



UN Trade and Development contributions to the implementation of the 4th United Nations Ocean Forum Recommendations (2022) INFORMATION NOTE BY UNCTAD SECRETARIAT

This note provides an overview of the key contributions by UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to implement over the past two years the recommendations: (1) outlined in the [Chair's Summary](#) for the [4th UN Ocean Forum](#) (UNOF4) prepared by H.E. Ms. Usha Canabady, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations; and (2) on advancing trade-related aspects of SDG 14 as requested by Member States at UNOF4 and in preparation for the [2nd UN Ocean Conference](#) in 2022 ("UNOC 2022").

I. [UNCTAD role at UNOC 2022](#)

UNCTAD played a unique role as the United Nations focal point on trade and development at UNOC 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal. Mauritius and Portugal transmitted the Chair's Summary of the 4th Ocean Forum to the United Nations in Geneva and New York Missions, ensuring that clear references to trade, ending fisheries subsidies, maritime transport, sustainable development and enabling carbon sequestration were explicitly included in the 2022 [Lisbon Declaration](#). In addition, UNCTAD called for the establishment of a [Blue Deal](#) at the interactive dialogue on [Leveraging interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other Goals towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#), and organized four side events on [ocean trade facilitation](#), [ocean knowledge and capacity development](#), [key challenges on fisheries and aquaculture](#) and [promoting Blue BioTrade implementation for CITES-listed marine species](#). UNCTAD also launched the first ever [ocean trade database](#), covering both goods and services, which is currently hosted under the environment and related trade segment of UNCTAD Statistics, and which has become a reference point for measurement and understanding of a [harmonized international trade classification for the development of sustainable ocean-based economies](#).

II. [Blue Deal and sustainable ocean economy initiatives](#)

Through the UNCTAD 2023 [Trade and Environment Review](#) and the transformative [Blue Deal Initiative](#), UNCTAD played a pivotal role in advancing the issue of sustainable ocean economy. UNCTAD has supported developing countries in strengthening trade policies to harness ocean resources for economic growth, job creation, and sustainable use of resources and ecosystems. Key initiatives include mainstreaming the emergence of a sustainable [seaweed sector](#), investing in ocean-based [non-plastic substitutes and alternatives](#), and launching the [Blue BioTrade Initiative in the Eastern Caribbean region](#), which aligns regional trade policies with socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation. While challenges in securing long-term funding to meet demand for technical cooperation persist, UNCTAD has continued advocating for [increased funding, investment, capacity building, research and the development of sustainable blue sectors](#), leveraging partnerships and innovation to build resilient and inclusive blue economies.

III. [The seaweed sector and sustainable economic recovery post-COVID19](#)

In 2024, UNCTAD published [An ocean of opportunities: The potential of seaweed to advance food, environmental and gender dimensions of the SDGs](#). The report highlights seaweed's significant potential to boost livelihoods, enhance food security, preserve marine biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and empower women along the value chain, particularly in coastal communities, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and

least developed countries (LDCs). Building on these findings, UNCTAD co-organized side events in 2024 at (i) the [High-Level Political Forum \(HLPF\) on Sustainable Development 2024](#), (ii) the [United Nations Environment Assembly 6 \(UNEA-6\)](#) as well as the (iii) [40th anniversary of FAO-GLOBEFISH](#). These events not only emphasized seaweed's potential to contribute to achieving the SDGs e.g., mitigate climate change, support coastal ecosystems and enhance water quality, but also spotlighted the status of the seaweed industry, markets, demand, emerging trends, and technological advancement for seaweed products. Equally, UNCTAD has also highlighted significant persistent challenges in scaling sustainable seaweed production, including insufficient policy support, barriers to women's participation, and knowledge gaps regarding its environmental and economic benefits. Balancing production growth with ecological risks, such as invasive species and monoculture farming, remains a critical priority for the sector.

IV. Fisheries subsidies and non-tariff measures reform

UNCTAD has worked to address trade barriers and improve the competitiveness of fisheries and aquaculture products by building capacity to meet market access requirements for marine goods. These efforts include promoting dialogues and knowledge sharing initiatives, particularly organising key workshops, such as: (i) [regional trade agreements \(RTAs\) and their implications for fisheries and aquaculture products](#) (2023) with FAO and Shanghai Ocean University; and (ii) [market access for small-scale fisheries and the Belt and Road Initiative](#) (2024). Additionally, UNCTAD published a flagship report on [South-South trade in the marine fisheries and aquaculture sectors](#), highlighting the potential of South-South trade to boost trade flows, improve food security and advance sustainable economic development through capacity-building, technology transfer, and inclusive trade policies.

