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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Thirty-eighth Session

Georgetown, Guyana, 11–13 March and 18–21 March 2024

Agrifood systems transformation in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Latin America and the Caribbean

Executive Summary

Of the 33 FAO Member Countries that comprise the FAO region of Latin America and the Caribbean, 16 are Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS)[1]. This document outlines the social, environmental, technological and political context in which the Caribbean SIDS are operating to transform their agrifood systems. It describes the priority areas of FAO's work that have been identified through an extensive process of consultation across the Caribbean during the previous biennium, and it outlines FAO's approach to delivering technical assistance and other support to optimize efficiency and impact.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Agrifood systems transformation of Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is important to the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region as they make up nearly half of its membership. FAO's programming seeks to accelerate the region's agrifood systems transformation. The work planned for the biennium 2024-2025 builds on the work carried out by FAO to enable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis during the 2022-2023 biennium. Major areas of work are: (a) efficient, inclusive and sustainable production; (b) ending hunger and achieving food security and nutrition; (c) sustainable management of natural resources and adaptation to climate change; and (d) reduction of inequalities, poverty and promotion of resilience.

[1] Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

2. In supporting Caribbean SIDS in these areas, FAO leverages its knowledge and experiences from its international networks to enable accelerated progress using proven solutions. FAO uses its global normative leadership role on many issues governing agrifood systems, to create added value in its field programme. FAO's strengthened capacity for partnerships – within the United Nations, with other regional and international organizations, with private sector and civil society – also supports cohesive and progressive programmatic support to the region.

3. This document outlines FAO's programming to effectively respond to the needs of the Caribbean SIDS. It will also look at the rationale and the ambitions of the programmes of work and examine the approaches that FAO uses to scale up and enable sustainable impact. The overall purpose is to: a) validate priority needs of Caribbean SIDS; b) optimize FAO's approach for efficient, effective and impactful programme delivery; ,c) strengthen inter and intraregional collaboration for agrifood sector transformation; and d) inform Members' deliberations during the 38th session of the Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean and subsequent recommendations.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

II.1. Characteristics of SIDS and the general situation of SIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean

4. It is widely recognized that the inherent characteristics of SIDS expose them to complex and multi-faceted vulnerabilities. Their small economies, relatively small populations and limited land space, together with their isolation, make them highly dependent on global markets and disproportionately vulnerable to external shocks. They are also on the frontline of climate change impacts.

5. Caribbean SIDS are at different stages of transforming their agriculture sectors because of the marked differences in their resource capacity (e.g. fossil fuels, land, labour, technology, market access and governance). This occurs parallel to several new and evolving forces: a renewed vision for agriculture provoked by the recent global crises; a reinforcement of cooperation and collaboration among countries on various fronts; and political/social crises within some LAC countries that have put the issue of intraregional migration in political focus. Despite having among the highest Human Development Index rates globally, this has not translated to modernization and competitiveness in the agribusiness sector or leadership in marine resource management. Instead, the region faces high youth unemployment and missed opportunities to diversify the region's narrow resource base. Investment in a more resilient future is an imperative, and agriculture sector transformation is a cornerstone of the Caribbean SIDS' resilience.

II.2. Challenges to financing agrifood sector transformation and resilience

6. The recent crises have exacerbated the negative fiscal situation in most of the Caribbean SIDS. The high debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio greatly limits the fiscal space for governments to support investment in building climate resilience and diversifying economies. The Bridgetown Initiative calling for reforms to the global financing architecture, and the global traction that it has gained, are testament to the thought leadership coming from the Caribbean in addressing long-standing disparities. Despite the wide recognition of the vulnerability of SIDS, this has not translated to their greater inclusion in opportunities for grant funding. While the climate financing facilities are welcomed, the process of accessing funding is considered excessively lengthy and costly. Climate justice is an important theme. The Caribbean SIDS, along with SIDS from other regions, successfully advocated, at the 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 27), for a Loss and Damage fund to be established to support effective recovery and adaptation response of developing countries.

7. There is potential for private sector investment in agrifood system transformation activities, with some countries exhibiting productive and trade potential in both commodity and value-added products. However, investors struggle with small market size, climate related vulnerability and natural disasters, political instability in some places, difficult access to business development services,

including crop insurance and other financial services, sufficient and reliable market information, adequate and affordable technologies, trade logistics, market infrastructure and institutional barriers.

