

DRAFT REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

**25th INTERSESSIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE 28TH ORDINARY
MEETING OF THE ACS MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

ACS Secretariat, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

(Virtual Meeting)

18th January, 2023

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This report provides an account of the activities and initiatives executed in the focal area of sustainable tourism for the period April 2022 to December 2022. It outlines the achievements in the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Work Programme, consistent with the 2022-2028 ACS Plan of Action adopted by the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council in 2022.

The ACS Secretariat maintains its focus on advancing economic recovery and resilience within the Greater Caribbean region through sustainable tourism. The pandemic led to a tourism crisis which also created opportunities to build back a stronger tourism industry. Additionally, as visitor confidence continues to drive travel destination selection, the ACS programming in sustainable tourism continued to emphasize balance across social, economic, and environmental considerations and the adoption of crisis management best practices.

1. MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT, CONSULTATION AND ENDORSEMENT

1.1 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism

The 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism took place virtually on 2nd June, 2022 and was presided over by Dr. Anasha Campbell, Minister of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) of the Republic of Nicaragua in her capacity as Chair. Also in attendance were the Vice-Chairs, representatives of Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. The representative of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana also attended in its capacity as Rapporteur.

Members of the Executive Board were briefed on the structure and functions of the Directorate and Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism, as well as the mandated programmatic for which they have oversight. The presentation delivered by the Director for Trade and Sustainable Development focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board and Coordination Mechanism as well as the Special Committee's relationship and expected contributions to other ACS statutory organs. The presentation also included a progress report on the 2021-2022 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme.

Executive Board members provided inputs on the upcoming 2022-2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme and approved the date for the 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism. Consensus and alignment between proposed work programme activities and the Chair's priorities were noted to include:

- i. Tourism recovery and industry positioning for economic reprioritization;

- ii. Promotion of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as well as heritage tourism;
- iii. Digital transformation for the empowerment of youth, women and indigenous peoples with crisis resilience;
- iv. Development of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy
- v. Hosting a high-level Tourism Resilience Forum
- vi. Ongoing stakeholder capacity building

1.2 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism

The 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism was held on Tuesday 30th August, 2022 via videoconference, and was presided over by Dr. Anasha Campbell, Minister of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) of the Republic of Nicaragua in its capacity as Chair of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism. Also attending virtually were the Vice Chairs of the Special Committee, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, as well as the Cooperative Republic of Guyana in its capacity as Rapporteur. Attending the meeting were 17 ACS Member States, 3 Associate Member States and 3 Observers.

During the first session of the meeting, a stakeholder session with tourism experts introduced a dynamic dialogue on tourism reactivation that provided members with industry insights and innovative ideas on how to weather the storm of the pandemic. Experts from the following organizations made interventions during this session: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), iUrban and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA). The discussions stressed the importance of digital transformation to foster greater resilience to the challenges of COVID-19 affecting the industry. The closed working session held during the second half of the meeting focused on strategic planning for ACS actions in sustainable tourism as guided by the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028. The meeting received proposals for strategic priorities and the 2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme and recommended such for implementation. More specifically, the Meeting approved the:

- i. Sustainable Tourism Implementation Plan
- ii. 2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme
- iii. Project Brief on Digital Transformation
- iv. STZC Steering Committee draft Terms of Reference

1.3 7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism

The 7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism was held on August 2nd, 2022 via videoconference at the ACS Secretariat, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Meeting was presided by the Chair of the ACS Ministerial Council, the Republic of Guatemala, H.E. Minister Mario Adolfo Búcaro Flores, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The general objective of the meeting was to synergize the work of the Special Committees and Caribbean Sea Commission and to facilitate coherence between the work programmes in each respective focal area, the ACS Action Plan and Summit mandates. In this regard, the representative of Nicaragua, H.E. Anasha Campbell, Chair of the Special Committee on Sustainable

Tourism delivered a presentation on the priority areas related to the sustainable tourism as reflected in the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028. In her introductory remarks, she highlighted the challenges affecting the tourism sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and presented her main objective as Chair of this Special Committee: to continue promoting and supporting the recovery of the tourism sector and to promote its repositioning as a priority economic activity which contributes to sustainable socioeconomic growth in the Greater Caribbean region. She also highlighted key projects and activities in planned envisaged under the 2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme and Implementation Plan. In this regard, she emphasized the organisation of the high-level tourism event in 2023 and ACS Project *"Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in OCTs of the Greater Caribbean"* funded under the RESEMBID Covid-19 Response Facility.

