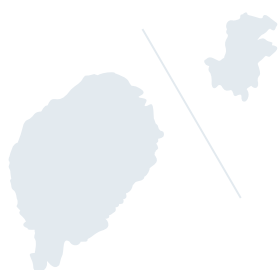




Fisheries  
Transparency  
Initiative

# TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries  
Management Information



**Democratic Republic of  
São Tomé and Príncipe**

In collaboration with:



2022 Summary Assessment Report

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Researcher: Dr. Andre Standing (Fisheries Transparency Initiative)

Reviewers: Mansor Ndour (Fisheries Transparency Initiative), Manuel Jorge De Carvalho Do Rio (MAR Ambiente e Pesca Artesanal, MARAPA), Damiano Borgogno (United Nations Development Programme)

Design: weeks.de Werbeagentur GmbH



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Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this assessment. All information was believed to be correct as of September 2022. Nevertheless, the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) cannot accept responsibility for the consequences resulting from the use of this assessment or its contents by others.

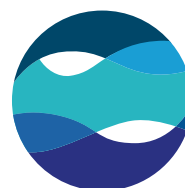
The ideas, opinions and comments in this assessment are entirely the responsibility of the FiTI and do not necessarily represent or reflect Irish Aid policy.

Furthermore, in conducting this assessment, the FiTI did not investigate the veracity or completeness of the published information and did not make any judgement about the integrity of the information or practices disclosed.

We would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who contributed to the various stages of research and preparation of this assessment.

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) is a global multi-stakeholder initiative that strengthens transparency and collaboration in marine fisheries management.

By making fisheries management more transparent and inclusive, the FiTI promotes informed public debates on fisheries policies and supports the long-term contribution of the sector to national economies and the well-being of citizens and businesses that depend on a healthy marine environment.



**Fisheries  
Transparency  
Initiative**

[www.fiti.global](http://www.fiti.global)

## **TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries**

*Management Information* assesses the level of information that national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe publish on government websites regarding the country's marine fisheries sector.



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São Tomé and Príncipe's **TAKING STOCK: Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information** assessment consists of this Summary Assessment Report, as well as an in-depth Detailed Assessment Report.

Both reports, as well as information on the methodology, can be found at:  
[www.fiti.global/taking-stock](http://www.fiti.global/taking-stock)



# SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES NEED TRANSPARENCY

For millennia, those who dedicated themselves to fishing, whether for food, income or recreation, did not need to worry about the sustainable management of this natural resource. Fish stocks replenished themselves with ease. **This is no longer the case.** The ocean is under increasing threats from myriad impacts, like climate change, pollution, and overfishing.

**Governments have the fundamental obligation to manage common resources, such as fish, on behalf of their citizens.** But this invokes a complex challenge: to ensure that fishing and fish trade contribute to income, employment, food and nutrition for millions of people, while conserving marine biodiversity for present and future generations.

**Public availability of information is critical to achieving sustainable fisheries. Yet, transparency in fisheries management has not been a priority.** Many governments do not disclose basic information on their fisheries sectors, such as laws, permits, fishing agreements, stock assessments, financial contributions, catch data and subsidies. Additionally, there are widespread concerns that companies are not consistently reporting accurate information on catches, fishing practices and payments to governments. The data that is already publicly available is too often incomplete, outdated, unverified, or not readily accessible.



*Lack of basic transparency could be seen as an underlying facilitator of all the negative aspects of the global fisheries sector – IUU fishing, fleet overcapacity, overfishing, ill-directed subsidies, corruption, poor fisheries management decisions, etc. A more transparent sector would place a spotlight on such activities whenever they occur, making it harder for perpetrators to hide behind the current veil of secrecy and requiring immediate action to be taken to correct the wrong.*