II.3. Food security and healthy diets

8. The issue of unhealthy diets and the unsustainable burden of social and economic costs of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) across the Caribbean have been high on the governments' agendas for decades. During the recent crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, food insecurity rose to unprecedented levels. The Caribbean was identified as the region with the highest cost of a healthy diet. The situation has catapulted food security as a priority in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) agenda. The Caribbean preparatory meeting for the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States document highlighted the issue of food security as one of increasing urgency, and called on FAO for greater support for SIDS-specific innovative agriculture practices and responses. There is a distinctly regional approach to food security and the foundation for assuring availability and stability of adequate food supplies is provided through the CARICOM "25 x 2025 Initiative" whereby extraregional food imports will be reduced by 25 percent by 2025. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in its role as Pro Tempore President of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) during 2023, has led the development of a food security and nutrition plan for CELAC.

9. The food security situation in Haiti is dire, and it has been aggravated by an upsurge in armed violence and an ongoing cholera outbreak. Half of Haiti's total population is chronically food insecure, and 22 percent of children are chronically malnourished[2]. Additionally, dependence on humanitarian aid is limited due to constraints on funding and physical accessibility to reach households. Food security trajectories indicate that agricultural production will only meet the food requirements of about 20 percent of poor and very poor households[3].

II.4. Readiness for transformation

10. The political will to transform agrifood systems is high in the Caribbean. There are calls for adoption of innovative technologies, for changes in soil and land management, and for changes in the management approaches to marine resources. Countries are revising policies, strategies and institutions to facilitate the needed transformation. A Special CARICOM Ministerial Task Force on Food Production and Food Security closely monitors the implementation of key aspects of the transformation agenda. The countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) are similarly monitoring the implementation of the OECS Food and Agriculture Sustainable Transformation Strategy. The Central American Integration System (SICA) is reviewing its food and nutrition security policy and aligning it to the recent UN Food Systems Summit guidance. Cooperation among Caribbean countries is growing: in 2023, CARICOM signed an agreement with Cuba on technical cooperation; several innovative cross-country production and marketing collaborations are being developed; discussions have been launched on joint procurement platforms; there is an intensified effort to address the highly problematic issue of trade logistics; a number of sanitary and phytosanitary protocols have been issued to facilitate agrifood trade throughout the Caribbean; and a number of food and agrifood sector investment fora have been organized. Caribbean SIDS are also building partnerships further afield, particularly within CELAC, with the African continent and with other SIDS globally.

[2] FAO. 2023. *Haiti: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023*. Rome. In: https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4664en

[3] FEWS NET. *In addition to insecurity and inflation, drought worsens food insecurity in Haiti, 2023.* Food Security Outlook February to September 2023 - Haiti. In: https://fews.net/latin-america-and-caribbean/haiti/food-security-outlook/february-2023

III. KEY FAO PROGRAMME AREAS FOR AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION IN CARIBBEAN SIDS (2024 – 2025)

III.1. Efficient, inclusive and sustainable production

Sustainable crop and livestock production

11. This work aims at building capacities within countries to optimize the use of their limited natural resources consistent with their sector development ambitions and targets. Agricultural productivity in the Caribbean is low and, for the most part, there has been little investment in technology. Twenty-four percent of lands in the CARICOM SIDS[4] are degraded, and seven countries are among the world's most water-stressed[5]. Additionally, in many countries, land is being lost from agriculture at a high rate. Key aspects of FAO's work include:

(a) the development of trained drone teams in ministries of agriculture, which, coupled with soil sampling and analyses, enable the creation of digitized land maps that allow better planning for agricultural land use;

(b) policy support around land use and building capacities for efficient and effective management of land and equitable access by women and youth;

(c) technical support for the development of evidence-based water policies and irrigation investment plans that consider innovative approaches to water treatment and management;

(d) improving capacities for better collection, management and use of agriculture data and statistics;

(e) building capacities of extension services and farmers on integrated crop management including integrated pest management;

(f) promoting increased access to high quality, adapted seeds and planting materials;

(g) technical and economic assessment of local ingredients for animal feed;

(h) technical support for the prevention, control and response of transboundary plant and animal diseases; and

(i) introducing and optimizing innovative technologies for efficient and climate smart production such as: insect rearing as a source of poultry and aquaculture feed and biological fertilizer; optimizing greenhouses; novel water desalination treatments based on renewable energy; use of sensors for precision agriculture; digital animal identification and traceability systems; new aquaculture and mariculture techniques.

