

Springing Back into Shape

While tourism is the mainstay of the economy of the Caribbean islands of Antigua and Barbuda, fisheries reforms will give them resilience from developments like COVID-19

Human-rights principles in small-scale fisheries were officially established with the publication in 2015 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). These are designed to encourage stakeholders to prioritize the physical and environmental security of small-scale fisheries for the benefit of those active within the fisher community and beyond. 'Fisher' is an all-encompassing term for those involved in any element of the fisheries value chain, from extraction to processing.

Antigua and Barbuda is a twin-island state in the Eastern Caribbean, renowned globally for its white sand beaches and tropical climate. The surrounding waters provide unique opportunities for fishing, hosting an array of species, including types of gastropoda and crustacea. However, these resources are not fully utilized due to a shift away from traditional industry. The tourism sector expanded exponentially in the 1980s and now accounts for over 90 per cent of total jobs. This transition has seen Antigua and Barbuda's gross domestic product (GDP) increase, with growth averaging 6.8 per cent and contributing to high levels of human and social development.

Nonetheless, this over-reliance on the travel and tourism industry leaves the island state highly vulnerable to exogenous economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental risks like hurricanes and earthquakes.

This article provides an overview of social development in the fisheries sector of Antigua and Barbuda, and a synopsis of existing policy, legislation and programmes that contribute towards achieving the goals outlined

in the SSF Guidelines. It draws from secondary data analysis, a literature review, and interviews with key informants.

With the explosion of the tourism industry, fishers and society, in general, have witnessed an increased focus on social development, human rights and decent work standards. A consequence of this was the introduction of the Fisheries Regulations in 2013, drawing together social policy with the prerequisite for fisher registration. There is extensive crossover between the SSF Guidelines and the Fisheries Regulations, most notably the focus on sustainable fisheries management and the utilization of the precautionary principle.

The 2013 regulations state that in order to be entered into the record as a licensed fisher, an individual is required to be registered under the Social

Security Act of 1972 that affords insured parties and their dependent(s) access to a degree of financial security through the provision of assistance, including sickness benefit and old-age benefit.

Formalization

Another condition for registration is engagement with the Fisher Professionalization Programme. Modules are centred around the formalization of the fisheries sector. It includes elements of record-keeping, fisheries laws and engine preventative maintenance.

There are gaps in this coverage, however. Take, for example, vessel

Antigua and Barbuda's fishers are struggling to maintain their traditional access and user rights as they compete with coastal development.

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insurance, something critical to the sustainability of the fisheries industry. Following Hurricane Irma in 2017, it emerged that only 5.9 per cent of fishing vessels were covered by vessel insurance. A number of reasons explain this, including high premiums and inadequate coverage. Whilst interventions are being explored, the majority of these are only at the pilot stage.

Prioritizing social development has led to the provision of universal free education for children aged five to 16 years, and a sharp decline in infant mortality. Investment has also been made in affordable public utilities and better access to adequate housing, which is critical in the islands exposed to extreme weather conditions.

There still exist gaps that need to be addressed to ensure fishers and small-scale fisheries can mitigate the insecurities of external shocks. Fishers are believed to have a great level of occupational mobility due to high rates of education—78 per cent of fishers have a secondary school education—but it is the small-scale fisheries themselves who need protection, especially as they are considered a ‘safety net’ for other economic activities.

Antigua and Barbuda’s fishers are struggling to maintain their traditional access and user rights as they compete with coastal development. Much of this development is driven by the demands for tourism-related infrastructure. In addition, access to landing sites is becoming increasingly problematic in certain rural areas, with the development of resorts and gated communities.

It appears that instead of acting as a complement to the tourism sector, the two industries are beginning to clash with the interests of fishers. As demand grows for additional infrastructure, there may be increasingly reduced access to spaces fundamental to fishing. To mitigate this, fisher organizations need strengthening in the areas of leadership, management, policy advocacy and engagement.

Proactive resilience

Despite the impressive gains in development in Antigua and Barbuda, instances like Hurricane Irma highlight the fragility of these advancements and the need for proactive resilience planning. This has been acknowledged within the regionally endorsed 2018 Protocol on Climate Change Adaptation

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Modern fishing units in Antigua and Barbuda. Despite the impressive gains in development, instances like Hurricane Irma highlight the fragility of these advancements and the need for proactive resilience planning



Northeast Marine Management Area, Antigua and Barbuda. Fishers are believed to have a great level of occupational mobility due to high rates of education, especially as they are considered a 'safety net' for other economic activities

and Disaster Risk Management in Fisheries and Aquaculture. But more needs to be done in terms of preparedness and diversification of the economy, especially as it is now overwhelmingly reliant on tourism.

Key recommendations

Keeping a focus on the social development of the wider community, the following recurring themes are pertinent to small-scale fisheries and the wider fishing community:

- Diversification of the national economy, potentially towards capture fisheries and aquaculture. This will also aid food security.
- Further investment in processing and European Union-certified landing sites, offering export potential.
- Priority and funding for resilience planning.
- Initiatives to reduce inequality of income and gender. Now, only 7 per cent of the fishers are women.
- Shift towards information and communication technology (ICT) to allow for online training modules, enhancing education and infrastructure for the development of transferable skills.

These recommendations are aligned with the goals of the SSF Guidelines. They help encourage sustainability within small-scale fisheries. They would assist Antigua and Barbuda in preparing the fishing industry for the future, all the while addressing tensions between fishing and tourism, its two major industries. This will ensure a strong foundation for future economic growth and development. 📌

For more



Case Study: A Comparative Analysis of Different Approaches to Fisheries Co-management in Antigua and Barbuda

http://aquaticcommons.org/21433/1/GCFI_65-6.pdf

Linking Fisheries to Tourism-Related Markets: Antigua and Barbuda

<https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/ditc-ted-Belize-28112018-Agenda-CRFM-Document-2016-3.pdf>