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010

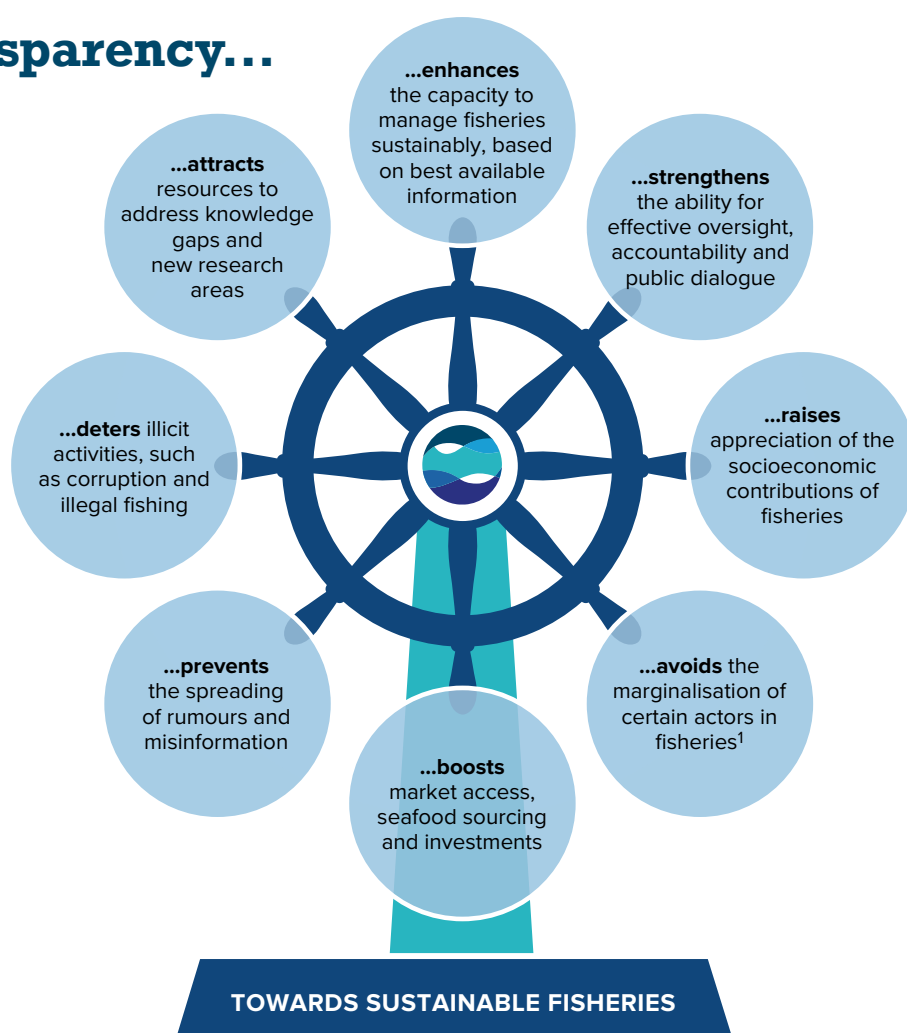




Enhancing transparency in fisheries management appeals to all stakeholders that appreciate the enormous value of marine fisheries – whether that relates to food and nutrition security, employment, the value to national economies, or the cultural importance of fishing.

**Transparency in fisheries management yields multiple benefits, and their relevance and applicability vary depending on the national context.**

## Transparency...



Promoting these positive features of fisheries lies at the heart of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI).



Fisheries  
Transparency  
Initiative

<sup>1</sup> In particular small-scale fisheries and women.

## Transparency is not voluntary. It is a government's duty and a citizen's right!

The provision of accessible, timely and credible information on a country's marine fisheries is increasingly becoming a **legal requirement for governments**, stemming, among other things, from Freedom of Information laws. Such laws are frequently based on three key principles: *public participation*, *access to justice* and *access to information*. The last of these principles implies that the public should be able to obtain environmental information (including information about their country's fisheries sector) with only limited, explicitly defined exceptions arising from justifiable confidentiality claims and security matters.



São Tomé and Príncipe does **not have a dedicated law governing access to government information**. While article 30 of the Constitution refers to freedom of expression and information, this relates primarily to express and divulge thinking by word, by image or by any other means, but not on information.

In July 2020 the Government resolved to implement a '**National Strategy for Digital Governance in São Tomé and Príncipe**'. This is a comprehensive strategy based on international best practice to improve public services, increase citizen participation and strengthen online access to government data. It was developed in partnership with the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV).

Within this strategy **fisheries is designated as one of 9 thematic priorities for government information**, setting out specific requirements for the Directorate of Fisheries, such as the digitalisation of information on licenses and certificates for fishing activities, a register of fishermen, as well as information on government subsidies and external financing to the sector.

As of November 2022, this strategy does not appear to have been fully implemented. For example, a core task is to publish a central portal ([www.gov.st](http://www.gov.st)). However, this domain name is currently not in use.

- Since 2008, São Tomé and Príncipe is an implementing country of the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)**, which is recognised as the global standard for the good governance of oil, gas and mineral resources.<sup>2</sup>
- In January 2022, the government of São Tomé and Príncipe made a public commitment to join the **Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)** to promote transparency in its marine fisheries sector.<sup>3</sup>
- São Tomé and Príncipe is not a member country of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**.



The importance of public access to government information is also emphasised in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 16.10 of the SDGs calls on all states to adopt legislation or policies guaranteeing the right to information, which is essential not only for the achievement of Goal 16, but is an enabler to achieving other SDGs.

<sup>2</sup> <https://eiti.org/countries/sao-tome-and-principe>











<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fiti.global/saotomeandprincipe-joins-fiti>

## ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the first time that Comoros has been assessed regarding the online transparency of its marine fisheries sector.

This TAKING STOCK assessment covers 12 thematic areas of fisheries management, as defined by the FiTI Standard.<sup>4</sup>

The **FiTI Standard** is the only internationally recognised framework that defines what information on fisheries management should be published online by national authorities. The FiTI Standard was developed over two years in a global multi-stakeholder endeavour. Its objective is to contribute to the sustainability of marine fisheries by increasing the accessibility and credibility of national fisheries management information.

- |    |   |   |     |  |                                    |
|----|---|---|-----|--|------------------------------------|
| #1 |    | Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents | #7  |    | Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade |
| #2 |   | Fisheries Tenure Arrangements                             | #8  |   | Fisheries Law Enforcement          |
| #3 |  | Foreign Fishing Access Agreements                         | #9  |  | Labour Standards                   |
| #4 |  | The State of the Fisheries Resources                      | #10 |  | Fisheries Subsidies                |
| #5 |  | Large-Scale Fisheries                                     | #11 |  | Official Development Assistance    |
| #6 |  | Small-Scale Fisheries                                     | #12 |  | Beneficial Ownership               |

For this assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been broken down into a total of **39 transparency elements**.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fiti.global/fiti-standard>

<sup>5</sup> An overview of these 39 transparency elements can be found in the section [‘Key findings’](#).

This assessment evaluates whether basic information on the marine fisheries sector in São Tomé and Príncipe is **freely available** on government websites, whether it is **up to date** and whether it is **easy to find**.<sup>6</sup>



**Additionally, this assessment:**

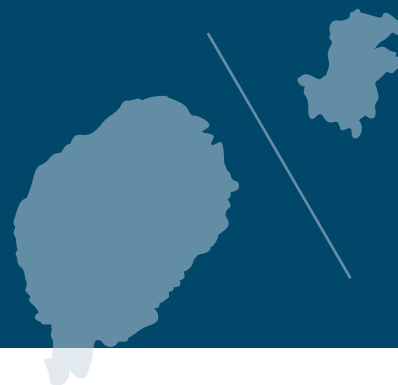
- Considers whether information is published in a way that renders it easy to **(re)use**, e.g. to download, search and filter;
- Documents instances of **'good transparency practices'**, where published information allows non-experts to draw reliable conclusions;<sup>7</sup> and
- Proposes practical **recommendations** to improve online transparency around the marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe.



