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STEPPING UP RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE:

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS TO SUSTAIN THE ACHIEVEMENTS FROM
THE 2022 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ARTISANAL FISHERIES AND
AQUACULTURE CELEBRATION IN THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC**

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Contents

Figures	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Achievements of IYafa celebrations in the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission region: Mainstreaming the global agenda	2
2.1. Commitments to pave the way for an inclusive and productive celebratory year	2
2.2. “Sea” grassroot achievements	4
2.3. Policy and regional level actions	4
2.4. IYafa Champions	5
2.5. Local level activities and outputs	6
3. Sustaining the achievements and key recommendations towards the 10th anniversary of the SSF guidelines	7
4. References	8

Figures

Chapter 2	Figure 1. Description of the three subthemes of the WECAFC IYafa celebration	2
	Figure 2. An overview of IYafa 2022 activities led by regional partner	4
	Figure 3. Panelists speaking at the RWIFF in Fort Walton Beach, Florida	5
	Figure 4. Members of the Association of Ticuna Indigenous Producers in Colombia	6
	Figure 5. Participants of the National Forum on Artisanal Fishing and Aquaculture in Nicaragua	7

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Workers withdraws the nets to harvest prawns. Freshwater prawns are a high-value product in Dominica and other Caribbean Islands – ©FAO/Dwayne Benjamin

1. Introduction

The 72nd General Assembly of the United Nations in 2017 declared 2022 as the International Year for Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAF/A). This declaration marked an important opportunity to continue consolidating the efforts aimed at improving small-scale fisheries, using as a fundamental tool, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), approved in 2014 by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). The central goal of IYAF/A 2022 was to promote the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture (SSF/A) food systems to enhance the well-being of producers as well as consumers.

In the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)¹ region, SSF/A contribute substantially to livelihoods and poverty alleviation, supporting coastal communities' well-being, including food security, coastal economies, and social and cultural identities. Importantly, the fisheries sector in the Caribbean is predominantly small-scale (Oxenford and McConney, 2020). Further, women play a pivotal role in fisheries value chain, predominantly in the processing segment, adding value to and steering dynamic marketing of the products, though some own fishing assets and are involved in other support services. Such important contributions are however, not yet fully recognized, which gives rise to artisanal fishers and small-scale aquaculture farmers' marginalization, limited access to resources, exclusion from policy and decisionmaking processes, and consequently a high level of poverty and vulnerability in these sectors. Mindful of this state of fact and acknowledging the need to sensitize public opinion and governments on the social value of SSF/A and on the importance of adopting specific public policies and programmes to improve their living conditions in a sustainable manner, at its 17th session in 2019, the WECAFC members formally encouraged the continued implementation of the SSF Guidelines in all member states and the development of a roadmap for the IYAF/A 2022. This aimed to consolidate activities with partners and to link the highly distributed activities to showcase the progress made in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in a coordinated way and gain more visibility and recognition for WECAFC area's SSF, SSA and key stakeholders, including fisherfolk, fish farmers and their organizations on a global scale.

1. Members of WECAFC are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa, Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Republic of Korea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States of America, Boliv. Rep of Venezuela.

2. Achievements of IYafa celebrations in the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission region: mainstreaming the global agenda

2.1. Commitments to pave the way for an inclusive and productive celebratory year

To support the regional sensitization and visibility of the celebratory year, a regional IYafa WECAFC coordination committee was formed to lead these efforts. This committee included a diverse range of actors from academia, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and regional fisherfolk organizations. The identification of committee members was a deliberate effort to empower stakeholders and guide the mobilization of local actors. The formation of this regional committee was particularly noteworthy because it incorporated participation from the South American and Mesoamerican IYafa regional committees, representing subregional groups. This partnership enhanced coordination and expanded the scope of influence of the activities. Notably, these three committees covered the entire Americas and Caribbean, which was a significant accomplishment. Additionally, the WECAFC Committee actively participated as a member of the global IYafa task force. This membership further strengthened the committee's influence from a global to local level, demonstrating their commitment and efforts to engage with fisheries-related issues and initiatives on a broader scale. Through their involvement in the global task force, the WECAFC Committee brought valuable insights and expertise to the regional coordination committee, reinforcing their commitment to promoting sustainable practices and advocating for the well-being of fishers and fish farmers.

