

## Ensuring the sustainability of aquatic production.....

Is it correct to say “aquaculture has a bad reputation!”? Well, some forms of aquaculture have a bad reputation in the eyes of some of the public. The issues of concern to public include; chemicals and veterinary drug use, accumulation of environmental contaminants, escapees, net energy conversion during farming of top carnivores, mangrove clearance and land degradation, competition with other users of the aquatic and coastal environments, etc. Some of these issues are certainly true and worthy of considering, but the quantum to which the issues are highlighted is definitely biased. Certainly it is wrong to say “aquaculture has a bad reputation”, because aquaculture is so diverse and complex. We just can’t put all eggs in one basket and say all are bad! Unfortunately, the truth is that the bias has worked against the truth; in the international environmental arena aquaculture has a tarnished image.

Traditional or extensive aquaculture is still in practice in many countries in the world, producing large quantities of fish feeding low in food chain. These systems and their products support livelihoods of people, provide food, alleviate rural poverty and improve health among less fortunate communities. The “modern-day aquaculture”, which is perceived primarily as producing high value species (mainly carnivorous fish and shrimp) destined for import markets, is a different kettle of fish altogether. These systems and practices use significant amounts of natural resources and also produce considerable volumes of effluents and waste. The sustainability and the environmental acceptability of these systems and practices have been increasingly questioned and scrutinised. However, during the past decade, mainly owing to research and technological improvements, the sustainability and environmental acceptability of these practices have improved significantly.

While “modern-day aquaculture” is trying to improve its’ image and sustainability, and to produce fish acceptable to international markets and consumers, the global population is increasing rapidly, requiring more fish as food. Without much hope for fish from the marine catches, most of this demand has to come from aquaculture and inland fisheries. Even if we manage to increase the production to meet the demand, what guarantee do we have that fish will be easily accessible to all sectors of the global community? Can rural or urban poor communities be able to consume more fish in the future? Will there be a significant increase in fish consumption in Africa? How much do we know about the role of fish as food for poorest and unfortunate segments of the global population? What would be the role of inland capture fisheries and what opportunities would culture-based fisheries have to improve fish consumption among vulnerable populations?

The Fisheries Department is now working towards better understanding the role of inland fisheries in increasing fish production, improving access to fish and better nutrition and health. Some case studies are being conducted and more work is planned. Preliminary results of one of those studies are elaborated in this issue. As we move to a better understanding of the role of aquaculture, culture based fisheries and capture fisheries it will be important to balance environmental concerns with production and food security concerns. Accurate information on aquatic resources and the people that depend on them will be essential elements to ensure sustainability and avoid misperceptions.

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Fishermen on Lake Łuknajno (Poland)

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