**SÃO TOMÉ  
AND  
PRÍNCIPE**

This assessment is intended to support national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe to improve transparency in fisheries management and to stimulate interest in fisheries among a wide range of stakeholders.

It also establishes a comprehensive benchmark for evaluating progress over time.



<sup>6</sup> For more information about the assessment's methodology, please refer to <https://www.fiti.global/taking-stock/methodology>.

<sup>7</sup> For example, national authorities may utilise innovative techniques to help visualise information, such as online information systems or fact sheets.





*Public disclosure of information cannot be directly equated with actual progress towards sustainable fisheries management.*

**A lack of transparency in fisheries management is not always a deliberate state of affairs.** Governments with poor levels of transparency are often viewed negatively, as if driven by the desire to hide information from public scrutiny. However, what may be perceived as opacity or secretive practices is often the result of other factors, such as the complexity of the fisheries sector, a lack of technology, expertise and staff, or legal concerns. Some government ministries or national agencies, particularly those that are underfunded, may not prioritise transparency. Unfortunately, these arguments can also be used as a convenient excuse to avoid scrutiny.

A low level of transparency in this TAKING STOCK assessment may not be a sign of wrongdoing, but rather highlights an opportunity for national authorities to enhance disclosure to stakeholders. Likewise, a high level illustrates strong disclosure systems, but this may not reflect operational success regarding the sustainable management of marine fisheries.

Transparency should also not be misinterpreted as a direct indicator for ethical behaviour, such as honesty and integrity.

**This assessment is therefore not an end in itself.** Instead, it takes stock of current disclosure practices against an internationally recognised transparency framework – the FiTI Standard – with a view to starting a conversation with all relevant stakeholders in the marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe.

The ambition is that this and future **TAKING STOCK** assessments will contribute to making government transparency the global norm in fisheries management.

# CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON MARINE FISHERIES IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE



## Recent developments relevant to the marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe



In 2021, São Tomé and Príncipe launched a project to repopulate the sea with artificial marine reefs in the coastal area of the northern part of the island of São Tomé. The project aims to create new habitats that reduce fishing efforts in traditional fishing areas, while increasing the fish stocks available to artisanal fishers.



In January 2022, the government of São Tomé and Príncipe announced its public commitment to join the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), becoming the sixth country to increase transparency and multi-stakeholder collaboration in fisheries management through the FiTI Standard.



In recent years, São Tomé and Príncipe has seen a significant decline in Panhã fish as a result of overfishing and climate change.

<sup>8</sup> Under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14.5, countries (including São Tomé and Príncipe) committed to conserve at least 10 per cent of their coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

<sup>9</sup> As of today (November 2022), São Tomé and Príncipe has not established dedicated Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). However, the country is currently in the process of approving its first MPAs (e.g. for Príncipe).



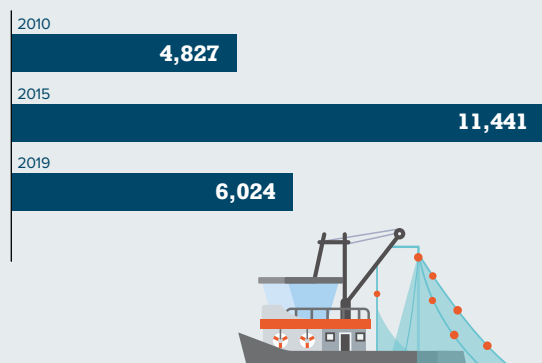
## SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

The marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe plays a key role in fulfilling the economic, employment, food security and nutrition needs of its citizens.<sup>10</sup>

CONTEXTUAL  
INFORMATION

### Capture fisheries production

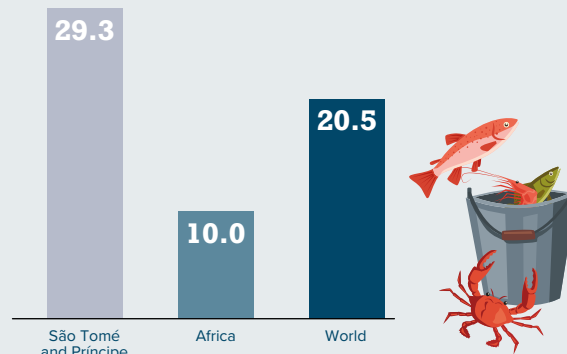
(tonnes, live weight)



Source: FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2019 (published in 2021) and 2015 (published in 2017)

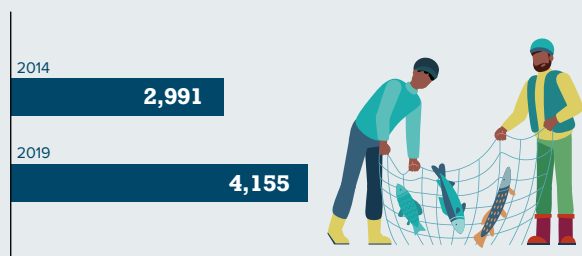
### Fish available for consumption

kg/per capita



Source: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020, FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile – São Tomé and Príncipe 2019