The theme for the IYafa celebration in WECAFC was 'Resilience and Recovery,' with a specific focus on gender and youth. The selection of Resilience and Recovery was significant for this region as it took place during the world's recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic. Small-scale fishers and fish farmers across the region were severely affected by the pandemic, impacting their social and economic well-being. Therefore, the chosen themes reflected a regional effort to support the recovery of small-scale fishers and fish farmers by leveraging their collective efforts. The inclusion of gender and youth as cross-cutting themes also recognized the vital roles these groups play in ensuring the sustainability of the region's fisheries. These main themes were further supported by three subthemes: social resilience, innovation, and intersectoral linkages (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.

Description of the three subthemes of the WECAFC IYafa celebration

No.	SUB-THEME	
1	SOCIAL RESILIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrating Social protection in SSF (in addressing climate change – poverty nexus, building back better from natural disasters or other external shocks)
2	INNOVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promoting innovation along SSF and SSA value chain and in creating livelihood opportunities ● Promoting/embracing the use of ICT in advocacy, policy influence, marketing and intra-regional trade
3	INTERSECTORAL LINKAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Defining/conceptualizing blue economy in the WECAFC region ● Positioning SSF and SSA in the blue economy ● Creating/strengthening linkages with SSF and other sectors e.g. tourism ● SSF and SSA in marketing and trade

Source: Own elaboration.



Small-scale fisheries and small-scale aquaculture (NFI) – ©FAO/Luis Antonio Rojas

While the establishment of the regional committee represented an important higher-level priority and met the recommendation of the WECAF Commission, the committee also aimed to have a local influence. To achieve this, the group proactively raised awareness about the upcoming celebrations through the development of a roadmap of activities. This roadmap served as the foundation for a coordinated communication strategy, encompassing various scales of knowledge sharing. Importantly, to operationalize these activities, the committee successfully mobilized resources from the European Union Directorate for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. These resources played a significant role in supporting not only regional activities but also numerous national and community-level initiatives.

To kickstart the celebratory year, the WECAFC IYAYA coordination committee in coordination with the subregional committees of Meso-America and South America, and the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) organized, the regional LAC ceremony to contextualize the goals and objectives of IYAF 2022 for the region, aiming to inspire action-oriented celebrations throughout 2022. This regional event was held following the global launch event by the International Steering Committee and the IYAF Secretariat of the IYAF on 19 November 2021.



Source: Own elaboration.

2.2. “Sea” grassroots achievements

The activities were designed to clearly demonstrated how SSF/A policy and management are helping to support blue transformation and contribute to societal well-being. There were many in-person conference events, online webinars, festivals, trainings, and demonstration projects covering all themes and sub-themes (Figure 2).

IYafa 2022 achievements in the WECAFC region would not have been possible without the active engagement of many national and local partners at the “seagrass roots” level of artisanal fisheries and aquaculture (Wade and Diei Ouadi, 2022). Social media posts and videos in the region’s languages were frequently forwarded by recipients in addition to being shared through IYafa’s global communications campaign.

2.3. Policy and regional level actions

IYafa 2022 saw several strategic policy communications and initiatives being made throughout the year of celebration. Appropriately, one of the first and most impactful was from the Honourable Saboto Caesar, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry, and Labour of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, then the Chairman of the CRFM Ministerial Council and an IYafa Champion. During the LAC launch event, the Honourable Caesar called upon CRFM member states and partner organizations to integrate dedicated IYafa activities into their programmes and promote the objectives of the IYafa 2022 celebrations. He highlighted gender equality and women’s empowerment in SSF/SSA and strengthening adaptive capacity for resilience to climate change and other external shocks such as the global COVID-19 pandemic which was raging at the time. The event was overwhelmingly attended, highly positively received by an audience surpassing 1 200 people.

FIGURE 3.
Panelists speaking at the RWIFF in Fort Walton Beach, Florida



Source: Own elaboration.

2.4. IYafa Champions

An important part of the IYafa celebrations was the recognition of champions, either individuals or entities who had played a significant role in the sector and had the potential to further influence progress in the development of sustainable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture food systems. The WECFAC IYafa regional coordination committee used a nomination process to identify and highlight champions of smallscale fisheries and small-scale aquaculture in the Western Central Atlantic Region. Following two calls in 2021 and 2022, a total of [24 champions](#) were selected within a wide range of stakeholders spanning from policymakers and managers, artisanal fisherfolk or aquaculture leaders, enterprises, organizations to civil society. [These champions](#) from around the region (Figure 5) played active roles in the IYafa 2022 celebrations, organizing, facilitating and participating in regional and national activities for resilience and recovery in the sectors.

