sustainable utilization of fisheries resources for trade and economic development.

5.6. Transportation and Related Infrastructure

A basic requirement for moving goods from one country to another is a functioning and efficient transport system and port infrastructure[xxv], especially for the movement perishable goods such as fish. Shipping of goods and travel among Caribbean States often must go via port facilities in the USA (Florida). For the purposes of intra-regional trade, air and maritime transport are the major modes of transporting goods and services among the SIDs comprising the Community. However, according to Lewis[xxvi] (Pers. Comm.), inadequate transport infrastructure has been and remains a major impediment to the regional integration process, the expansion or diversification of trade, and the competitiveness of firms in the CARICOM Region. He furthermore said that regional transport infrastructure is critical for the development of regional economies and achieving CARICOM's integration objectives through the expansion of intra-regional trade and should perhaps be given special treatment and provided with the necessary resources to ensure its development and maintenance.

There is a need for continuing investment in regional transport infrastructure to enable the Community to stay abreast of developments in containerised shipping, aircraft operations, and

the new technologies and logistics systems that enhance the efficiency of air and seaport operations. Development of an incentive programme for transport enterprises aimed at promoting the development of non-traditional shipping routes within and across the Caribbean basin should also be considered to improve intra-regional trade and circumvent the high cost of shipping via US ports.

5.7. Market Intelligence and Information Systems

Exporters and importers need reliable and timely market information to make informed business decisions. Access to information—such as prices, traders, processors, standards, and the nature, quality and quantity of products demanded or available, and other relevant information needed by fishers, processors, exporters, and importers to understand and make good decisions regarding external markets—is often limited in the region. Market information systems used in gathering, analyzing, and disseminating such information to interested stakeholders need to be upgraded to facilitate intra-regional trade.

6. CONCLUSION

Within the region, countries should accord higher priority to intra-regional trade, to address food and nutrition security and reduce the heavy dependency on imported fish and other food items. There is no doubt that exporters in the region are justly rewarded for their investments from the exportation of high-value fish and fishery products to third countries. However, a two-pronged strategy of promoting the export of high-value species to extra-regional markets and promoting the export of other species intra-regionally may be the most prudent approach to expanding trade in fish and fishery products at this time.

Investments in promoting the expansion of intra-regional trade should only be pursued after a more careful and thorough analysis of the state of fisheries resources, and the conduct of a marketing study to better understand the characteristics and opportunities within the regional market and to identify fish species and products that may have a competitive advantage. Further studies are also required to better understand the relationship, opportunities, and challenges between regional and the external markets, to determine the social and economic feasibility and issues that would need to be addressed. The key impediments to sustainable fish and aquaculture production and trade in fish and fishery products in the Region also need to be more clearly identified and defined.

The information obtained from the studies mentioned above would provide States with the evidence needed to determine appropriate policy, legal, and institutional reforms and interventions, including capacity building, which might be needed to boost intra-regional trade. Likewise, evidence-based, targeted, focused, and practical interventions at both the national and regional levels could then be developed to overcome the impediments identified.

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[xiii] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), International Trade Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2022 (LC/PUB.2022/23-P), Santiago, 2023, pages 68 and 110

[xiv] The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora is an international agreement to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. An increasing number of commercial marine species is being regulated by CITES.

[xv] CARIFORUM is made up of the CARICOM States plus the Dominican Republic.

[xvi] The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas Establishing the Caribbean Community Including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (hereinafter ***the Revised Treaty***)

[xvii] The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and Anguilla, although members of the CRFM are not member of the CSME.

[xviii] Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates wholly produced within the region are deemed to be of Community origin (Art 84). According to Rule 2, Schedule 1, "Wholly produced" when used with reference to goods means:….. “products obtained by hunting or fishing conducted within the Community; marine products taken from the sea by a vessel of a Member State;…”. In addition, Rule 1, Schedule 1, provides that marine products taken from the sea or goods produced therefrom at sea shall be regarded as having been consigned from a Member State if they were taken by or produced in a vessel of a Member State and have been brought direct to the Community. A vessel shall be treated as a vessel of a Member State only if - (a) it is registered in a Member State; (b) it carries a complement (inclusive of the Master thereof) of which not less than three-fourths are nationals of Member States; and (c) it is majority owned and operated by - (i) nationals of Member States, or (ii) a Government of a Member State, or (iii) a statutory Corporation of a Member State

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