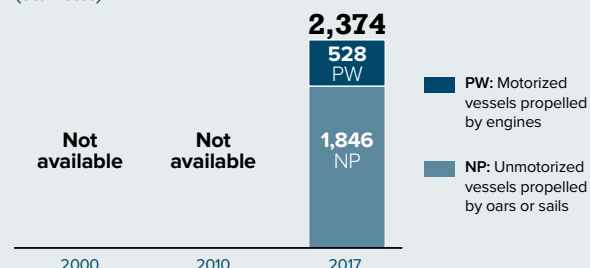
### Number of fishers



Source: FAO & Ministry of Planning, Finance and Blue Economy, Estratégia de transição para economia azul em São Tomé e Príncipe, 2019

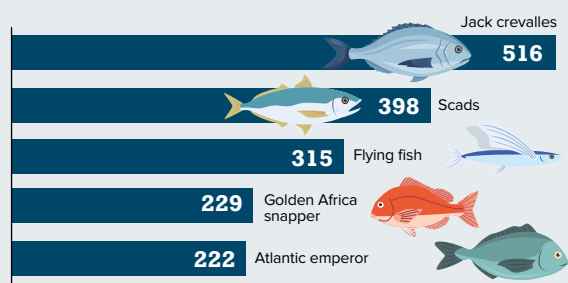
### Number of fishing vessels

(estimates)



Source: FAO, Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profile, São Tomé and Príncipe

### Top 5 species



Source: FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile - São Tomé and Príncipe 2019 (in tonnes, by production volume)

### Export of fish and fish products

Since 2003, São Tomé and Príncipe is a net importer of fish and fish products.



**USD 2,730**  
[2019]

Source: FAO GLOBEFISH Market Profile - São Tomé and Príncipe 2019

<sup>10</sup> This information reflects international statistics (e.g. from the United Nations FAO), which in some cases may differ from national statistics. In addition, this report does not state the contribution of São Tomé and Príncipe's sector to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although this is a common way of expressing the economic value of fisheries, GDP is not sufficient for fully representing the overall social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of the sector.

# KEY FINDINGS

## PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



**SÃO TOMÉ  
AND  
PRÍNCIPE**

KEY FINDINGS  
Public access to fisheries information



This assessment shows clearly the need for national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe to significantly improve public access to fisheries management information. The government's announcement to implement the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITI) demonstrate a first tangible step to enhance transparency in the sector.



Only **2 out of 35** applicable transparency elements, São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities publish information online („Public Access“).



For **26** transparency elements there is no information published.



For **7** transparency element no information has yet been produced by São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities.

### Weak public access

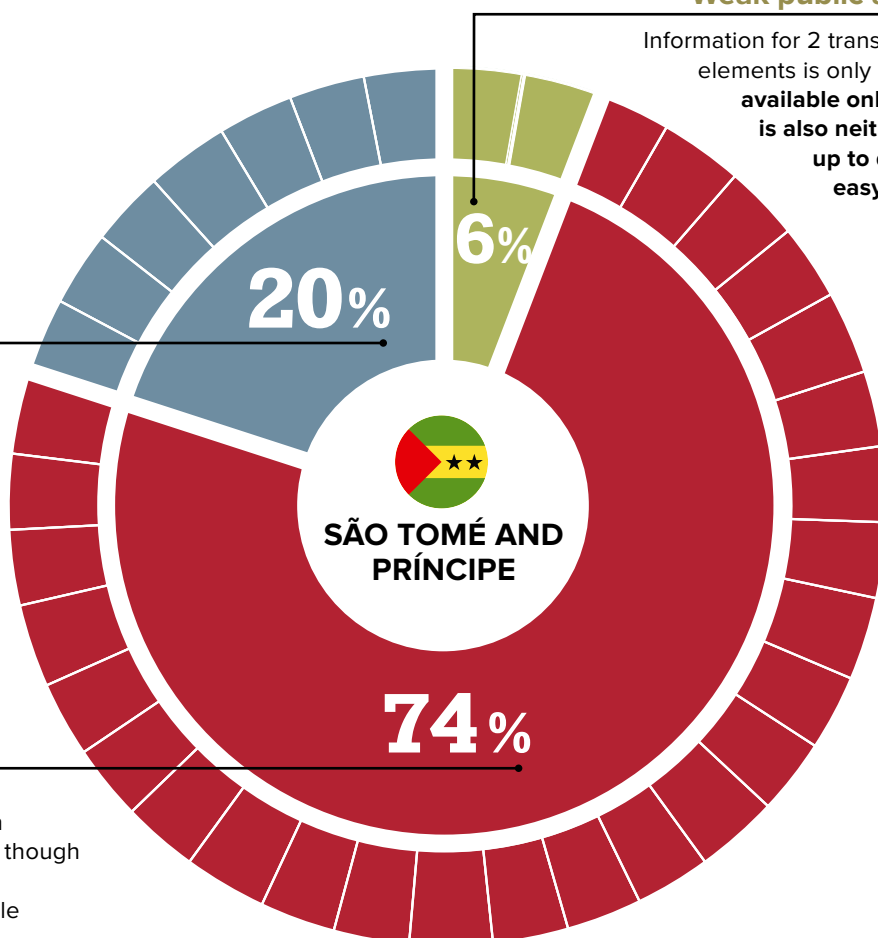
Information for 2 transparency elements is only **partially available online**, and is also **neither fully up to date nor easy to find**.

### Not produced

Information for 7 transparency elements has **not been collected or compiled yet**.

### No public access



































































For 26 transparency elements, **no information** is published **online**, even though there is evidence that this information is available to national authorities.









4 of the 39 transparency elements is considered as **not applicable** to the marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe (see [Annex](#)).