The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) actively participated in the IYafa in 2022. It passed resolutions encouraging member countries to continue IYafa activities through Fisheries Advisory Committees (FACs) and drafted policies to integrate small-scale fisheries and aquaculture (SSF/A) into the blue economy dialogue. The coordination committee also organized events to support IYafa's momentum, including the inaugural regional Women in Fisheries Forum (RWIFF) and collaboration with subregional committees. These efforts demonstrate the commitment to sustainable fisheries and empowering stakeholders, particularly women and youth, in the region's blue transformation. The active regional engagement in IYafa has significant regional policy implications. For example, by passing resolutions to encourage continued IYafa activities through Fisheries Advisory Committees (FACs) and drafting policies to integrate small-scale fisheries and aquaculture (SSF/A) into the blue economy dialogue, the CRFM promotes collaboration, sustainable practices, and economic development in the region. Emphasizing gender and youth mainstreaming, social security, and protection for fishers further addresses inequalities and vulnerabilities within the fisheries sector. Moreover, the coordination of the subregional committees fosters knowledge exchange and regional cooperation, enhancing the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the Caribbean's artisanal fisheries and aquaculture sectors while promoting environmental conservation and social well-being.

FIGURE 4.
Members of the Association of Ticuna Indigenous Producers in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration.

2.5. Local level activities and outputs

The regional IYAFAs 2022 celebration also provided support to various initiatives, including Dr Alejandro Espinoza's (a SSF champion from Mexico) active participation in the 4th World Small-scale Fisheries Congress organized by TBTF, 25-27 October 2022 in Mexico.

Additionally, through project funds from the European Union, the coordination committee assisted the Association of Ticuna Indigenous Producers in Colombia with equipment and knowledge transfer for alternative diets, enhancing product quality and reducing production costs (Figure 4).

Moreover, INPESCA (Nicaraguan Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture), FAO, FNT (National Workers Front), and other institutions organized a successful National Forum on Artisanal Fishing and Aquaculture in Nicaragua, emphasizing sustainable fishing practices, women's role, climate change impact (Figure 5). Furthermore, UWI-CERMES and partners of the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT) organized several gender and youth events to promote gender mainstreaming in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture policies and practices throughout 2022. By empowering indigenous producers and emphasizing government commitment, these initiatives contribute to environmentally responsible and economically viable fisheries while recognizing the vital role of women and youth in achieving long-term sustainability.

FIGURE 5.

Participants of the National Forum on Artisanal Fishing and Aquaculture in Nicaragua



Source: Own elaboration.

3. Sustaining the achievements and key recommendations towards the 10th anniversary of the SSF guidelines

The inception of the contextualizing of the celebratory year, its connected activities and closing within the framework of the 19th session of WECAFC have been consistently led by the regional coordination committee, a body of multiscale actors representing academia, civil society, governments, fisherfolk, aquafarmers and regional organizations. The deliverables from the IYAF 2022 celebration not only demonstrate its success but also hold significant policy relevance in facilitating further sustainable development beyond the event. By endorsing the institutionalization of the entity responsible for spearheading the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and preparing for the 10th anniversary, WECAFC members can ensure continued progress. WECAFC's responsibilities, including supporting the practical implementation of the Blue Economy guidance, inaugural RWIFF and the culture of excellence among Champions, align with broader policy objectives of promoting sustainable fisheries and gender inclusivity. The establishment of the RWIFF as a biennial event or standalone forum under the regional coordination committee reinforces the policy focus on empowering women in fisheries. Moreover, the committee's role in garnering political and financial support for sustaining IYAF achievements highlights the importance of mobilizing resources for long-term policy implementation.

The creation of three key calls to action, notably including that of the regional call to action by women, youth, and ministers, and the utilization of policy recommendations from the two policy briefs by the South America committee^{2,3}, hold significant regional policy importance and relevance. By incorporating these Calls to Action and evidence-based policy recommendations, the region demonstrates a firm commitment to addressing critical issues facing small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. This commitment is particularly significant as it reflects the collective efforts of various stakeholders, in shaping policies that promote sustainability, inclusivity, and socioeconomic development. As the committee embraces the inherent diversity of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in the region and leverages the spatial diversity of WECAFC members, policy efforts are strengthened to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by this sector in preparation of the further implementation of the SSF Guidelines, which celebrate their 10th anniversary in 2024.

2. For more information, refer to: [Recomendaciones de políticas públicas para el desarrollo sostenible de la pesca y la acuicultura artesanales en pequeña escala en América del Sur](#)

3. For more information, refer to: [Caracterización de la pesca y la acuicultura artesanal en pequeña escala en América del Sur y recomendaciones de políticas públicas](#)

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