

Aquaculture and Africa's development

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Aquaculture has an important role to play in global efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition through supplying fish and other aquatic products rich in protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals. Aquaculture can also make significant contributions to development by improving incomes, providing employment opportunities and increasing returns on resource use. With appropriate management, the sector appears ready to meet the demand gap for aquatic food (fish) for the coming decades, a consequence to the increasing global population and stagnant capture fishery production. The main challenge for policy makers and development agents is to create an "enabling environment" to support the expansion needed to meet this potential. This enabling environment is multi-faceted and requires significant political will, policy support and investment. If we fall short in this endeavour, we may not be able to provide the supply of aquatic food required to even maintain current levels of consumption.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, per capita consumption has already dropped and we can little afford to see this trend continue or worsen. Thus, for the coming years and decades, Africa should be a high priority region for aquaculture development. We should join hands with all development agents and institutions to ensure that aquaculture and fish production in Africa becomes part of the overall development process for the continent. There are some new developments, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which, through its Fish for All Summit in 2005, raised awareness regarding the potential of aquaculture. We should capitalise on these. Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have limited resources to deliver quality public goods and services without donor support and an under-developed private sector which could operate in its stead. There is thus a need for renewed and long-term assistance to Africa's aquaculture sector. This approach should favour private investment; it is imperative that we all learn from mistakes of the past.

During a recent review by FAO, two essential overarching conditions identified for making this happen were political stability and good governance. However, we also believe that there should be more emphasis put on private sector investment in aquaculture. Private sector efficiency will be facilitated by the establishment of an enabling public sector environment combined with a strategy to undertake development within the limits of available resources. Positive impacts of growing aquaculture development will be further complemented by aggressive implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), development of national aquaculture strategies and good legislation. Providing incentives and risk reduction measures for Foreign Direct Investment are also necessary and can have trickle-down effects to boost development of small- and medium-scale commercial aquaculture.

The availability of quality inputs such as seed and feed in sufficient quantities, good quality information and available capital as well as access to land and water resources will contribute to reducing risks and enhancing sustainability. During the process of increasing the benefits of aquaculture to Africa, including direct and indirect advantages to the most needy, it will be imperative that the good image of aquaculture be maintained. Adoption of appropriate environmental management practices for protection and sustainable use of aquatic resources will be vital in this regard. It is also important that we maintain high standards for food safety. Finally, development of skills and the efficient use of communication and knowledge transfer through modern information technology will not only improve overall global knowledge but also link the continents.

As the only global inter-governmental forum with an aquaculture mandate, the Sub-Committee will undoubtedly play a strong advocacy role for raising and discussing timely global issues in the coming years. It will endeavour to review, discuss, harmonize and agree on regional and/or global standards and guidelines required for sustainable aquaculture development. The Sub-Committee, while playing the role of global watchdog for aquaculture, will also help in unlocking the potential for aquaculture development in Africa, particularly, by creating an effective South-South and North-South dialogue. It is important that Africa can both learn from its own past as well as from the successes and failures in aquaculture development worldwide.

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