## DETAILED OVERVIEW








						
Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 <b>Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents</b>	1-A	Laws on marine fisheries				Weak public access
	1-B	Fisheries policy documents				Not produced
	1-C	Fisheries management plans				Not produced
 <b>Fisheries Tenure Arrangements</b>	2-A	Commercial fishing (large-scale and small-scale)				No public access
	2-B	Coastal subsistence fishing				No public access
	2-C	Scientific and exploratory fishing				No public access
	2-D	Sport fishing				No public access
 <b>Foreign Fishing Access Agreements</b>	3-A	Foreign-flagged vessels fishing in STP waters				No public access
	3-B	STP-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters				Not applicable
 <b>The State of the Fisheries Resources</b>	4-A	National reports on the state of marine fish populations				Not produced
	4-B	Scientific stock assessments				Not produced
 <b>Large-Scale Fisheries</b>	5-A	Vessels				No public access
	5-B	Payments				No public access
	5-C	Catches within STP waters				No public access
	5-D	Catches outside STP waters				Not applicable
	5-E	Landings in STP ports				Not applicable
	5-F	Transshipments and landings in foreign ports				No public access
	5-G	Discards				No public access
	5-H	Fishing effort				No public access







 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable

STP = São Tomé and Príncipe



## DETAILED OVERVIEW

						
Thematic area	ID	Transparency element	AVAILABLE ONLINE?	UP TO DATE?	EASY TO FIND?	
 <b>Small-Scale Fisheries</b>	6-A	Vessels				No public access
	6-B	Licenses				No public access
	6-C	Fishers				No public access
	6-D	Payments				No public access
	6-E	Catches				No public access
	6-F	Discards				No public access
 <b>Post-Harvest Sector and Fish Trade</b>	7-A	Imports				No public access
	7-B	Exports				Weak public access
	7-C	Employment in commercial fisheries				No public access
	7-D	Employment in informal fisheries				No public access
 <b>Fisheries Law Enforcement</b>	8-A	Enforcement of laws				No public access
	8-B	Sanctions for major offences				No public access
 <b>Labour Standards</b>	9-A	Enforcement of labour standards				No public access
	9-B	Sanctions for labour standard offences				No public access
 <b>Fisheries Subsidies</b>	10-A	Government financial transfers or subsidies				No public access
 <b>Official Development Assistance</b>	11-A	Assistance for national fisheries development				No public access
	11-B	Assistance for foreign fisheries development				Not applicable
 <b>Beneficial Ownership</b>	12-A	Legal basis for beneficial ownership transparency				Not produced
	12-B	Beneficial ownership registry				Not produced
	12-C	Beneficial ownership disclosure in fisheries				Not produced

 To a full extent
  To a large extent
  To a limited extent
  No
  Not produced
  Not applicable

STP = São Tomé and Príncipe





## GIVING MEANING TO TRANSPARENCY: NOTABLE EXAMPLES

The value of this TAKING STOCK assessment does not only lie in understanding what information on a country's marine fisheries is available online, and where gaps exist. Fundamentally, and in very simple terms, **public access to fisheries information is important to help answer critical questions about the sustainability of the sector.**

### Examples

Who manages our fisheries?

Are our fisheries being sustainably managed?

What is the contribution of marine fisheries to our national food security?

How much does my country earn from our fisheries resources?

Who catches our fish?

What is the value of fisheries to our national economy?

How is my country dealing with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing?

How well is the government protecting the rights of people working in the fisheries sector?



**Government**

**Fishers**  
(Industrial and artisanal)

**Media**

**Parliamentarians**

**Civil Society Organisations**

**Academia**

Given the complexity of fisheries management, answering such questions is not always a straightforward task. However, by increasing public access to fisheries information, governments provide their citizens and business partners the necessary means to engage in informed public debates.





As shown in the previous 'Key findings' section, the vast amount of information that is available to São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities is not published online. This lack of public access to information clearly restricts the ability of all relevant stakeholders to participate in public debates and reforms towards better governance of the sector, and to monitor government decision-making regarding the sustainable management of the country's marine fisheries sector.

✗	<b>How is the fishing sector in São Tomé and Príncipe regulated?</b>	São Tomé and Príncipe's government does not provide a registry of marine fisheries laws, nor were all relevant laws and degrees found in the official Gazette. This is a critical aspect, as these laws also include important information on tenure arrangements for commercial, subsistence, scientific and sport fisheries. While some of these laws can be found on third-party websites, e.g. FAO's FAOLEX database, stakeholders less familiar with the fisheries sector – such as the media or parliamentarians – might not even be aware of the existence of such regulatory information.
✗	<b>Who is allowed to fish in São Tomé and Príncipe's waters?</b>	The government of São Tomé and Príncipe does not publish a registry of large-scale fishing vessels. This is contrary to the requirement stated in Decree 41/2013, mandating that information on licensed industrial vessels is published by the relevant Ministry. Likewise, no information on semi-industrial and artisanal fishing is found online on government websites or online reports. This lack of information does not only comprise missing vessel information, but there is also no information published on retained catches, landings and discards from these vessels.
✗	<b>How much does São Tomé and Príncipe earn from its fisheries resources?</b>	Neither the Ministry of Fisheries nor the Ministry of Finance publish information regarding the actual revenues received from licensing industrial fisheries. However, such information falls under Decree 41/2013 and thus, should be provided in the public domain.
✗	<b>What is the economic and social value of small-scale fisheries in São Tomé and Príncipe?</b>	No information is published online regarding semi-industrial, artisanal or subsistence fishing in São Tomé and Príncipe. Such lack of information on vessels, number of fishers, catches etc. could lead to the marginalisation of small-scale fisheries in policy-making processes as well as inequitable flows of government support.
✗	<b>How is the government supporting São Tomé and Príncipe's fisheries sector?</b>	Despite the fact that São Tomé and Príncipe's government provides multiple forms of direct and indirect subsidies to its marine fisheries sector, for example government support to acquire fishing gear and equipment, no such information is published online. Furthermore, São Tomé and Príncipe is the recipient of development assistance for multiple projects to support its fisheries (e.g. from Japan, the Global Environment Facility, and under the current FISH4ACP project, financed by the European Union and Germany). However, no information on any of these projects, including their objectives, deliverables and financial value, can be found on government websites.
✗	<b>Who is violating laws and regulations in São Tomé and Príncipe's fisheries sector?</b>	No record of convictions for major offences in the fisheries sector is published online, even though there is evidence that national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe have arrested fishing vessels for illegal fishing activities.



