SPEAKERS NOTE

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Side event at UN High Level Political Forum 2024: How seaweed contributes to achieving each of the goals under review

Good morning, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure for UNCTAD to co-host this timely event with the Global Seaweed Coalition, the World Bank, the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, and the UN Global Compact. I am Chantal Line Carpentier, head of the Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Branch of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Some of you may wonder why a session on seaweed at the HLPF session with the theme "Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions". It's OK, as the purpose of this session is to demonstrate that seaweed is not a simple niche ocean economy sector, but instead an enabler of economic, social, and environmental transformation.

Indeed, seaweed is a versatile marine macroalgae, rapidly gaining recognition for its multifaceted contributions to poverty reduction (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG5), and climate action (SDG 13). Don't worry before joining my new position and being exposed to the topic, I was not aware either of this super product!

Seaweed is a wonder of nature. We have consumed it as food since pre-historical times, particularly in Asia, being eaten as food in the form of soups, snacks, and fish preparations such as sushi. And Indigenous communities around the world have accumulated a large knowledge base around it. But the uses of seaweed today go much beyond. It is currently being used as a human food complement (e.g. agar or carrageenan), as a natural industrial ingredient, as animal feed, as a fertilizer, for cosmetics, as a non-plastic substitute, for paper, textiles and even for biofuel production.

The global market for seaweed has more than tripled over the last two decades, growing from $5 billion in 2000 to $17 billion in value according to FAO. UNCTAD

estimates that global imports of seaweed represented about $1.2 billion in 2022 and 2023. With international trade in seaweed and its by-products representing only 14 per cent of the total market value of seaweed, there is a significant potential for sunrise industrial development and new global supply side partnerships (UNCTAD, 2024).

Seaweed can significantly improve sustainable livelihoods for small-scale farmers and harvesters while mitigating climate change. Seaweed offers significant opportunities to end poverty, by allowing for production and income diversification, new business activities, and local employment, ultimately empowering women's, youth, and indigenous peoples in coastal communities of developing countries. In many developing countries, seaweed cultivation and processing are a complementary economic activity for women to add to the family income and food security.

Seaweed has become increasingly fashionable as a plant-based material and inputs that can contribute as it can be produced and cultivated in any ocean and sea and even ex situ. There is an increase in demand for vegetarian meals from many consumers due to its nutritional value in terms of iodine, polyphenols, carotenoids, and omega-3 fatty acids among others. It even started to be used as a food complement in meals for children in Asia and Africa due to its nutritional value.

Seaweed is the ocean farming activity with the lowest environmental impacts in cultivation as it does not need fresh water in production, fertilizers, or land, it absorbs carbon and can filter water system. Many developing countries can expand seaweed cultivation by making use of marine spatial planning and Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture.[1] The beauty of this approach is basically closed production circuits, zero waste, circularity, lower costs, and output diversification.

We can also say that seaweed can contribute to global climate action due to its wide range of environmental impacts, from biodiversity enhancement to de-acidification and reoxygenation of surrounding waters. Seaweed has increasingly been receiving attention in sustainability and environmental conversations, and scientists have been calling for the inclusion of seaweed in conservation frameworks.

However, more case studies and data, and more policy attention are required to demonstrate how seaweed cultivation as well as restoration of kelp forests can positively and effectively contribute to climate action, without causing unintended environmental and social impacts. Member states' financial support could help accelerate progress.

In summary, and after all this exiting overview, what can we do to increase sustainable seaweed growth in a way that benefits people and the planet? We can:

- Encourage governments to incorporate seaweed into national development, biodiversity, and climate mitigation plans.
- Advocate for the definition and harmonization of seaweed standards and related food and non-food products safety and security regulations.
- Develop consortium or center of excellence to conduct research on various aspects of seaweed such as its carbon sequestration potential, biosecurity risks, nutritional benefits, and multiply sustainable uses.

[1] The first means to rationally and sustainably plan and define the ocean space to avoid unnecessary conflict, competition, and over exploitation. It also means to integrate cultivation of feed species (e.g. finfish or shrimp) with that of extractive species, such as mollusks, seaweeds, and invertebrates (e.g. sea cucumbers and sea urchins), such that the wastes of one resource user become a resource (fertilizer or food) for the others, thus providing circular benefits.

- Provide support for the development of seaweed-based foods, nutraceuticals, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals and for non-plastics substitutes product development by women and vulnerable coastal communities.
- Promote training, associativity, ventures, and access to credit for sustainable seaweed farming and aquaculture as part of the work undergoing at the UN inter-agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy to finance and support SSE entities.

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