

Aquaculture for Sustainable Development

Aquaculture is now known as the emerging new agriculture, the catalyst of the 'blue revolution', the answer to world's future fish supply, the fastest food producing sector, the future of fisheries.

The term 'sustainable' has been used in a variety of ways; its definition abounds in different contexts. Within the framework of the 1987 report - *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland Report, in honour of Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland) - by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, the concept of sustainable development was discussed at the 1992 UN-sponsored Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and a definition of 'sustainable development' emerged as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. From an environmental perspective, sustainable development covers the overall human ecological support systems including the climatic system, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and in general, the human communities and the various systems on which they depend.

How then can we translate the above definition of sustainable development to aquaculture?

The 38th issue of FAN is a special edition dedicated to the theme "Role of Aquaculture in Sustainable Development", which will be discussed and debated at the High Level Special Event that will take place on November 2007 during the 37th FAO Conference in Rome, Italy. The President of Sri Lanka, the Honourable Mahinda Rajapaksa is expected to grace the event and deliver a Keynote Speech. This is the first time that a High Level Special Event is taking place in FAO dedicated to aquaculture. This is, in itself, a clear recognition of the growing importance of aquaculture and the increasing expectation of its potential 'contribution to global food security, nutritional well-being, poverty reduction and economic development by producing - with minimum impact on the environment and maximum benefit to society - 85 million tonnes of aquatic food by 2030, an increase of 37 million tonnes over the 2005 level'. These will perhaps reinforce the above terminologies used to express the current state of aquaculture.

As some Heads of State and Ministers are planning to discuss aquaculture as a matter of importance and urgency, the issue of political will and governance should not be forgotten when addressing sustainability. Collaboration, cooperation and consensus are critical in making decisions concerning sector sustainability. Aquaculture could no longer be considered as totally a national concern in our global

village. The resources required for aquaculture production and the products of aquaculture both extend beyond national boundaries, thus, regular and systematic regional dialogues are becoming essential to ensure sustainability. 'Aquaculture networking' can be a good conduit for such regional cooperation.

The term *network* in general terms refers to any interconnected group or system. Different types of network exist, e.g. human, media, technology, science, mathematics, engineering and many others. In this issue, the readers will be treated with a glimpse of what it takes for an aquaculture network to work (or not to work!), how it is being done and how it may be done in different regions. Networking also means giving something to get something and with a little structure, it can go a long way. An essential issue is the price one has to pay. There are many important experiences that can be learned from successes in Asia, lessons which can be extended to create further success elsewhere. The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department is seriously pursuing the establishment of aquaculture networks in different regions of the world.

FAN 38 brings to you the current state of aquaculture, its contribution to sustainable development, future challenges and prospects. Emerging issues, challenges and opportunities facing the different aquaculture producing regions and current views on trade and safety, policy and planning, aquaculture statistics and information databases are also presented. We also portray a range of thematic activities/events concerned with sustainable aquaculture development including a brief description of projects and publications.

A major challenge will be how our current understanding of 'sustainability' can be used to evaluate policy choices and business decisions which both require predicting their needs and liabilities. We hope that this issue will further raise the bar of aquaculture, the many challenges it faces as well as opportunities it presents to recognize the vital need for active participation of relevant sectors of society in consultation and decisions for sustainable development.

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