Unlike the previous examples, where information is available to the national authorities of São Tomé and Príncipe but not yet published online, there are also several important aspects of the country's fisheries sector where no information exists at all. This clearly impedes the government's ability to manage fisheries sustainably, as well as stakeholders' ability to better understand their fisheries sector.

However, it is acknowledged that this may be because São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities are targeting different priorities or simply do not have the technical, financial or human resources needed to collect such information. Notable examples include:

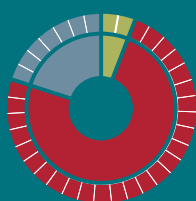
	<p><b>How healthy are São Tomé and Príncipe's fish stocks?</b></p>	<p>Despite the value of marine fish to the economy and food security of São Tomé and Príncipe, the government does not produce a singular report at regular intervals that summarises information on the state of fish populations.</p> <p>Our assessment found also no evidence that national authorities undertake stock assessments of commercial fish species. While it appears that national authorities collate some catch information of fish species, including through donor funded projects, it does not seem that the government has the capacity to undertake analysis on fish populations and on the status of fish stocks, including information on trends in fish stocks.</p>
	<p><b>Who benefits from fishing in São Tomé and Príncipe' waters?</b></p>	<p>No information was found whether national authorities are working to produce dedicated rules and procedures to incorporate beneficial ownership into filings that regulate access to fisheries, nor to compile a register of the operators or beneficial owners of vessels flying São Tomé and Príncipe's flag.</p>



# A DEEP DIVE INTO PUBLIC ACCESS TO FISHERIES INFORMATION



## SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE



Typically, additional important insights can be gained by understanding whether the published information ('Public access') meets basic information requirements, is up to date and easy to find. However, given the limited state of public access to fisheries management information in São Tomé and Príncipe, the meaningfulness of this section is severely limited.



AVAILABLE  
ONLINE?



UP TO DATE?



EASY TO FIND?



## AVAILABLE ONLINE?

### AVAILABLE ONLINE?



São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities publish information online only for 2 transparency elements (i.e 'Public access').<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the published information meets the requirements of the FiTI Standard only to a limited extent.

## UP TO DATE?<sup>12</sup>

### UP TO DATE?



The information for the two transparency elements that is published online is seen as not up to date.

## EASY TO FIND?<sup>13</sup>

### EASY TO FIND?



The information for the two transparency elements that is published online is only partially easy to find.

<sup>11</sup> From a total of 39 transparency elements, this assessment considers four as being 'Not applicable' to São Tomé and Príncipe's marine fisheries sector, whereas seven elements are considered as 'Not produced' (meaning the government has not collected or compiled the information requested under this element).

<sup>12</sup> Fish is a renewable resource that can, if sustainably managed, remain accessible and beneficial for generations. Those making decisions affecting fisheries must be able to have quick and easy access to the latest available data. The importance of up-to-date information takes on an even greater dimension when it comes to time-sensitive issues such as the production of catch data or scientific stock assessments.

<sup>13</sup> Governments have the responsibility to manage fisheries on behalf of their citizens – and inform them about the current status, opportunities and challenges facing the sector. In the digital age, websites remain one of the most popular mediums to convey such information. However, websites are passive communications channels, and stakeholders have to purposely visit the site, search for the desired content and navigate to find information. If this is difficult or time consuming, stakeholders may lose interest, leaving potentially important information unread and underutilised.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES OF SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

As the majority of fisheries information that is available to São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities is not published online, there are significant opportunities to improve transparency in the country's marine fisheries.

The country's recent commitment to implement the FiTI Standard is therefore a crucial foundation for enhancing the accessibility, quality and credibility of national fisheries.

## 1. Make currently unpublished information publicly available

There are many aspects of fisheries management where government information is currently not being published. Doing so would raise levels of transparency and trust in national fisheries authorities. This includes e.g.:

- **Laws and policy documents** regulating the fisheries sectors;
- Agreements that allow **foreign-flagged vessels** to fish in the country's territorial waters;
- A **registry for large-scale (industrial) fishing vessels**;
- **Government revenues** for issuing fishing licenses;
- Information on the **enforcement of laws and regulations** in the fisheries sector;
- Information on **government financial transfers or subsidies**;
- Information regarding the **implementation and outcomes of projects** financed by international partners.

It is acknowledged that publishing information online has not historically been government practice in São Tomé and Príncipe. Budgetary constraints and limited human capacity resources within the country's national authorities pose sizeable challenges to their ability to make fisheries information available online in a structured and periodic manner. Internet usage also remains low across the country; the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates that only one-third of the country's population (or 33%) uses the internet (according to 2020 figures). This is important contextual information given this assessment evaluates whether the government publishes information online.

However, while the FiTI places emphasis on 'downward' accountability - that is from the government to its citizens - national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe have also a responsibility to share information on a regional and global level as well.

Furthermore, several opportunities exist at the moment – in particular through donor-led projects – for national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe to increase public access to fisheries information online. For example, the United Nations Development Programme is currently setting up a Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) as part of the country's commitment towards the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This newly created website could therefore be used to make currently unpublished information about the country's fisheries sector publicly available, such as laws and policy documents regulating the fisheries sector.