Blue Transformation

12. While land space is limited in many of the Caribbean countries, a large proportion of their territorial space is ocean. For the Caribbean SIDS overall roughly 80 percent of its territorial space is ocean. Excluding the continental SIDS, that figure rises to over 90 percent. The Caribbean SIDS refer to themselves as "Big Ocean States", but work is needed for these countries to position themselves as leaders in sustainable marine resource management. Fisheries data collection, management and reporting are weak, and many commercially important species are overfished. Pollution and algal blooms threaten marine ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them. Up to 35 percent of fisheries and aquaculture production is either lost or wasted every year[6]. The Development of

[4] Data derived from 4 models (UNCCD default, Trends. Earth, FAO-WOCAT, FAO Alt) and LPD data 2001-2022 FAO-WOCAT.

[5] ECLAC, 2022. *Global Warming Impacts to Freshwater Resources in Caribbean SIDS*. Focus Magazine of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), Issue 3, July-September 2022, pp. 8-9. In: https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/1212f5fe-59f0-4755-981b-906c6c30d9d0/content

[6] FAO. 2022. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022. Towards Blue Transformation.* Rome. In: https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0461en

aquaculture is lagging behind the rest of the world. Key focus areas in FAO's ongoing and planned work include:

(a) supporting the development of evidence-based fisheries and aquaculture policies consistent with best decision-making practices for sustainable aquatic food systems;

(b) technical assistance in fisheries statistics and the operationalization of robust fisheries information systems;

(c) training and capacity development in marine resource surveys and cross-sectoral marine spatial planning;

(d) supporting the strengthening of legislative and regulatory frameworks and developing national capacities to prevent Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing;

(e) strengthening the capacity of fisherfolks and their organizations to engage with governments, promote participatory ecosystem stewardship and enhance value addition of fisheries products;

(f) support the development of capacity and inclusive access to social protection, promote safety at sea and address threats such as the sargassum influxes;

(g) technical assistance for the development of sustainable and resilient aquaculture systems, including a modern and economically viable mariculture subsector; and

(h) strengthening support to the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) through its FAO Secretariat and to facilitate greater Caribbean participation in FAO's Committee on Fisheries.

III.2. End hunger and achieve food security and nutrition

13. The recent complex global crises have brought food security into sharp political focus at the highest levels of governments throughout the Caribbean. The 25 x 2025 Initiative serves to enhance food availability and the stability of those critical supplies. It also drives the economic prosperity and diversification which build resilience. Within LAC, the Caribbean is the subregion where hunger and food insecurity have increased the most. The Caribbean was the subregion with the highest proportion of the population (57 percent) unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021 – that is more than twice the LAC regional average[7]. FAO's emphases on working with the Caribbean SIDS to improve the food security situation include the following:

(a) building capacities and developing suitable and validated tools that enable countries to monitor the food security situation, nationally and locally, including tracking the affordability of healthy diets;

(b) supporting countries to review and update evidence-based food and nutrition-related policies, and monitor their implementation;

(c) facilitating governments' efforts to integrate school feeding as a viable strategy to assure access to healthy diets to school children, and to expand domestic market opportunities for smallholder local farmers;

(d) technical support to nutrition programmes including through school nutrition guidelines and standards, and national food-based dietary guidelines to promote food quality, diversity and sustainability; and

(e) technical guidance and analyses in support of advocacy and public information on issues such as front-of-package labelling, and food marketing and promotion, in collaboration with key actors including academia, civil society and parliamentary fronts against hunger.

[7] FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF & WFP. 2023. *Latin America and the Caribbean – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends*. Santiago. In: https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8514en

III.3. Sustainable management of natural resources and adaptation to climate change

14. The region is recognized as an area of high species richness and high species endemism and as one of the earth's most biologically rich yet threatened areas. The main threats to terrestrial biodiversity today are habitat destruction and fragmentation due to the expansion of agriculture, cities, tourism and commercial development. Overexploitation of living resources, predation and competition by invasive alien species are also significant threats. The increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes and droughts, sea level rise and the general drying trend in the region exacerbate stressed ecosystems. Underlying these threats are a multiplicity of root causes, including a lack of awareness of the value of natural ecosystems, weak land use planning and conflicting policy, limited data and technical information, weak land management and environmental institutions, outdated forestry legislation and insufficient funding. Specifically, the unavailability of data and information impedes sound decision-making, planning and reporting on adaptation and mitigation actions. FAO's work in the Caribbean focuses on:

