



Participants to the workshop

Aquaculture Project in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Takes Off

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The government of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have entered into a new Unilateral Trust Fund Agreement to continue the development and improvement of the agriculture sector in the Kingdom. This new Technical Cooperation Agreement (TCA) will run for a five-year period from 2007 until 2012 and covers a broad range of projects to be implemented across the whole country. It must be noted that this new TCA is already in the 6th phase; the Government of KSA and FAO having gone through five phases of TCAs during the last 25 years. The total budget for the new TCA amounts approximately to US\$57.5 million and this covers 13 different projects ranging from camel breeding, preservation of Arabian horses, production of tropical and subtropical fruits, establishment of

a date palm research center, olive production and processing, irrigation and waste water management, animal quarantine and integrated plant health management, among others. The fisheries and aquaculture component of the present TCA is the "Support to the Fish Farming Center in Jeddah with Project Symbol UTFN/SAU/017/SAU".

Just like in the previous TCAs between FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the long-term objective of the present project is to improve the capability of the Fish Farming Center (FFC) as an Aquaculture Research Institution to generate science-based sustainable aquaculture technologies appropriate for the Kingdom and the neighboring Arab countries. FFC is the only Aquaculture Research Center in the Kingdom established in 1982 by the MOA with assistance from FAO. Its mandate is to help

develop the aquaculture industry in the country. The establishment of the FFC then was the response of the Government to help aquaculture farmers, particularly in developing aquaculture technologies for the rapidly expanding aquaculture sector at the national level. In line with this, the specific objectives of the present project are to: (1) improve the technical capability of the research staff to undertake scientific research, (2) upgrade the physical (fish holding systems, hatchery, nursery, pond systems) and laboratory facilities, (3) develop and improve the technologies for marine fish broodstock management, hatchery, nursery and grow-out culture systems, (4) produce superior quality of white shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*) breeders (the only shrimp species cultured in the Kingdom), (5) develop the capability for culture system in off-shore fish cages, and (7) improve the information dissemination system.



A view of the Fish Farming Centre in Jeddah, KSA

Some of the workshop outputs and recommendations are presented below. The participants recognized the: (1) importance of FFC to do scientific research on candidate aquaculture species; (2) importance of close collaboration between FFC and the universities to prevent possible duplication of work and to promote exchange of ideas and information, and sharing of resources; (3) need for more dialogue between FFC and the private sector so that the problems of the industry will be addressed; (4) lack of reference laboratory for molecular disease diagnosis in the Kingdom; (5) FFC library must be open to the private sector; (6) need to develop a National Aquaculture Development Strategy to include guidelines on zoning and licensing especially on the issue of cage culture development in the Red Sea; (7) need to establish an aquaculture society to forge closer ties between all players in the aquaculture industry of the country; (8) increasing cost of farm production brought about by increasing feed cost; and (9) importance of encouraging visits of prominent overseas scientists to FFC. A big challenge lies ahead for the Center and its staff especially so that the private sector demands more from them.

The Project had its Inception Workshop on 15 January 2008 at the Movenpick Resort, Al Nawras, Jeddah. The one-day workshop brought together all the stakeholders and partners in the development of the aquaculture industry in the country. These include people from MOA, other related government agencies (e.g. Presidency of Meteorology and Environment), academe (especially universities with degree and research programs in fisheries, aquaculture, marine science, biology), research funding institutions in the country, and private sector. From the FAO Headquarters in Rome, Mr Alessandro Lovatelli, the Lead Technical Officer for the project, attended the workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to inform all stakeholders and partners on the development of the aquaculture industry in the country and the various activities that the FFC will undertake in relation to the present project and to seek their cooperation and collaboration on these activities.



From left to right: Mr Anwar Essa Al-Sunaiher (Acting Director, Aquaculture Development, Ministry of Agriculture, KSA), Mr Alessandro Lovatelli (FAO), Mr Hassan M. Ali Dinar (FAO Riyadh) and Mr Thamr I.M. Eissa (Director, Fish Farming Centre)