## 2. Address information gaps

Although São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities collate certain information on fisheries, there are important areas within the sector where government information is notably absent, likely due to insufficient research capabilities or resources allocated for data collection. Gaps in information exist on issues such as:

- **Fisheries management plans;**
- **Scientific stock assessments for commercial fish species;**
- **Beneficial ownership information**

References to several activities being undertaken by São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities were found online (e.g. the development of a strategy for the country's Blue Economy), but it remains unclear whether such activities are still ongoing, are completed or have been cancelled.

Clearly detailing the status of such activities via progress reports increases the accountability of and appreciation for the government's efforts to ensure a sustainable marine fisheries sector.

## 3. Continue implementing the country's strategy for digital governance

This assessment showed clearly that only few of the Ministries relevant for fisheries have their own website (or these websites are currently under constructions), while other Ministries use primarily social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) to publish news and updates.

In order to improve public services, increase citizen participation and strengthen online access to government data, the government should continue implementing its '2020 'National Strategy for Digital Governance in São Tomé and Príncipe'. This could, for example, include a main landing page for fisheries information, with categories for key information available through a menu system.<sup>14</sup>

Strengthening transparency within São Tomé and Príncipe's marine fisheries sector by, inter alia, reviewing and prioritising these recommendations, should be based on ongoing discussions with stakeholders, such as fishers, fishing companies, civil society and academia (e.g. as part of the country's to-be established FiTI National Multi-Stakeholder Group). This may further help to identify other important information gaps on national priorities, which have not been covered under this assessment (such as the impacts of climate change or the interactions between fisheries and other sectors in the blue economy).

<sup>14</sup> The 12 thematic areas of the FiTI Standard could serve as such a high-level menu structure.

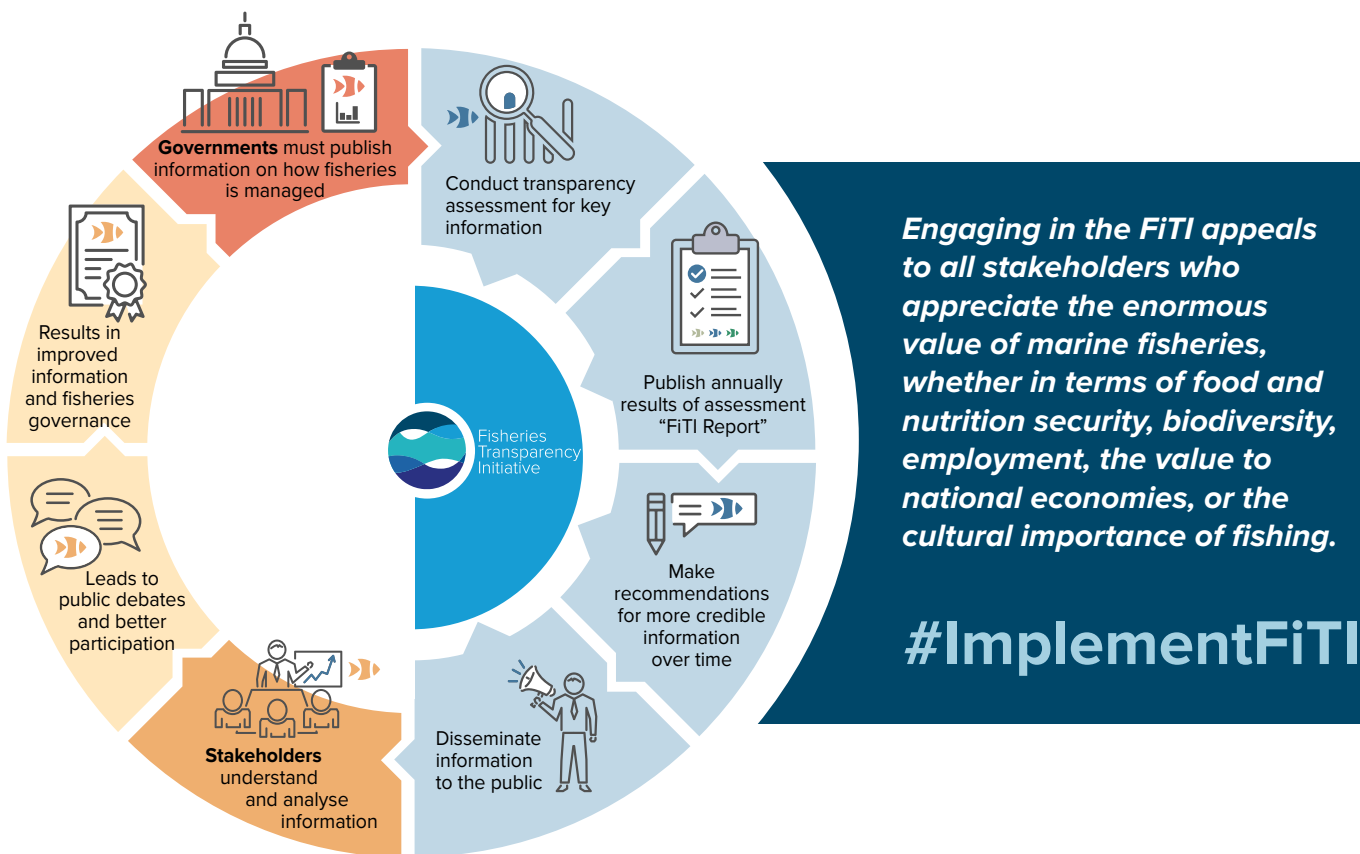
# TRANSPARENCY NEEDS TRUST

Public access to information on how the marine fisheries sector in São Tomé and Príncipe is being exploited is fundamental for good governance. This TAKING STOCK assessment provides a sound starting point for national authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe to enhance transparency in marine fisheries management. But it does not tell the whole story: challenges still exist that are unlikely to be overcome by a single actor working alone. Such challenges involve determining whether information that is not published online simply does not exist, or whether information that is disclosed is perceived as credible by stakeholders. Addressing such challenges requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

**Therefore, a collective effort is needed from all relevant stakeholders to incorporate a variety of perspectives and enhance transparency and trust over time.**

The Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) provides such a unique combination of transparency and participation. The FiTI is implemented in countries through National Multi-Stakeholder Groups, consisting of representatives from government, business and organised civil society. These groups work collectively to:

- » assess the information in the public domain against the FiTI Standard;
- » make recommendations on how to prioritise the closure of information gaps; and
- » provide suggestions on how information published by national authorities can be strengthened to further raise levels of openness and public access to information.