1.4 Inputs for Sustainable Tourism in the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028

Following the approval of the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028, the Directorate continued its work on contributions for the Implementation Plan 2022-2028. Within the Implementation Plan, major tourism activities through which the related strategic actions would be realized were defined. The corresponding outputs, resources, partners, success indicators and timelines were articulated. Approved strategic actions were designed to help realise the three broad development strategies of (a) increasing economic competitiveness, (b) enhancing market exposure and (c) investment promotion and facilitation. In summary, the Directorate will work to operationalise efforts that deliver:

- i. Destination sustainability assessments and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- ii. Best practice identification and sharing
- iii. Product innovation for niche market development
- iv. Methodologies, tools and technologies that support robust tourism value chains
- v. Regional approaches to sustainable tourism planning and management
- vi. Sustainability as a differentiator of Greater Caribbean destination brands
- vii. Heritage-based sustainable tourism products
- viii. Cooperation for tourism development financing
- ix. Strategic alliances and collaboration for industry advancement

2. IMPROVE EMPIRICAL DATA GATHERING AND DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

2.1 Tourism Research with George Washington University

The ACS Secretary General signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) with George Washington University on September 30th 2021, to undertake a COVID-19 Destination Governance Impact Study. The LoU was signed after concluded negotiations and the final

study was initially expected to be delivered by June 2022. However, after various implementation delays due to changing academic schedules and the limited availability of graduate researchers, work is expected to resume in October 2022, with final publication by May 2023. As per the initial scope of the LoU, the publication is expected to reveal industry-tested models for tourism governance protection during crises.

3. PARTNERSHIPS AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 ACS Engagements with the UNWTO

To promote the expansion of organizational partnerships, ACS was invited as a special panelist to the 67th UNWTO Regional Commission of the Americas Meeting in Uruguay from May 19th – 21st, 2022. Through the Adviser for Trade and Sustainable Development, the Secretariat engaged a hemispheric delegation with a presentation outlining *"Greater Caribbean Perspectives on the development of Policies and Legislation for the protection of Tourists and Crisis Management in Emergency situations"*.

Insights were presented to over 100 delegates, with commendations being received from the UNWTO Secretary General on the proactive sustainable tourism development approach of the ACS. Further, the Adviser participated in a High-Level Tourism Policies Panel Discussion and offered development agency insights into (a) short-term tourism development prospects (b) Greater Caribbean priorities for recovery and resilience, and (c) obstacles to accelerate recovery and build resilience.

3.2 Participation in the Organization of American States (OAS) High Level Forum

On July 20th – 21st, 2022, the Directorate participated in the OAS High-Level Policy Forum for Building Small Tourism Enterprises (STE) Disaster resilience in the Caribbean to better understand operators' needs. The discussion highlighted concerns about financial recovery support, business continuity planning, and crisis planning. The importance of credible crisis communication assistance was detailed, including crisis planning awareness and crisis response readiness messaging to affected visitors. From the insights gained, the Directorate opted to expand its capacity-building programme to address the aforementioned areas of concern. Further, the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) was invited to share summary results from a regional survey of over 600 Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs) at the 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism.

3.3 4th Meeting of Strategic Partner Agencies in Tourism

On June 30th, 2022, the Directorate hosted the 4th Meeting of Strategic Regional Partner Agencies in Tourism, to promote continued coordination and cooperation in regional tourism recovery. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); with invitations also extended to the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA), the Central American Tourism Agency (CATA), and the Organization of American States (OAS), which were unable to attend.

The Meeting received a contextual presentation on the Association's mandate, its cooperation rationale, and an overview of ongoing and upcoming Sustainable Tourism activities. In addition, representatives from CTO, OECS, and UNDP presented their visions and expectations for implementation. Following the discussion, expressions of interest for joint action were noted for:

- i. Joint celebrations for World Tourism Day 2022, possibly through a series of partner events;
- ii. Development of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), including free regional participation in a CBT course being introduced by the CTO;
- iii. Shared implementation of tourism industry digital transformation initiatives;
- iv. Coordinated contributions to and membership support for destinations participating in the Glasgow Declaration;
- v. Ongoing tourism research and contributions to possible sustainable tourism indicators captured in the ACS Observatory.

4. BUILD RESILIENCE THROUGH INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION IN ORDER TO ACCELERATE REGIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

4.1 ACS-RESEMBID Project "Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in OCTs of the Greater Caribbean"

Since December 2021, the ACS had begun implementation of the *"Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the Greater Caribbean"* Project funded by the RESEMBID (Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity) Programme COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility. Improved capacity for contagion mitigation and management in the tourism industry of the three beneficiary countries (Bonaire, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) is one of the key areas of focus. The procurement of required administrative and technical support consultants is a critical step towards full project operationalisation, following which work on the four project outputs will be executed in order to deliver:

- i. A consolidated Best Practice Guide for tourism stakeholders in contagion scenarios;
- ii. A series of 12 online webinars and three in-country workshops that encourage the expedited adoption of strategies within the Best Practice Guide;
- iii. A piloted Reciprocal Passenger Facilitation mechanism that simplifies travel to and among participating OCTs;
- iv. A validated technological solution that can facilitate visitor contact tracing.

