EDITORIAL

"Ensuring that every human being has an adequate and stable supply of food is more than a moral imperative or an investment with potentially huge economic returns: it is the realization of a basic human right" - Jacques Diouf, World Food Day 2007.

Aquaculture and 'the Right to Food': for Mutual Supportiveness

The right to food is enshrined in international law. It is the right of every child, woman and man to have continuous access to the resources needed to produce, earn or purchase enough food not to prevent hunger alone, but to enjoy an active and healthy life. Its broader implication for world and national leaders is the need for an economic, political and social environment that will allow people to achieve food security through their own means.

Aquaculture, now producing more of the aquatic food the world needs, has an important role in the realisation of the right to food. It is recognized as the fastest food producing sector - contributing nearly half (47 %) of the world's food fish consumption in 2007 - and expanding in recent years to meet the growing demand for fish. This contribution is expected to reach 50 percent by 2010.

The nutritional and health benefits from fish consumption has long been recognized: fish has superior nutritional profiles, containing high quality animal protein and a source of polyunsaturated fatty acids (omega-3), vitamins (A, B, D, and E) and minerals (iron, phosphorus, calcium, iodine and selenium). One billion people within 58 developing and low-income food deficit countries depend on food fish as primary source of animal protein. Fish, the staple animal protein source of traditional fisherfolk, is the single food that could address several different malnutrition disorders. Beyond providing food, aquaculture strengthens people's capacity to exercise their right to food through employment, community development, generating income and accumulating other assets, and by compensating for declines in food sources because of the over-exploitation of natural resources.

The rapid expansion of the sector and the absence of appropriate legislative arrangements are hindering its sustainable development. Several issues in the field of aquaculture that can affect peoples' livelihoods and thus, possibly, the people's right to food. Failing to ensure conservation and sustainability of aquatic resources means that the ability of future generations to access this vital food resource will be seriously jeopardized. If not planned well and executed responsibly, diversification, intensification and expansion of the aquaculture sector could result in social concerns, i.e. displacing traditional coastal fishers and damaging complex ecosystems that supported livelihoods of variety of users. This impairs the ability of such communities for access to food thus depriving their right to food and to live with dignity. While aquaculture can cause negative environmental impacts, significant improvements have been made in the environmental sector to reduce risks and impacts of aquaculture. However, there still exist many concerns and uncertainties (e.g. habitat degradation, food safety issues from the use of veterinary drugs, escapees and exotic species introduction, aquatic animal pathogens and pests, genetic impacts on wild populations, etc.) which, if not managed well, will decrease natural productivity and increase economic losses.

Aquaculture contributes increasing quantities to global aquatic food supplies, supplementing the declining contribution from capture fisheries. Sustainability -- food fish being accessible for both present and future generations -- and ensuring that its benefits accrue to society including and particularly rural communities, indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers -- are major challenges that the aquaculture sector must deal with if it has fulfill its role of supplying the food fish that the world needs. A human rights-based and ecosystem approach to aquaculture can ensure that aquaculture development is sustained. Human rights put emphasis on human dignity, equality, non-discrimination and empowerment, transparency and participation in decision-making processes and demands accountability from everyone but especially those in positions of authority. An ecosystem approach to aquaculture integrates the activity within the wider ecosystem in such a way that it promotes sustainable development, equity, resilience of interlinked social and ecological systems.

Right to food principles have several implications: (i) the necessity of clarifying roles, responsibilities and powers of institutions involved in aquaculture development and management including enforcement; (ii) the need to establish mechanisms that enable participation

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of stakeholders in the decision-making processes at all levels; (iii) the importance of facilitating access of fish farmers to water bodies and land for aquaculture production and providing support for traditional , community-based and small-scale aquaculture; and (iv) maintaining the integrity of the mechanisms that allow individuals to hold government accountable for what has been done or not done, and to obtain redress when their rights are violated. Human rights principles also require governments to monitor food security, environmental and social impacts of aquaculture operations and take adequate measures to enable those who are threatened or negatively impacted to have access to reliable and alternative sources of support.