V. Social sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture

UNCTAD has implemented various initiatives to facilitate market access while promoting gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in fisheries and aquaculture. For instance, in September 2023, UNCTAD co-hosted a [session](#) at the WTO Public Forum, discussing not only barriers to equitable participation faced by women, such as restricted access to markets, financing, and decision-making platforms, but also highlighted their critical role in fisheries and seaweed cultivation, showcasing innovative approaches and best practices to enhance women's participation in these sectors. UNCTAD continues to amplify its advocacy on this issue also through its enduring partnership and [collaboration](#) with FAO GLOBEFISH, highlighting the importance of fair, transparent, and inclusive value chains, and equitable access to market information to support sustainable livelihoods and resilient communities and a workshop convening stakeholders to address market access challenges for small-scale fisheries and explore solutions like the Belt and Road Initiative to support fair trade and sustainable livelihoods.

VI. Decarbonisation of shipping and fisheries and resilient maritime supply chains

UNCTAD actively supports the decarbonisation of shipping, fisheries, and related supply chains through targeted research, capacity-building initiatives, and strategic advocacy. UNCTAD's pioneering report, [“Energy transition of fishing fleets: Opportunities and challenges for developing countries \(2024\)”](#), emphasized reducing fleet sizes, improving energy efficiency, and adopting smarter navigation to cut emissions. These strategies, combined with addressing gaps in investment, traceability, and regulatory support, are critical to building sustainable and resilient maritime supply chains. Further, at the Global Supply Chain Forum in Bridgetown, Barbados in May 2024, UNCTAD continued the dialogue by organising [a discussion](#) that explored strategies,

technologies, and policy incentives for decarbonisation of the sector. UNCTAD also convened several [technical sessions on sustainable and resilient maritime transport](#), low-carbon shipping, energy transition in ports, the evolving geography of maritime trade, regional transport connectivity, performance indicator measurement in ports, and other thematic areas. Key outcomes included a SIDS [Ministerial Statement](#) and the launch of a United Nations Development Account technical assistance project by UNCTAD, UNECLAC and UNESCWA focusing on [Harnessing Trade Policy and Transport and Logistics to Build Sustainable and Resilient Food Supply Chains in the Caribbean and the Arab Region](#).

VII. **Addressing marine litter and plastic pollution**

UNCTAD has taken significant action to combat marine litter and plastic pollution through the promotion of non-plastic substitutes, green financing, and sustainable trade solutions. In response to the lack of an internationally agreed list of non-plastic substitutes, UNCTAD led the proposal of 282 Harmonized System codes for potential substitutes in its 2023 report [Plastic Pollution: The pressing case for natural and environmentally friendly substitutes to plastics](#). Building on this, UNCTAD hosted a Pacific workshop on [plastic pollution and material substitutes](#), advancing SDGs 14.1 and 12. UNCTAD also oversees 27 global projects under the [Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution \(SMEP\) Programme](#), targeting pollution and marine litter. It has actively led and supported discussions on [Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear](#) (ALDFG). One of these initiatives, which develops and pilots innovative biodegradable fishing gear and ropes ([Catchgreen](#) in South Africa, Kenya, and Sweden), was featured in the ProBlue/World Bank report [Lost at Sea: Combating ALDFG](#) presented at the 5th International Negotiations Committee (INC-5) to develop an international legally binding instrument (ILBI) on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

At the multilateral level, UNCTAD collaborates closely with the WTO to amplify its influence on the issue by e.g., co-leading events with other United Nations trade and environment agencies e.g., “[Fostering trade-related cooperation on plastic pollution at MC13](#)” in 2024 and contributing to the WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution. Additionally, it steered the dialogues at an [informal pre-event](#) with the African Legal Network and the East African Legislative Assembly on [a regional approach to reduce the use of single-use plastics \(SUPs\)](#); Delterra for a [pre-event for INC-4](#) on Plastics, focusing on trade-related solutions, mitigation measures, and alternatives to plastics and the World Economic Forum for a [pre-event for INC-5](#) on trade implications of a new global plastics treaty.

Contact information at [Trade, Environment, Climate Change & Sustainable Development Branch \(TECCSDB\)](#)

- Chantal Line Carpentier, Head | Email: carpentier@unctad.org
- [Ocean Economy and Fisheries Programme](#): David Vivas Eugui, Chief of Section ai | Email: david.vivaseugui@unctad.org
- [Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution \(SMEP\) Programme](#): Henrique Pacini, Economic Affairs Officer | Email: henrique.pacini@unctad.org

Acknowledgements: In undertaking these activities, UNCTAD is grateful for the generous support of the Governments of Portugal, France, Switzerland SECO and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for their support to the Ocean Economy and Fisheries, the Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) and the Trade and Biodiversity Programmes. UNCTAD also gratefully acknowledges the partnership and collaborative spirit of UNDESA, FAO, UNEP, WTO, UNDOALOS, CITES, the World Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the OACPS, and the International Ocean Institute. These achievements over the past two years since the 4th United Nations Ocean Conference in 2022 would not have been possible without their support, particularly.