



Enhancing capacity for sustainable trade of queen conch through Blue BioTrade in the Eastern Caribbean.

Project code TJAJ

SUMMARY

May 2022

A summary of country case study recommendations for policy makers, exporters and investors



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1. Background

The queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) or “lambi” is a large marine shellfish renowned as one of the Caribbean’s most iconic and valuable fishery resources strongly linked to the region’s culture and economy. As a result of uncontrolled harvesting and illegal landings, the [queen conch](#) was listed in [Appendix II](#) of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) in 1992, which means that its international trade is regulated to ensure it is legal, sustainable, and traceable.

Eastern Caribbean States acknowledge that achieving sustainable trade of queen conch at the value chain level can promote environmental, social, and economic development in the region, as well as lay the foundations for best practices in other ocean economy value chains.

In 2020, the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development \(UNCTAD\)](#), the [Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States \(OECS\)](#) and the [CITES Secretariat](#) jointly launched Phase 1 of the pilot project, “[Seizing the trade and business potential of Blue BioTrade products for promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine biodiversity in selected Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Countries](#)”, which aims to increase stakeholder capacity for sustainable trade of queen conch in Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Three detailed country case studies were produced to map the actors of the queen conch value chain, identify challenges and opportunities for the application of the [Blue BioTrade approach](#), and generate momentum for action through inclusive consultation and validation with stakeholders, including national governments. **The Blue BioTrade approach** consists of applying a set of environmental, social and economic sustainability guidelines (based on [UNCTAD’s BioTrade Principles and Criteria](#)) to trade and investment in marine biodiversity-based value chains that benefit all actors fairly and equitably. As the project enters its second phase, a regional Blue BioTrade plan of action for queen conch is being designed and will be consulted with stakeholders in a [Regional Workshop in May 2022](#). It is expected that this plan is implemented by the OECS with the support of UNCTAD, CITES, and the [Caribbean Biodiversity Fund \(CBF\)](#).



2. Level of queen conch sustainable management, production and export capacity in beneficiary countries *

Building on the country case studies, this summary identifies key policy recommendations and serves as a primary input for the preparation of the regional Blue BioTrade plan of action for queen conch, which will support OECS Member States in promoting value addition and sustainable trade in the queen conch sector.

2.1 Grenada

Official data reported to the United Nations by Grenada show exports of mollusc declining steeply and steadily from \$191,000 (2016) to \$23,000 (2019) and \$18,000 (2020), largely driven by queen conch sector. Despite possessing high export capacity sustained by two Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCAP) certified processing facilities (Spice Isle Fish House and Vineyard Seafoods), Grenada's exports of queen conch declined due to several factors including two CITES-trade suspensions and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Urgently addressing the CITES suspensions would greatly benefit the Grenadian queen conch sector by (i) enabling its exporters to benefit from the surge in global and regional demand, and (ii) taking advantage of Grenada's high processing capacity and trade links to the southern Caribbean. With regards to the domestic market, (Grenada produced 24 tonnes of queen conch in 2017), implementing the Blue BioTrade approach would ensure sustainability of the value chain and higher value-addition.

2.2 Saint Lucia

Figure 1. Fisheries Division employee (Ms. Makeba Felix) inspects conch fishing operations off the coast of Saint Lucia



Source: Alexander Girvan (2021).

Saint Lucia produced 99 tonnes of queen conch in 2017 and benefits from a booming market, which increased by 73 percent during the last decade. Domestic production and imports of unprocessed queen conch represented an estimated \$1.35 million market in 2019. This value increases considerably when processed conch is included, which is an important part of Saint Lucia's active culinary industry.

Figure 2. A fisherman and the day's (deshelled) queen conch catch in Gros Islet Saint Lucia



Source: Alexander Girvan (2021).

Saint Lucia can export processed products and has strong cultural ties with queen conch destination markets in the French Caribbean. By developing HACCAP certified processing facilities and obtaining European Union recognition as a third-party sanitary authority, Saint Lucia could significantly improve its export capacity and increase its processing capacity through collaboration with its neighbouring countries.

2.3 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Figure 3. The fishing camp on Mustique Island in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



Source: Alexander Girvan (2021).

