

CARICOM/CRFM COUNTRIES CONCLUDE ON REGIONAL MASTERPLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

CARICOM Fisheries stakeholders hailed as a success, the just concluded workshop in Saint Lucia to validate a Regional Master Plan for sustainable development of coastal fisheries resources in the Region. Participants numbered approximately 50 and included senior officials from the Fisheries Departments and Representatives of regional fisheries as well as representatives from regional, and Inter-governmental Organizations and Institutions that have an interest in fisheries and aquaculture development.

Hosted across two days from January 16-17, the workshop was convened by collaborating agencies – the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) Secretariat based in Belize and the Japanese International Development Agency (JICA). The workshop sought to discuss the now concluded Draft Master Plan, review the results and lessons learnt from the pilot projects implemented during its preparation; gain consensus on priority activities and propose recommendations for implementation.

In 2000 the CARICOM Governments and Japan signed a partnership agreement entitled "*A New Framework for Japan-CARICOM Cooperation for the Twenty-first Century*". Under this agreement the Government of Japan provided funding and technical assistance to CARICOM through a development study to prepare a Master Plan for sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture for coastal community development. The Study commenced in March, 2009, with the appointment of IC Net Limited as the Japanese Executing Agency for the Study.

Some of the pilot projects undertaken from the commencement of the project in 2009 to now include - aquaculture development in Belize and Jamaica, development and management of pelagic fishes such as tuna and diamondback squid using fish aggregating devices in Dominica and St. Lucia, and activities to strengthen the fisheries data and information management systems in Guyana and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. An exposition featuring the Diamond Back Squid on the second day, included a live culinary demonstration by a Japanese Chef on its preparation as exotic seafood.

In addressing the formal opening ceremony, CRFM Executive Director Milton Haughton spoke of the critical timing of the Master Plan, in the context of economic imperatives facing CARICOM countries. Citing diversification as a primary consideration, he noted the potential of indigenous sectors such as fisheries and aquaculture. With the three strategic goals of the Master Plan being 1) diversification of fishery and development of underutilized species, 2) development of aquaculture and creation of alternative income sources for fishers and coastal communities, and 3) sustainable use and management of the resource systems through community-based resource management approaches with governments and local communities working in partnership, he said:

“The process by which the Master Plan was prepared involved practical hands-on collaborative activities with fishermen and fish farmers working cooperatively to plan and implement pilot projects to test the technical and economic feasibility of different options. This resulted in tangible benefits, such as the actual provision of resources and transfer of knowledge and technology to the fishermen and fish farmers, and innovation in how they could conduct business using new technology, diversifying activities, applying cooperative, business oriented and sustainable approaches to fishing and aquaculture, and improving their earnings.”

In his remarks JICA representative Shunji Sugijama justified the necessary shift in fisheries policy from “development driven, revenue/employment generation oriented, industrial fisheries centered, with a centralized top-down approach” that defined 80s and 90s to the “management driven, sustainable fisheries livelihood centered, small-scale fisheries focus with decentralized bottom-up approach” which is more responsive to the present needs of national food and nutrition security, and sustainable livelihoods of fishing communities.

“This has also raised an important question to us JICA; how can we be responsive in meeting the current needs of the fisheries sector and how can we be effective in providing needed assistance to address the issue. We have been monitoring the progress of the project with strong interest because we envisage that the outputs of this project could be very instructive in terms of shaping future course of JICA’s cooperation action in the fisheries sector of the region.”

In May 2012, the Ministers Responsible for fisheries of the CARICOM countries, meeting as the CRFM Ministerial Council, approved the Draft Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy, which serves as another important regional policy document to strengthen the region’s commitment and provide a structured approach for sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture. Successful implementation of the Master Plan will contribute to ensuring optimum utilization, long-term conservation, improved income, and food and nutrition security in the CARICOM Member States.

In his feature address St. Lucia’s new Minister of Agriculture, Food Production, Fisheries and Rural Development Hon. Moses Jn. Baptiste affirmed the collaborative approach among Caricom States.

“The patchwork of Exclusive Economic Zones within the Caribbean region dictates cohesiveness in the management of shared fishery resources. We have recognised that sustainable use, improved self-sufficiency and effective management of our marine and coastal resources can only be achieved when the benefits to present and future generations are safeguarded including food security, sovereignty and socio-economic well-being.”

The Final Draft Master Plan with priority actions and recommendations for follow-up coming from the workshop will be presented to the next Meeting of the CRFM Forum (Chief Fisheries of CARICOM

countries) and the Sixth Meeting of the CRFM Council of Ministers scheduled for March and April 2012 respectively in the Bahamas.