Activities and ongoing work completed to date are detailed as follows:

- A Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) consultant has been contracted to coordinate project MEAL activities. A MEAL Inception Report inclusive of a MEAL plan was subsequently submitted and approved.
- In August 2022, a 3-month procurement plan, 3-month communications plan and revised work plan were developed and submitted to RESEMBID for approval. Based on their feedback, changes were made and finalized to ensure an accelerated implementation.
- To meet the contractual obligations related to communications and visibility of the project, the project implementation team sought support from the Communications Unit of the ACS Secretariat until a communications consultant was contracted. In this regard, an article and infographics were drafted and created for posting on ACS communication channels. The posts focused on sharing general information about the project and were published during the September-October 2022 period.
- Following the evaluation of proposals for communication and marketing services, a communications and marketing firm was selected. The contracting process is expected to be concluded by October 24th, 2022.
- Following the publication of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for "*Project Consultancy 1 – Knowledge Products*", the project implementation team is currently evaluating technical proposals and expect to complete the selection process by October 2022.
- The Terms of Reference for "*Project Consultancy 2 – Pilot Testing*" was approved by the beneficiaries. This procurement is projected to be completed by November 30th, 2022.
- The 3rd Quarterly Regional Project Steering Committee (RPSC) Meeting was convened initially scheduled for September 24th but was later rescheduled twice to September 27th and finally to September 30th. Unfortunately, only one country attended. Therefore, the Project Manager used the opportunity to briefly update the representative present at the meeting and later informed all members of the RPSC that the meeting will be postponed again to another agreed date.
- The August Monthly Report and Quarterly MEAL Report which is due on October 6th, 2022 were submitted. The September Monthly Report has also been drafted and will be submitted by the second week of October.
- The Project Manager and Project Assistant attended a RESEMBID Implementation and Work Plan Workshop held by the RESEMBID Programme on Wednesday 28th September, 2022.

5. STRENGTHEN MSME INTERNATIONALISATION TO FACILITATE ECONOMIC GROWTH, RESILIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

5.1 MSME Competitiveness and Development Project

In keeping with the 2022 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme, the Directorate submitted a proposal to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Regional Public

Goods (RPG) Call for Proposals in May 2022. Eligible elements of the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) project were included in the proposal. The overall project objective is to promote the development of value chains and MSMEs in the Greater Caribbean, particularly in the sectors of community-based tourism, the creative industry and agribusiness sector. Given the broad social and economic base CBT represents in Greater Caribbean countries, it was selected with the aim of supporting inclusive regional economic growth and job generation.

ACS member countries who are also Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs) of the IDB were engaged and as such, the ACS received letters of commitment from Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago. In August 2022, the ACS received conditional approval for the project and was awarded USD\$720,000 for project development and implementation. After meeting with the IDB RPG team in October 2022, the Directorate liaised with the relevant representatives from the line ministries with direct involvement in the implementation of the project in order to meet the necessary administrative requirements. In accordance with IDB RPG process, this included requesting non-objection letters from the Ministries of Finance in Honduras, Jamaica and Nicaragua. Thereafter, subsequent meetings were held to discuss and finalize the project proposal, project indicator matrix, procurement plan and related terms of reference. Work by the Directorate and the IDB RPG team is currently underway to complete these project documents.

6. STIMULATE SERVICES SECTOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The 1st Workshop on Social and Environmental Sustainability

In keeping with the vision espoused within the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028, the Directorate conceptualised a tourism stakeholder workshop in the area of social and environmental sustainability. The initiative addresses critical industry challenges which threaten to undermine the quality of visitor experiences in host destinations. It aligns with the Secretariat's holistic interpretation of sustainable tourism that combines a symbiotic relationship between environmental, social and economic factors. The workshop is proposed under the theme *"From Theory to Practice – Modernising the Greater Caribbean Tourism Outlook"* and aims to promote social and environmental sustainability as a strategy for enabling resilient tourism growth trajectories. Tourism experts would be expected to explore strategies and best practice approaches to improve the sustainability of regional destinations. Notably, the Secretariat secured technical support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Caribbean Sub-Regional Office and GLP Films, both recognized as global experts in the field. The event will target tourism planners, tourism administrators and communication officers to enhance their capacity for mainstreaming social and environmental considerations within

national tourism activities. Due to competing commitments and to ensure the participation of all partners, the event was postponed to 2023.