Due to its large and shallow territorial waters and central location, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is the largest queen conch market of the three project beneficiaries and the second largest in the OECS after Antigua and Barbuda. Queen conch represented 70 per cent of all its fisheries exports in 2019, of which half was sent to the United States. The country is CITES compliant. Exports of queen conch increased rapidly during the last decade from 18,600 kg in 2010 to 334,855 kg by 2019. To ensure the healthy status of the resource following best practices, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been conducting a stock assessment since February 2022. Investments in a conch nursery and processing capacity would enable the country to expand production, address stock depletion, and enter niche markets providing higher value-addition.

3. Implementing country case study recommendations through the application of Blue BioTrade in the Eastern Caribbean

Empowering small-scale coastal producers from OECS Member States to seize and maximise the opportunities of Blue BioTrade in queen conch in domestic, regional and international markets necessitates verifiable indicators of environmental, economic and social sustainability. The Blue BioTrade approach and its Principles and Criteria, developed by UNCTAD, provides such tools, including measures to comply with CITES requirements. Close collaboration between the project countries' policymakers, regulators, businesses/exporters and partner institutions could create synergy towards those goals and enhance the efficacy of their efforts to achieve legal, sustainable and traceable queen conch trade.

Table 1. How can policy makers support the OECS Blue BioTrade queen conch value chain?










Criteria	Recommendations	Sustainability actions
	<p>Maintaining sustainable stocks of queen conch</p> <p>Incentivising private sector actors to act sustainably</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conducting stock assessments to determine thresholds for sustainable queen conch fishing ▪ Limiting queen conch fishing, focusing on strategic measures including a closed season during spawning, no-catch zones, quotas, and a monitoring programme ▪ Regulating land-based activities for environmental protection e.g., reducing water pollution, regulating coastal developments, and promoting sustainable consumption ▪ Monitoring landings of juvenile conch i.e., juvenile conch must not be fished to ensure stock sustainability; although there are low reports of juvenile conch landing, deshelling of conchs at sea (to reduce costs) increases risk of juvenile conch fishing ▪ Regulating foreign direct investment to ensure sustainable investments ▪ Organising regular queen conch fisherfolk association meetings to promote associativity and coordination amongst actors
	<p>Improving livelihoods of stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investing in data collection to obtain further information (employment, gender, health, etc.) on queen conch value chain actors and their needs ▪ Promoting social sustainability, including ensuring safety protocols for diving are respected
	<p>Accessing export markets by complying with CITES requirements: E.g., Grenada needs to urgently address 2 CITES suspensions: Legal Acquisition Finding (LAF) and Non-Detriment Findings (NDF)</p> <p>Increasing export capacity under sustainability parameters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaborating with CITES, the OECS and UNCTAD to address the trade suspensions, including by drafting and implementing new legislation ▪ Improving enforcement of regulations and compliance capabilities are essential to reduce illegal trade but must be combined with incentives for legal trade ▪ Building export infrastructure (already ongoing in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

Table 2. How can exporters and investors support the OECS Blue BioTrade queen conch value chain?

Criteria	Recommendations	Sustainability actions
	Contributing to the maintenance of sustainable and healthy stocks of queen conch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperating with government efforts to conduct stock assessments, catch reporting, implement environmental regulation, and monitor landings of juvenile conch Assessing and adopting best practices for sustainable conservation of resources, using the UNCTAD Blue BioTrade Self-Assessment Tool
	Improving livelihoods of divers, including by reducing health risks caused by unsafe diving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training divers on safety protocols for scuba-diving, investing in certifications of social sustainability, which can contribute to higher value-added products Acquiring and making health insurance schemes accessible for divers and other vulnerable actors in the value chain
	<p>Meeting growing demand: Queen conch is a booming market worth \$74 million in 2017, of which 10–15 per cent accrues to the 3 countries studied (350 tonnes annually)</p> <p>Achieving high investment returns: A \$4.6 million project in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines yielded an additional \$8.3 million in production revenue in 2017–2020 alone.</p> <p>Accessing high value-added markets: Queen conch is sold at prices as high as \$8.50 per lb in Martinique (part of France and the European Union) by contrast to \$2.50–4 in the United States, yet - countries lack certifications for exports to the European Union.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtaining certifications, including Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCAP) in relevant processing facilities Creating an export task force to define options to ensure access to the European market Supporting biodiversity recovery and productive capability, such as by establishing a conch nursery in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, owing to its strategic location which could benefit the three countries Reducing seafood waste and adding value: Queen conch has many uses, including as a seafood delicacy, medicine, cosmetics, jewellery, and handicrafts. Within the food industry, clean and processed conch such as meat trimmings (e.g., for burgers or sausages) offer higher value. Learning conch processing techniques and diversifying conch end-uses will facilitate exporting given the high price competition on unprocessed conch from other markets Transforming waste into value: Conch shells are often discarded - however, these can be used as a biomaterial for coastal engineering, reef restoration, or be sold as ornaments and/or materials for fashion products

