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Jamaica enters conch cluster project

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Jamaicans are making their mark in the Compete Caribbean project with Conch Clusters. Compete Caribbean is a private sector development programme that provides technical assistance to support productive development policies, business climate reforms, clustering initiatives and technology and innovation in small and medium-size enterprises (SME) in the Caribbean region.

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The programme, jointly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Government of Canada, supports projects in 13 Caribbean countries. According to Roderick Francis, CEO of B&D Trawling, Jamaica wants to tap into this programme to expand local production.

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SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH for conch

“Jamaicans have entered the programme with their own cluster project, aptly named the Jamaican Conch Cluster. Current Cluster members are B&D Trawling Ltd (cluster lead), Ton-Rick Enterprises Ltd., Newport Fish & Meats Ltd. and Seafood Incorporated Ltd. This Cluster Development Plan (CDP) details the strategic direction for the Jamaica Conch Cluster (JCC) to address the challenges and opportunities for inclusive and sustainable economic growth of its queen conch business. This CDP is submitted as a funding proposal for technical assistance grants from the Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility (CCPF),” explained Francis.

MSC certification will validate the sustainability of Jamaican conch and appeal to environmentally aware customers. The cluster is far advanced in achieving MSC certification. An independent MSC pre-assessment exercise, funded by the CCPF, was recently conducted in June to July 2021. The study concluded that the cluster can proceed to full assessment for certification. MSC certification will distinguish the Jamaica queen conch fishery as the only MSC-certified queen conch fishery in the world.

Research has shown that North American customers have increased willingness to pay premium price for sustainable products and 48 per cent are willing to pay more for seafood from a certified fishery. Among North American seafood consumers, sustainably sourced/environmentally friendly seafood is ranked as the 6th most important driver for purchase and 58 per cent agree that consumption of sustainable seafood is necessary to protect the ocean.

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“We have joined together to form this cluster, because we see it as the most effective and efficient means to achieve these goals. We recognise that the long-term sustainability of their businesses also hinge on the policy, legislative and governance regime impacting the sector as well as innovative strategies to enhance their competitive advantage,” Francis said.

The IDB, FCDO, CDB and the government of Canada have contributed US\$27.5 million to the Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility, of which US\$4.5 million is earmarked for technical assistance to Caribbean public and private stakeholders to support development of the blue economy. The JCC wants to tap into this US\$4.5 million in order to increase employment, generate and sustain exports, foster sustainable economic growth and increase the revenues of SMEs.

The Jamaica Conch Cluster is a blue economy-based cluster that employs 699 workers (67 per cent women). It comprises four of 12 Jamaican private queen conch producing companies.

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