(a) mobilizing catalytic resources to support the implementation of adaptation actions in agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU);

(b) supporting the design and implementation of carbon credit mechanisms to increase investments in protected area management;

(c) facilitating marine spatial planning to enhance the adoption of an ecosystem approach to fisheries;

(d) supporting the participatory development and implementation of national protected area system plans, management plans and specie recovery plans;

(e) promoting the streamlining of agriculture, forestry and fisheries into nationally determined contributions;

(f) building capacity in remote sensing to manage forest, land and soils;

(g) promoting and facilitating the use of nature-based solutions;

(h) facilitating the adoption of protocols, methodologies and standard operating procedures for measuring greenhouse gas in the AFOLU sector; and

(i) researching drought tolerant landraces specific to the emerging climate in the Caribbean.

III.4. Reduction of inequalities, poverty and promotion of resilience

Promoting resilience

15. This area of work aims at enhancing social, economic and environmental resilience in the Caribbean SIDS. The high vulnerability of these SIDS was manifested by the disproportionate GDP losses, rise in unemployment and food insecurity provoked by recent global crises, and the slower recovery compared with most other subregions. One of the most direct ways in which disasters and shocks (both natural and economic) affect agriculture is through lower-than-expected production. This results in direct economic loss to farmers and fishers, which can cascade along the entire value chain. Over the period 1991–2021, the Caribbean region recorded over 8 percent in total agricultural losses from extreme events as a share of agricultural GDP[8].

16. Actions that enhance social, economic and environmental resilience in an integrated manner are needed in order to address these complex challenges, promote a better life for citizens of the Caribbean SIDS and leave no one behind. These include:

(a) building capacities for multi-hazard risk monitoring, early warning and anticipatory action to prevent or reduce impacts;

[8] FAO. 2023. *The Impact of Disasters on Agriculture and Food Security 2023 – Avoiding and reducing losses through investment in resilience.* Rome. In: https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7900en

(b) technical support in the development and implementation of national and community-based agriculture disaster risk management plans that do not only consider priority hazards such as hurricanes, droughts and floods, but also consider the secondary hazards that they trigger;

(c) facilitating vulnerability and risk assessments to inform gender-responsive and youth-inclusive policies and programmes.

(d) supporting data and risk analytics intelligence to expand the reach of social protection programmes targeting farming and fishing communities, and inform the design of agriculture insurance products;

(e) promoting the analysis of climate and disaster risks across value chains to enable a more systematic approach to risk management;

(f) facilitating access to context-appropriate, innovative tools and solutions for disaster risk management such as decision-support models for water stress and pathogen risk management and the establishment of boat banks for rapid emergency response; and

(g) exploring innovative financing instruments that can enable agriculture households and value chain actors to better anticipate, absorb or recover from shocks.

Inclusive economic growth

17. Caribbean SIDS continue to face major challenges to improving the competitiveness and inclusiveness of national and regional agricultural value chains. The paucity of quality data in the region frustrates attempts to accurately identify high potential value chains. The region continues to struggle with high dependence on imports, low levels of innovation, weak connectivity among sector actors, and insufficient financing and investment. Inclusive agrifood sector growth in the region will require an integrated value chain development approach bringing together all stakeholders and jointly building a common vision for the sector.

18. FAO will facilitate the work of national teams, representing diverse stakeholders along the value chain, including ministry staff, farmers leaders, women and young entrepreneurs, support service institutions, private sector agribusiness and financial service institutions, to collectively support the implementation of upgrading strategies for value chains for which there is evidence of good potential. This will include:

(a) rapid value chain selection assessments to identify those with the highest development potential, and include systematic analysis of risk, technology and gender conditions in specific chains;

(b) the development of strategic upgrading plans to address key binding constraints affecting the performance of value chains;

(c) the development of business investment plans to establish public-private partnerships to help implement the upgrading plan and strategically strengthen priority value chains in each country, bringing in needed public and private commitment and investment into key agricultural sectors;

(d) supporting the development of inclusive policies for effective economic inclusion of rural youth and women through improved access to productive resources and services, education and capacity building, labour markets and emerging economic activities; and

(e) supporting farmers' organizations through the improvement of their productive and associative capacities and enhancement of collective action.