Because rights give people a stake and make them active and responsible members of society, applying a human rights-based approach to aquaculture serves both national economic development goals and individuals' aspiration to self-sufficiency.

Ensuring an enabling environment and taking steps to achieve full realisation of the right to food for all is not a matter of policy discretion of governments but their legal obligation.

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UPCOMING EVENTS (from September 2008)

September 2008
►FAO/NACA Inception Planning Workshop of Regional TCP/RAS/3203 Reducing the dependence on the utilization of trash fish/low value fish as feed for aquaculture of marine finfish in the Asian region, 8-10 September, Krabi, Thailand. Mohammad.Hasan@fao.org/Cecile.Brugere@fao.org/Miao.Weimin@fao.org
►FAO Workshop on Environment Impact Assessment and Monitoring in Aquaculture, 15-17 September 2008, Rome, Italy. Uwe.Barg@fao.org/ Doris.Soto@fao.org/Jose.AguilarManjarrez@fao.org

October 2008
►First Meeting of the FAO CWP Aquaculture Working Group, 3-4 October 2008, Puerto Varas, Chile. Sachiko.Tsuji@fao.org
►Fourth Session of the FAO COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 6-10 October 2008, Puerto Varas, Chile.
Rohana.Subasinghe@fao.org/Jiansan.Jia@fao.org
►5th NACEE Directors Meeting, 14-17 October 2008, Lvov, Ukraine. Uwe.Barg@fao.org/Jiansan.Jia@fao.org/Thomas.MothPoulsen@fao.org
►GFCM Committee on Aquaculture Working Group on Siting and Carrying Capacity, 21-23 October 2008, Crete, Greece. Fabio.Massa@fao.org

November 2008
►FAO/Chinese Ministry of Agriculture/FISHINFONETWORK Global Technical and Trade Conference on Shrimp, 6-9 november 2008, Guangzhou, China.
infish@po.jaring.my/Audun.Lem@fao.org
►FAO/FSM National Workshop on Risk Assessment in Aquaculture Development, 10-12 November 2008, Ponhpei, Federated States of Micronesia. Masanami.Izumi@fao.org/Melba.Reantaso@fao.org
►FAO Expert Workshop on Methodologies and Indicators for the Appraisal and Evaluation of the Contribution of Small-scale Aquaculture to Sustainable Aquaculture and Rural Livelihood Development, 24-28 November 2008, Nha Trang, Viet Nam. Melba.Reantaso@fao.org/ Susana.Siar@fao.org/Nathanael.Hishamunda@fao.org
►GFCM Committee on Aquaculture Workshop on Indicators for Sustainable Development of Aquaculture and Guidelines for their Use in the Mediterranean 27-28 November 2008, Montpellier, France. Fabio.Massa@fao.org
►FAO Workshop on Development of Guidelines on Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture, 24-26 November 2008, Italy. Doris.Soto@fao.org/Jose.AguilarManjarrez@fao.org/ Nathanael.Hishamunda@fao.org
►RECOFI-WGA Technical Workshop on Cage Aquaculture, November 2008, Muscat, Oman. Alessandro.Lovatelli@fao.org

December 2008
►CIFAA Committee for Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa 15th Session, 9-11 December 2008, Lusaka, Zambia. John.Moehl@fao.org
►GFCM Committee on Aquaculture Information System for the Promotion of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean (SIPAM) Annual Meeting, 15-16 December 2008, Tirana, Albania. Fabio.Massa@fao.org
►GFCM Committee on Aquaculture 6th Session, 17-19 December 2008, Tirana, Albania. Fabio.Massa@fao.org

May 2009
►FAO/RECOFI Fifth Session, May 2009, United Arab Emirates. Piero.Mannini@fao.org/Alessandro.Lovatelli@fao.org