



# Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Export Potential to the European Union

Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS): Feasibility Study







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The study has been prepared by Rodrigo Rupérez, Siti Rubiah Lambert and Niematallah Elfatih Ahmed Elamin, under the leadership of Santiago Fernández de Cordoba from the Trade Analysis Branch (TAB) of the Division on International Trade and Commodities (DITC) at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

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This study was formatted by Jenifer Tacardon-Mercado, UNCTAD and proofread by Gwendolyn Griffith-Manasse, CROSQ.

**The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS)** is an initiative of five United Nations agencies: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and UN Environment (UNEP). It was created in response to the challenges posed by sustainability standards. It helps decision-makers in developing countries source adequate information on Sustainability Standards, as well as share their experiences and get technical help.

UNFSS addresses the sustainable development value of voluntary sustainability standards by pooling resources, synchronizing efforts, and assuring policy coherence through a multi-stakeholder approach.

The UNFSS Secretariat is based at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva, Switzerland. It has a support group responsible for implementing its work plan and the coordination of all the activities undertaken under the UNFSS name.

It is the only forum that systematically conducts analytical, empirical and capacity-building activities in this field at an international level. It deals with the generic and strategic challenges invariably created by Sustainability Standards without endorsing or legitimizing any specific standard.

# CONTENTS

Executive summary .....	v
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Mainstreaming VSS and its impact on developing countries and emerging markets.....	1
1.2 Market opportunities in the European Union for “sustainable” products from CARICOM .....	2
1.3 Certification as a challenge: Trade and sustainable development .....	3
1.4 Defining indicative sectors.....	3
<b>2. DEMAND SIDE ANALYSIS: THE EUROPEAN UNION – HOW TO EXPORT? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 CARIFORUM-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement Context.....	4
2.2 Market regulation.....	7
2.3 Market trends.....	12
2.4 Certification of products.....	14
2.5 Integration in the European channels: Distribution, marketing .....	15
<b>3. SUPPLY SIDE ANALYSIS: VSS LANDSCAPE IN CARICOM .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 CARICOM institutions promoting sustainable development .....	16
3.2 VSS IN CARICOM.....	18
3.3 Impact of VSS on SMEs and MSMEs .....	22
<b>4. VSS AS A TRADE INSTRUMENT FOR CARICOM EXPORTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Agri-Food.....	24
4.1.1 Herbs and Spices.....	24
4.1.2 Cocoa .....	34
4.1.3 Sugar Cane .....	42
4.1.4 Coconut.....	50
4.2 Aquaculture .....	57
<b>5. ROLE OF ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION BODIES .....</b>	<b>66</b>
5.1 QIS and sustainable development.....	66
5.2 Accreditation and certification bodies: Features and mechanism .....	68
5.3 VSS and legal standards from a regulatory perspective .....	68
5.4 VSS and international QI institutions.....	68
5.5 National interpretation of VSS .....	71
<b>6. ROLE OF CROSQ .....</b>	<b>71</b>
6.1 Role of the CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ).....	72
6.2 Learning from other established National VSS Platforms .....	75
<b>7. RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>79</b>
7.1 Develop a sustainable export market in CARICOM.....	79
7.2 Enhance knowledge of sustainability practices and standards uptake through capacity building programmes	81
7.3 Product and packaging considerations.....	82
7.4 Establishment of CARICOM’s regional VSS multi-stakeholder platform.....	82
<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>84</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report assesses the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) agriculture and aquaculture export potential to the European Union through the utilization of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS). The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) describes VSS as “specifying requirements that producers, traders, manufacturers, retailers or service providers may be asked to meet, relating to a wide range of sustainability metrics, including respect for basic human rights, worker health and safety, the environmental impacts of production, community relations, land use planning and others”. VSS are expected to enhance the export potentials from developing countries to developed ones, and at the same time contribute to sustainable development by safeguarding public health and safety, and ensuring consumer, environment, and social protection, as well as contributing to economic development with potential price premia.

Against this background, this report investigates the potentiality of enhancing CARICOM's exports to the European Union through VSS adoption. It then highlights a set of recommendations to pave the pathway for CARICOM to capture the potential trade benefits associated with VSS. The study was conducted in close partnership with the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ).

The European Union is the second biggest market for CARICOM exports. The products covered in this report include herbs and spices, cocoa, sugarcane, coconut, and aquaculture products. From a trade perspective, these sectors are of great significance to CARICOM. Moreover, the rural population in CARICOM is mostly involved in the agricultural activities and cultivation of one or more of these products.

This report primarily aims to assist CARICOM in better understanding and benefiting from voluntary standards systems for the selected products and markets. The analysis is built upon secondary trade and standards related data, collected from the demand side (European Union) as well as the supply side (CARICOM). The investigation is not limited to data on trade and standards only; however, it goes beyond that to investigating the European legislation, exploring the market trends, and assessing the significance of certification schemes in the markets under investigation. Moreover, the report touches on the roles that can be played by standards, accreditation, and certification bodies and more specifically CROSQ in facilitating the transformation of economic activities towards more sustainable ones. Also, it addresses the benefits of establishing national and regional VSS Platforms through multi-stakeholder approach and highlights the learning takeaways from the established national platforms.

For each product, a detailed analysis of existing and potential trade between CARICOM and European Union is presented. Additionally, an overview of the main sustainability issues and concerns in the production processes of each of these products has been elucidated. A VSS market review, including opportunities, price premium, and regional importance, was also carried out as part of this study. Lastly, based on this in-depth analysis, a set of recommendations are set for each product under investigation.

These recommendations focused on four main pillars that are, promoting a sustainable export market in CARICOM, products and packaging, capacity building, and the role of CROSQ as follows:

### **Develop a sustainable export market in CARICOM**

The study stressed the importance of the promotion of sustainable exports and specified several ways in doing so. This includes, for example, international conventions, trade fairs, online platforms. It also highlights the significance of investing in personal partnerships with potential buyers. Moreover, the report highlighted additional recommendations related to national/regional testing facilities and VSS in public policy frameworks.

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### **Enhance knowledge of sustainability practices and standards uptake through capacity building programmes**

The analysis shows the need for capacity building activities for the value chain actors in CARICOM that includes, for instance, quality assurance training workshops, establishing platforms to educate exporters in terms of buyers potential conditions and requests, transparency and treatability, and providing a space for dialogue among the VSS circle.

### **Products and packaging considerations**

Products and packaging, on the other hand, needs to be enhanced through different ways that include increasing food safety and anti-modification requirements, promoting organic labels, and using sustainable packaging, among others.

### **Establishment of CARICOM's regional VSS multi-stakeholder platform**

CROSQ has a significant role as well to play in enhancing CARICOM potential exports through VSS; this includes, for instance, developing a measurement and monitoring systems, and mapping sustainability standards indicators to SDG. The report presents the role of CROSQ, and the 15 CARICOM countries collective effort to help increase the positive aspects of VSS, in line with their policy objectives that meet the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets.

Overall, the report provides a road map, for CARICOM, towards promoting and enhancing their sustainable exports to developed markets in European Union countries through VSS adoption. Based on the outputs of the analysis, it sets recommendations and a way forward for CARICOM and their regional standards organization, CROSQ.

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