

# Aquaculture production and opportunities for development in Central Asia

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The five transition economies in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) can be considered as weak performers in terms of aquaculture production, particularly when comparing their recent production data with the rest of the world. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, when these states became independent, aquaculture production declined dramatically. Official statistical figures for total fisheries production show that fish production significantly fell between 1989 and 2005. Over the same period, inland catches and aquaculture production decreased by 70-80 percent in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, while Tajik production dropped to 94 percent and the Kyrgyz production is now only about 2 percent of what it was in the 1980s.

Causes for the collapse in capture fisheries and aquaculture production are similar to those found in other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. These include: reduction in investment in research and production facilities to insignificant levels, decreased subsidies and efforts made to maintain fleets and hatcheries in good conditions, absent or bad management of water bodies, return of fishery and aquaculture specialists to their home countries outside the region, closure of supporting industries (e.g. feed production, vessel repair), lack of investment in modern processing and marketing facilities and equipment, lack of academic and vocational education in fisheries and aquaculture, privatization of the industry (at a too early stage, combined with widespread corruption in the hand-over process) and conflicts between government institutions about their duties, rights and responsibilities with regards to the inland aquatic resources.

It should be noted, however, that most of the catches go unrecorded and that poaching is widespread in inland waters. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a widespread problem, also affecting the aquaculture sector. Appropriate policy, legal and institutional frameworks are generally lacking in the five Central Asian countries, or they are outdated or not being enforced or implemented.

Opportunities for the sector lay in the fact that consumer demand for fisheries and aquaculture products is increasing with increasing incomes. Generally, consumption of fish in the 1980s was tenfold of what it is today; demand is large and especially, older people have a tradition of eating fish. Profit margins of producers on species like trout and grass carp are large at present as are possibilities to increase profitability through introduction of modern technologies, augmenting species diversity and improving product quality and safety. Current governments in the sub-region are starting to understand the value of fish as a healthy product and important component in their people's diet. Besides, they see opportunities for diversifying rural employment through aquaculture promotion. Related sectors, e.g. irrigation, are turning to the fishery

sector for increasing the productivity of the water resources under their management; interest in re-stocking is growing.

It is clear that the sub-region can learn a lot from the experiences from elsewhere in Asia and other parts of the world. The aquaculture sector can be considered as starting again from scratch, a beginning which is going with ups and downs and will require the combined efforts of the private sector, governments and donor agencies.

**GCP/GLO/162/EC: Development of inland fisheries and aquaculture in the Kyrgyz Republic**, a short-term project under the EC/FAO Facility for consultancy services to reduce rural food insecurity (FishDev–Kyrgyzstan) began in June 2007. The project aims at producing a review study of the current status of inland fisheries and aquaculture in the Kyrgyz Republic, a National Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Development and Management Strategy and implementation programme for the strategy and to organize a fish marketing and consumption promoting campaign to increase fish consumption in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, and in rural areas. The project of US\$ 124 000 has recently carried out two national level workshops and is expected to have produced all foreseen outputs before the end of 2007. [Responsible Officers: R van Anrooy (FAOSEC) and J Jorgensen (FIMF)].