



Information: A Must for Responsible Aquaculture

Aquaculture is expanding and its contribution to global food production is increasing at a significantly higher rate compared to other food producing sectors. It is poised to produce an additional 37.5 million tonnes by the year 2030, at least to maintain the current level of global fish consumption. The basis of all actions in support of creating an enabling environment for this great expectation is good information. Information serves many purposes. Information is knowledge, could be a message, a pattern, or a record, it may serve as an influence that could lead to transformation and betterment. Whatever the purpose may be, it has to be generated, collected, managed and analyzed appropriately, conveyed and disseminated accurately in a timely manner and used objectively and responsibly.

Trade in fish and aquaculture products has extended beyond national borders and reached the global market. As the governments' mandate in ensuring responsible production and trade is now carefully being scrutinized, governments are thus getting more involved in monitoring the effects of aquaculture to the environment and food safety and quality, as well as in assessing the impact of policies, or lack of it, and other sectoral developments. As a direct result of this, there is a significant improvement and increase in policies, agreements, laws, rules, regulations, etc. and implementation and monitoring requirements, which are, thus, posing important information challenges.

Advancement in communication technologies are causing an information explosion. These technologies and systems provide powerful tools for aquaculture data and information management. The use of Internet has given the most remote locations access to a wealth of information from all over the world. The field of remote sensing continues to develop. With increased computing capabilities at a fraction of the cost experienced only a few years ago, remote sensing technology can be employed to gather data on resources, previously difficult to access, and to monitor the environment. Geographic information systems (GIS) are now routinely used to compile and process spatial information. We also witnessed how this massive explosion in information has empowered many and transformed them from passive to active participants in sectoral development; some good, some not so good.

In developing countries, where food production is the main source of employment and livelihood by a majority of the population, the attention of development planners has also evolved such that information and data needs refer not

only to issues relating to food production and contribution to the national economy, but also on issues relating to the welfare of the population dependent on this sector and food security of the population as a whole. Thus, there is now a general renewed interest in household surveys that integrate key food production and welfare information and data so that the impact of policies on the welfare of the populations (dependent on food production) can be examined.

The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department is responding conscientiously to global aquaculture information needs. The departmental Web site (<http://www.fao.org/fi/>) has been improved providing instant on-line access to a number of web-based information systems (FAO STAT, NASO, NALO, CASIP, GISFISH, DIAS, AAPQIS, etc.) and many other relevant publications and information sources. With the mandate from the last session of the Committee on Fisheries, the Department is now attempting to develop a comprehensive strategy for improving information on aquaculture with the view to assist member countries in building their capacity to meet the growing demand for accurate information and data.

In today's world of excess, information is so abundant and easy to get and there are setbacks. For average individuals, information accumulates at a rate far faster than they can possibly be consumed. There are obstacles in managing such huge amount of information. In spite of this, having information is probably better than not having it. The most important is that it is here to serve us and we should be in control, rather than the other way around. We hope to address these and other challenges as they come.

FAN 37 presents four articles highlighting different aspects of information on inland fisheries and aquaculture (information sharing via aquatic commons, improving information on inland fisheries, global gateway to GIS/remote sensing/mapping and aquatic animal biosecurity information requirements).

FAN recognizes the need for accurate information in a timely manner. In keeping with this thrust, beginning 2008, FAN will have three issues, instead of two at present. We look forward to inform and enrich you with best information possible.

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and
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Upper photos

Left: Buna River located near the village of Blagaj, southeast of Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is one of the strongest and biggest water source in Europe with 43 000 l/sec of water flow (M Reantaso, FAO)

Right: Partial harvesting of fish from TCP/HAI/2903 project on poultry production and fish farming in Haiti (V Crespi, FAO)

Lower photos

Left: Myanmar, Ayerwaddy River - Inland fisheries in Myanmar are operated on a concession basis employing local people in the harvesting and processing of the fish (C Pongsr, Thailand)

Right: Small-scale marine cage culture farming in Hainan Island, China PR, collectively producing 100 000 tonnes of almost exclusively low value/trash fish fed high value marine finfish (S de Silva, NACA)

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