IV. OPTIMIZING DELIVERY OF FAO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

19. FAO seeks to exploit its intrinsic characteristics and to establish corporate strategies that optimize the delivery of FAO's programmes in an evolving global, regional and country context. Key aspects of FAO's approach to delivery are outlined with selected examples.

IV.1. Partnership

20. FAO's strategies, priority areas of work and processes are Member-driven. FAO works with countries through all phases of country programme design and implementation. FAO's partnering goes beyond governments and public institutions; FAO embraces the One UN, works with relevant regional bodies and institutions, collaborates closely with civil society organizations, and works increasingly with the private sector. Key aspects of FAO's partnerships are described below:

(a) constant engagement with key regional bodies (CARICOM, SICA, OECS) to ensure full alignment with their priorities including participation as observers in governance meetings, and participating fully in technical and thematic advisory working groups;

(b) expanding the work with the private sector to include different types of private entities, while seeking to better understand their perspectives and facilitate inclusive private investment;

(c) active engagement with the civil society, in particular academia, women's groups and youth; and

(d) involvement in numerous joint United Nations projects and even more informal collaborations in line with the UN Multi-country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

IV.2. Utilizing FAO's normative strength to enhance its field programme

21. FAO's singular role in many global mechanisms enables the Organization to provide authoritative guidance on best practices recognized internationally, and to facilitate increasingly effective engagement of Caribbean SIDS in global fora that shape governance of agrifood systems. Some examples of these synergies are outlined here:

(a) FAO provides the fora and technical expertise to facilitate the development and implementation of international instruments that set out the principles, responsibilities and international standards for responsible fisheries and aquaculture. FAO is currently supporting many Caribbean SIDS to address legislative, institutional and capacity constraints to fully comply with their international responsibilities.

(b) The FAO-based International Plant Protection Convention Secretariat regularly provides guidance and support to the work of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency, as the Regional Plant Protection Organization for the Caribbean, facilitating robust participation of the subregion in global phytosanitary standard-setting, facilitating capacity development and transfer of global best practices in phytosanitary management and control.

(c) The Global Soil Partnership has assisted with the design of a regional framework to support improved sustainable land management and sustainable soil management. These include the Caribbean Soil Support Group which will provide technical assistance on soil health, soil fertility and other soil-related issues to the work of the CARICOM Secretariat; and the Caribbean Soil Lab Network which will contribute to strengthening the capacity of laboratories in soil analysis in the Caribbean.

(d) Alongside the technological innovation of insect rearing mentioned in Section III.1, there must be parallel work on the regulation of this technology. This will be guided by the FAO Development Law Service and the expertise within the FAO Secretariat of the FAO/WHO Joint Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme which oversees risk assessments that inform the global food safety standard setting of Codex Alimentarius.

Furthermore, this work should enable Caribbean countries to be protagonists in shaping global governance of this young technology.

(e) One of FAO's flagship programmes, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, uses a Geospatial Platform and Data Lab for Statistical Innovation to develop ambitious evidence-based country-owned programmes to eradicate poverty (SDG 1), end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2), and reduce inequalities (SDG 10). In partnership with the FAO Investment Centre, investment plans and other investment aid are offered to countries. A growing number of Caribbean SIDS are eligible to participate in this Initiative.

IV.3. Transferring knowledge and experience

22. As a global knowledge organization, FAO is engaged with countries, specialized institutions and research networks around the world as they address a range of agrifood issues. FAO is therefore well-placed to facilitate the transfer/adaptation of solutions proven elsewhere hence accelerating agrifood system transformation. Examples of how this has benefited and could benefit the Caribbean SIDS are presented below:

(a) The SIDS Solution Platform was established in 2021 for the sharing of proven solutions to promote and scale up ideas to accelerate the achievement of agriculture, environment and health goals.

(b) The Climate Action Platform for Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean (PLACA) is facilitated by FAO and provides a space for discussion and sharing of information and solutions. One area of focus has been agricultural extension whereby PLACA trained over 1 000 extensionists through August 2023 and developed an online repository of low-cost technological solutions for climate change adaptation in agriculture. There is scope for greater engagement by the Caribbean.

(c) The High-Level Ministerial Event "Transforming agrifood systems to increase resilience and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Harnessing the potential of SIDS, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)", held in Rome on 29 June 2023, called for the establishment of a Ministerial network for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs, with technical support from FAO, to share experiences and collectively build resilience to climate change and food insecurity, and to secure investments to scale up agrifood system transformation.