Notes: *References to “\$” indicate United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

**The Blue BioTrade approach sustainability guidelines (symbols):  Environmental  Social  Economic

4. Coordinated cooperation in the sustainable management and utilisation of queen conch in the Eastern Caribbean

Phase 1 of the Blue BioTrade project has benefited from its project partners' high capacity and extensive experience in dealing with trade and industrial policy issues in the oceans economy (UNCTAD), advisory, monitoring, implementation and enforcement of the CITES Convention (CITES Secretariat), and promotion of regional integration and trade cooperation (the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States [OECS]).

In the next (second) phase, each of these agencies can contribute further by:

OECS

- **Continuously leading the effort and supporting its Member States in improving the sustainability of the queen conch value chain** to ensure that growth is commensurate to efforts in sustainable use and conservation.
- **Supporting the development of Blue BioTrade sustainable value chains** through an MoU with the CBF, under the [Caribbean Regional Architecture for Biodiversity \(CRAB\) project](#) funded by the Government of France (through FFEM1 and AFD2) in 2021.
- **Spearheading CRAB project and steering the implementation of the Blue BioTrade Regional Plan of Action based on the country assessments undertaken under Phase 1.** The main target species for value chain development under Phase 2 include queen conch, sea moss and sargassum. During this project, UNCTAD and CITES will play advisory roles on an ad-hoc basis.

UNCTAD

- **Providing guidance on achieving sustainability and stakeholder capacity across the queen conch value chain through the [Blue BioTrade Principles and Criteria](#) and [BioTrade Knowledge Sharing and Self-Assessment Tool](#),** a free and online platform providing information on biodiversity-based initiatives, associativity with different value chain actors, and benchmarking other sustainability practices against the BioTrade Principles and Criteria.
- **Supporting the BioTrade objectives of the Eastern Caribbean Member States** to identify non-tariff measures (NTMs) in important export markets through resources and analyses (e.g., [UNCTAD TRAINS](#)), and collaborating with CITES and partner countries, such as to address current and potential trade suspensions facing Grenada.
- **Providing resources and analysis on export markets** - a new and unprecedented [UNCTAD database on ocean trade](#), the first to draw on official data reported by all UN member states. It covers goods from fisheries and aquaculture (including precise estimates on molluscs, crustaceans, etc.) to seafood processing, port equipment, vessels, and high-technology manufactures. The UNCTAD database will soon be updated with trade data on ocean services including tourism, transport, port services, environmental services, and research and development.

CITES

- **Supporting the development and regulatory review of CITES implementing legislation** through advising on the key requirements, reviewing of and/or providing inputs into draft legislation during the development process.
- **Facilitating submission of Annual Reports as required under CITES** through providing guidance to member States on the process as well as practical assistance in preparation of the reports.
- **Assisting range States by enhancing the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan***, the forthcoming OECS Regional Action Plan for the queen conch value chain, national management plans, make scientifically robust Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) and address any recommendations coming from the [Review of Significant Trade](#).

Raising awareness and visibility for the region and the project has already been established amongst other international organisations and the partners' Member States through knowledge products including but not limited to publications, media campaigns, and events promoting sustainable queen conch exports from the Eastern Caribbean.

Keywords: SDG 14, UNCTAD Blue BioTrade approach, ocean economy, Eastern Caribbean, queen conch, sustainable fisheries, CITES

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Supporting developing countries to sustainably utilise, manage and care for the ocean and the people depending on it.