

The Limbé Workshop on Small-scale Aquaculture and the Limbé Declaration

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Small-scale systems can be very extensively managed and in the forest zone have native vegetation encroaching closely on the levees

In response to an increasing interest in sustainable aquaculture among governments and international donors, FAO, with the collaboration of the World Fish Center, organized a regional workshop on the subject of small-scale aquaculture. The workshop was held in Limbé, Cameroun, in March 2004. The principal objective of the workshop was to develop a consensus on the current status and way forward for small-scale aquaculture in Africa. With this aim, the participants reviewed how aquaculture is targeted in sub-Saharan Africa as a first step in the identification of appropriate extension approaches and production strategies that would suit the various technology user-groups.

The workshop assembled representatives of senior fisheries management agencies from nine countries in the region to discuss progress, opportunities and key constraints to aquaculture development. Through thematic presentations, working group sessions and plenary discussions, broad consensus was achieved on the way forward for African aquaculture. In an effort to realize the goals of aquaculture, an attempt was made to develop a set of practical guidelines that can be used

by national governments to insure that the major constraints are being addressed and that the major opportunities for aquaculture are capitalized upon to increase the contribution of aquaculture to food security and economic growth. The participants elaborated the **Limbé Declaration** (see Box 1) to encapsulate this pioneering approach to aquaculture development in the African region.

This Declaration was influenced by the key lessons learnt identified by the workshop, which include:

- Fish culture can be introduced and established in new sites without any external assistance beyond the provision of technical information (e.g. no credit, gifts, incentive, subsidies, etc.);
- Aquaculture development projects are generally of too short a duration (1 or 2 years); and,
- Most recent aquaculture development projects have usefully and successfully taken socio-economic aspects into consideration in project design and implementation.

The workshop concluded that farmers with a commercial orientation were the “motors” of aquaculture development. For these producers to function in this essential way, they must have a critical mass – this is a density dependent factor requiring an economically viable “weight” (e.g. surface area, tonnage, etc.) be present in an economically viable zone. Viable commercial producers will pull-down benefits to non-commercial framers who will inevitably share the same economic zone.

While many early aquaculture development theorists felt the successful establishment of aquaculture enterprises was best be reflected by a continuum along which a given framer would move, aquaculture development is now not seen as a series of vertical leaps as farmers reach higher and higher levels of production. It is rather viewed as a set of discrete enterprises where the farmers’ motives for adoption remain basically the same and increases are only those that can be easily obtained within the specific range of production technologies near the level where the farmer entered. In this context, it is understood that the delineations between classifications of producers require knowing enough about farmers’ motives; this in turn needs a new set of priorities and methodologies for those whose objective is to aid these farmers in gaining efficiency. For these reasons, the revised title to the workshop became: ***Small-scale Aquaculture in sub-Saharan Africa: revisiting the aquaculture target group paradigm***. For a more focused and efficient developmental approach, farmers should no longer be viewed chiefly from a perspective of size, scale or even intensity. The critical aspect is the producer’s motivation and ability to invest in aquaculture as a viable economic enterprise, regardless of its scale.

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Small-scale aquaculture systems can be very extensive, such as small ponds used in seed production enterprises (Madagascar)



Small-scale systems can be integrated with a variety of other plan and animal crops, here with a chicken coop built over the fishpond (Cameroon)

Box 1: Limbé Declaration

Aquaculture development in sub-Saharan Africa is at a crossroads. Burgeoning population growth and declining natural sources of fish make it imperative that aquaculture make as substantial contribution to continental fish supply as possible. The region is the only one in the world where per capita fish consumption is declining and is projected to decline further. Reasons for this situation include: civil conflict, weak management structures, low levels of investment in rural economies and lack of economic growth. At the same time, however, new opportunities exist that brighten the prospects for aquaculture development.

In many countries, policies of privatisation and decentralization provide incentives for increased investments in the sector from private and public sources as domestic markets, especially in urban areas, become more accessible and trade expands. At the global level, the ever-growing demand for fish has created opportunities for export-oriented aquaculture production. The challenge today is to make use of these opportunities for the sustainable development of aquaculture in the region. There is a need for a type of development that contributes to national food security and poverty reduction objectives and pays attention to the scope for expansion that the nature resource base allows.

Sub-Saharan Africa must, therefore, make a choice, either for "business as usual" and things continue as they are, and people live with the dire consequences, or it is "time to make hard choices", institute relevant policies and strategies, bring aquaculture into the formal cash economy and stem the tide that is undermining aquaculture's future. To this effect, many governments, cooperating partners as well as bilateral and multilateral development agencies are developing a new strategy for aquaculture development in sub-Saharan Africa.

The meeting recognized a number of constraints to the development of aquaculture, which include seed and feed production, as well as inefficient extension and outreach. The delegates to the workshop further acknowledge that:

- Support to a knowledge development and delivery structure to provide essential assistance for aquaculture from government and those providing external aid requires convincing demonstrations of impact on national development priorities such as poverty reduction, food security, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and sustainable environmental management;
- Institutional stability and durability will be achieved through structures that rely first and foremost on private sector investments as well as on output-orientated and accountable use of public revenue which aims at enhancing sustainable development of aquaculture; and
- Public/private partnerships between investors and knowledge delivery structures can facilitate sectoral growth by making available to farmers the highest quality technological, managerial and marketing information while public/civil society connections in such structures can help ensure the optimisation of public goods from the perspective of producers at all levels.

While appreciating the need to address the three major constraints identified (seed, feed, extension), the meeting called upon the governments and cooperating partners as well as research agencies to focus on the likely development impact of investment in these areas. In order to ensure optimum impact of the three development strategies, there is a need to examine other areas, such as market development, access to capital and other policy issues that might be deemed relevant and equally important.

Furthermore, participants propose that SSA governments should seek to develop public/private partnerships within the growing number of aquaculture enterprises, by creating cost-effective financial and institutional arrangements that can complement government and donor resources to deliver a limited number of critical research, advisory and technological services to high potential farmers.

Participants further pronounced that the approach to national aquaculture development, based upon the Cameroonian Strategic Framework for Aquaculture development addresses the major constraints to expansion of the sub-sector in the region, facilitates the necessary public/private and public/civil society linkages as well as proposes mechanisms to maximize returns to the investment of both public and private sector resources.

While endorsing this approach as an appropriate tool to foster aquaculture development, participants noted that such strategic approaches can only achieve their expected goals when efforts make use of existing national strategies, master plans and investment plans for aquaculture development in order to harmonize, building synergies and eliminating redundancies. These efforts involve national partners and stakeholders, but also aquaculture producers, support services, local authorities and investors from the public and civil society sectors, cooperating partners (donors), international and multilateral organizations.

The meeting envisages that aquaculture in SSA will grow into an important pillar of development in many areas in the region. It will be able to provide high quality food for rural and urban consumers, generate employment and general commercial activities in otherwise impoverished local economies, and contribute to national wealth through increased revenue from markets and trade. In order to achieve this vision, the countries in the region need to work together to increase their knowledge base, exchange best practice experiences and speak with one voice in the global marketplace.