

Presentation

by Mr. Ichiro Nomura, ADG of FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department
at Special Event on The Role of Aquaculture in Sustainable Development
19 Nov. 2007, FAO, Rome

Good afternoon, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Ichiro Nomura; I am the Assistant-Director General of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department.

I would like to briefly present to you a few slides on the current status, issues and future perspectives of global aquaculture in hope that it will help to set the scene for the discussions during this afternoon's session.

The corresponding conference paper C 2007/INF/16, is available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish, and it gives you more detailed information, and I apologize if the text in the screen here will appear only in English.

Aquaculture is currently the world's fastest growing food producing sector. It is highly diverse -- consisting of 442 cultured species in different culture systems, practices and environments.

Most aquaculture is produced in the developing countries. China produces over two-thirds of the global total. Taken as a whole, the Asia-Pacific region contributes 90% of total aquaculture production. As you can see on the slide, Western Europe produces 4.2% while Latin America and the Caribbean account for 2.9%.

Today, aquaculture provides nearly half of the world's food fish. What's more, aquaculture is perceived as having the greatest potential to meet the growing demand for aquatic food.

In 2005, the total production of aquatic animals amounted to 48.1 million tonnes with a farm-gate value of about 70 billion U.S. dollars.

Considering the projected population growth over the next decades, estimates show that an additional 37 million tonnes of aquatic food will be needed by 2030 just to maintain current consumption levels.

Aquaculture plays a vital role in global efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition. It supplies fish and other aquatic foods which are rich in protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals.

Aquaculture also significantly contributes to development: it improves incomes, provides employment and increases the returns on resource use. According to FAO's study, in 2004, aquaculture directly employed over 12 million people in Asia.

Given existing resources and technological advances, aquaculture further expand and in a more sustainable way. But this is only possible if the overall benefits of aquaculture are felt across a wide social scale. The main challenge facing policy-makers and development agencies is to create an "enabling environment" for the aquaculture sector. This way aquaculture can continue to grow while meeting peoples' needs and preserving the natural environment.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The environmental impacts of aquaculture development have received a lot of attention in the past two decades.

After years of public pressure, the aquaculture sector has considerably reduced its negative environmental impacts. Governments increasingly recognize that aquaculture, when well-planned and well-managed, can bring about broad benefits to society without adding to environmental degradation.

Moreover, some forms of aquaculture, such as algae and molluscs, actually make a positive contribution to the environment by reducing the negative impacts of other industries and activities.

In 2005, about 40 percent of world food fish production was traded in international markets for a total value of US\$ 78.4 billion. New markets are emerging worldwide and international and regional trade is expanding. In order to gain wider access to export markets, aquaculture farmers must improve the quality and safety of their products.

However, as markets impose stricter requirements, small-scale farmers face difficulties in producing for export. It is important and urgent to empower small-scale farmers to become competitive in global trade. Perhaps this is a significant corporate social responsibility.

A number of factors are forcing the aquaculture sector to intensify: declining resource availability, tighter regulatory environment, global economics and increasing demand for fish and fishery products. Of these, the main driving force appears to be a shrinking availability of suitable locations for developing aquaculture. As well, there are growing constraints due to competition for water and increased regulation on waste and abstraction. But these constraints have created other opportunities. For example, there is a growing trend towards sea-farming where many countries are experimenting with off-shore and open-ocean aquaculture.

Sustainable development of aquaculture requires a government's commitment to provide appropriate support to the sector. Commitment is seen in the form of clear policies, plans and strategies combined with adequate funding for their implementation. While a government's commitment is necessary for responsible aquaculture development, it is not sufficient to ensure sustainability. The aquaculture sector needs to operate under sound macro-economic, institutional and legal frameworks, with solid private sector investments.

In recent years, the rapid growth of the aquaculture sector has also seen a growing call for reliable and timely information on the status and trends of aquaculture. There have been many attempts to improve the information flow on aquaculture, globally.

The success of NACA, the Network of Aquaculture Centres for Asia-Pacific, has resulted in a strong demand for establishing more of such networks in other parts of the world. Distinguished delegates,

One notable exception to the rapid development of global aquaculture is its lagging development in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa holds the full resource potential for aquaculture growth. We believe its overall contribution could be improved considerably, making Africa a high priority region for aquaculture development.

Development agencies and institutions should join hands in ensuring that aquaculture and fish production in sub-Saharan Africa becomes part of the continent's overall development course. FAO's Special Programme for Aquaculture Development in Africa (SPADA) attempts to provide this much needed platform for cooperation.

As I mentioned earlier, an additional 37 million tonnes of aquatic food will be required by 2030 to maintain current consumption levels. We feel that the aquaculture sector has the full potential to meet this need. But the question remains whether the sector can grow fast and sustainably enough to meet the demand while preserving the natural resource base it needs to thrive.

Unwavering government will and support will be the key to meeting this demand. FAO is committed to assist our Member Governments and the civil society in providing necessary technical assistance to create the required "enabling environment".

Thank you!