

Aquatic Biodiversity

From research evidence to national policy

Towards a National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme for Lao PDR

Inland aquatic resources are extremely important for the population of LAO PDR. Particularly for those people living in rural rice production areas, fish and other aquatic animals such as frogs, shrimps, snails and snakes are an easy accessible and inexpensive source of food.

In order to make this aquatic biodiversity and its utilization visible, the FAO Inland Water Resources and Aquaculture Service initiated a **case study** in 2002, in which more than 50 aquatic organisms were identified that are being utilized every day and traditional catching and collection methods documented.

Following similar activities in other SE Asian countries, FAO in collaboration with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) organized a **Regional Workshop on the Traditional use and availability of aquatic biodiversity in rice-based ecosystems** in Xishuangbanna, P.R. China, in October 2002. Decision makers and researchers from the various SE Asian countries had the opportunity to compare their situation and realized that they all face a decrease in their natural aquatic resource base.

A study organized by FAORAP with collaboration of IUCN in December 2002 provided a participatory assessment of the **role and nutritional value of aquatic resources in the livelihoods of rural people** in Attapeu Province, Lao PDR.

To review and discuss the results of various projects on the contribution of aquatic resources and fish production to rural poor people's livelihood, the Living Aquatic Resources Research Center (LARReC) of Lao PDR's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry organized in collaboration with FAO a **Workshop on Aquatic Biodiversity in December 2003** in Vientiane. This conference prepared the way for the formulation of national priority activities to conserve the existing aquatic biodiversity and to enhance its sustainable use within the **National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme**.

FAO is joining the programme on Agricultural Biodiversity with the Lao PDR Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI). The main objective is to develop a long-term national Agricultural Biodiversity strategy, which will support, implement and co-ordinate various activities addressing the sustainable use of the existing biodiversity in Lao PDR. FAO and NAFRI have taken the technical lead on the formulation of the Agricultural Biodiversity Programme, including priority activities on aquatic biodiversity.

The aquatic components of the National Agricultural Programme include:

- *Improved understanding of the status of aquatic resources for food security and sustainable livelihoods*
- *Strengthened management capacity at the national, provincial and regional levels to support sustainable aquatic resource development for food security and sustainable livelihood*
- *Strengthened institutional and human capacity at the community level to promote the sustainable use of aquatic resources for food security and sustainable livelihoods*
- *Increased understanding of importance of aquatic resources among policymakers, rural inhabitants, and other stakeholders*

Beyond the legislation process, FAO continues to assist its member country Lao PDR in the implementation of the formulated policy and provides a platform for knowledge sharing such as at the upcoming FAO Regional Technical Expert Meeting on *Aquatic biodiversity, its nutritional composition, and human consumption in rice-based systems* to be held in FAO/RAP Bangkok from 8-10 December 2004. This will be an occasion also for other countries to learn from Lao's experience and assess good practices and policies for transfer into their own national activities.