## ANNEX: ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

This TAKING STOCK assessment evaluates the disclosure practices of São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities across 12 thematic areas of **marine fisheries management**,<sup>15</sup> as defined by the FiTI Standard.

In order to avoid ambiguities during the assessment, these 12 thematic areas have been further broken down into **39 transparency elements**. For example, thematic area #1 'Fisheries Laws, Regulations and Official Policy Documents' is broken down into three transparency elements.

The assessment is focused entirely on the availability of information<sup>16</sup> provided by São Tomé and Príncipe's national authorities through their own websites and online publications.

This report, the first for São Tomé and Príncipe, does not only seek to provide an overview of what the government publishes regarding a number of key areas of its marine fisheries sector. It also intends to provide a sound basis of information to spark interest among various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

The assessment does **not** try to capture and display the actual underlying information behind each transparency element (e.g. number of vessels), nor does it undertake an independent verification of whether information disclosed online by national authorities is complete or correct. Nevertheless, if compelling evidence of unreliable or contradicting information has been found, it is noted in the Detailed Assessment Report.

Within the scope of this assessment, two different entry points have been utilised to evaluate whether information on the marine fisheries sector of São Tomé and Príncipe is published online by national authorities, such as:<sup>17</sup>

- By directly accessing websites of national authorities;
- By utilising external search engines, such as Google.

The assessment was conducted as a **desktop study** without relying on initial input or contributions from national authorities.

The assessment was conducted over a period of 7 months (February – September 2022). The process was officially launched on 1 February 2022 when the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development was informed about the upcoming assessment, its key parameters and benefits.

**Given the fact that a vast amount of information is either not available to the government at all, or not published online (in part due to a missing website infrastructure by national authorities), this assessment concluded without requesting additional feedback from the authorities in São Tomé and Príncipe.**

The overall assessment process was conducted under the supervision and responsibility of the FiTI International Secretariat, with significant input from researchers and reviewers.

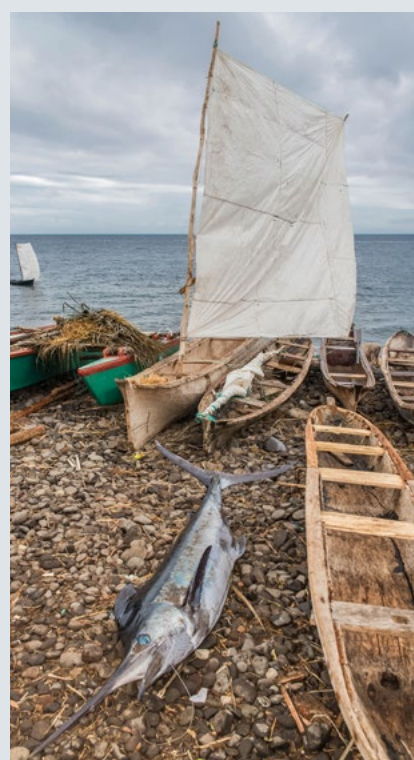
<sup>15</sup> Information on inland fisheries and aquaculture does not form part of this assessment.

<sup>16</sup> Kindly note that in the context of this research, the terms '**data**' and '**information**' are used interchangeably. It is acknowledged that while closely intertwined, they differ in meaning and usage (e.g. data is the raw fact, which should be processed to gain information). However, this difference is not of major relevance for this assessment.

<sup>17</sup> Information is only considered available online if it is proactively published on a government website and is available without access restrictions (e.g. the need to register online, request the data from a civil servant via email or pay a fee).

As part of this TAKING STOCK assessment, several transparency requirements are considered as not applicable for São Tomé and Príncipe's marine fisheries, such as:

<p>—</p>	<p><b>São Tomé and Príncipe-flagged vessels fishing in foreign waters</b></p>	<p>It is reported that São Tomé and Príncipe fishing vessels do fish outside of the country's EEZ, but this is restricted to a small number of semi-industrial fishing vessels. Their fishing activities are considered mostly focused on waters of adjacent West African countries, including Gabon. However, there is no government information that describes these fishing activities and confirms whether there is a fishing agreement signed between São Tomé and Príncipe and other countries. It is assumed for this assessment that no such bi-lateral agreements exist and that such vessels apply directly for licenses with foreign governments.</p> <p>Furthermore, no vessels registered to São Tomé and Príncipe appear on the vessel list of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT).</p> <p>Consequently, information on catches outside of São Tomé and Príncipe's waters is also not applicable.</p>
<p>—</p>	<p><b>Landings in national ports</b></p>	<p>Industrial fishing vessels do not land their catches in São Tomé and Príncipe, due to the lack of port infrastructure and domestic processing facilities.</p>



## TAKING STOCK

Online Transparency of Fisheries  
Management Information



2022

Summary Assessment Report  
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

**Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)**  
Highway Complex Building, Providence  
Mahé, Seychelles

**Email:** [info@fiti.global](mailto:info@fiti.global)

**Internet:** [www.fiti.global](http://www.fiti.global)

**Twitter:** @FisheriesTI

**Facebook:** Fisheries Transparency Initiative