

Aquaculture in The Philippines

WE ARE ALWAYS THE LOSERS

Aquaculture - also known as the “blue revolution” - involves a radical change in mentality and attitude. It means in fact a transformation from the stage of capture to a progressive stage of breeding and control of the different phases in the cycle of reproduction of living organisms in an aquatic environment. This is without doubt a historical development.

Consequently, the “blue revolution”, on an intensive large-scale basis, brings with it serious ecological and social consequences.

We have asked a fisherman, Max-Jose Mendoza, president of the fishworkers organisation Bigkis Lakas from The Philippines and at Virgilio Cristobal, coordinator at the Asian Social Institute of Manila, their opinion on the issue based on the study they made on aquaculture in their country.

Samudra - Can aquaculture in The Philippines be considered a failure or a success?

M.J. Mendoza - Aquaculture in my country can be regarded as a success from the commercial point of view, but serious doubts arise when considering the good of the country as a whole. In fact, valuable natural resources are being sacrificed for the sake of aquaculture.

After the introduction of aquaculture, only 10% of the mangroves are left in the Philippines. The fishermen are likely to become workers on the aquaculture projects, because they do not have the required capital for converting their land into breeding ponds.

Samudra - Which strategies do you develop in your organisations in the face of this situation? How do you see the future in this area, given the contradictions the “blue revolution” produces?

MJ. Mendoza - The fishermen have decided to steer themselves the development of aquaculture in the communal waters reserved to them. Because of financial limitations, the fishermen will perhaps be able to develop only a small part of the area, unlike the large capitalist enterprises who have farms of 100 hectares and more, complete with electrical aerators, etc..

The small-scale fishworkers would only exploit the areas already under cultivation, thus preserving the mangroves which are still intact. This will be our management policy.

V.Cristobal- Small-scale fishermen are encouraging the reforestation of mangroves, which is the price to pay so that shrimps will continue to live along the shoreline.

Samudra - Have the small-scale fishermen made a study of this along with other concerned groups such as farmers and ecologists?

M.J Mendoza- Because of different constraints in terms of resources and time availability, it is difficult to have a unified stand on this question with other groups.

Aquaculture is a most delicate question for fishworkers in the estuarine areas, where the land is most easily convertible into fish ponds. However, nearby farmers are already getting uneasy about aquaculture because of salt water penetration on their land. Intensive prawn culture requires a salinity of 20 to 30 parts per thousand. Sometimes the sea water content is too high so that fresh water has to be pumped in to dilute it, thus depriving farmers of part of their water supply. So, farmers develop an aversion for intensive aquaculture.

Samudra - What advice would you like to give to our readers on this question?

M.JMendoza -We should not develop aquaculture solely for export. If we do so, while local demands are not completely met, the price of the local fish supply is being raised indirectly. At present, the capitalist gets his dollars, but the poor people lose their proteins. On

the other hand, we fishworkers would be happy to see aquaculture being developed to supply local demands.

The industrialised countries and funding agencies should help us without strings attached to this assistance. At present they are dictating us which markets need to be supplied and where the means of production should be bought, from which consultants and technicians to get advise (with their money). In this way the fishworker becomes the worker for the capitalist.

V.Cristobal - Before implementing any aquaculture project is being planned, especially in mangroves or swamp areas, an analysis of the impact on the environment should be done.

We are continuously on the losing end when our natural resources are being destroyed. Our own people should generate the capital for an appropriate technology from within. The local people's organisation have the capacity and innovation to work towards a sustainable development.

CHALLENGES OF THE "BLUE REVOLUTION"

The challenges of the aquaculture are related to the need to seek a balance between capacity and the vocation of each region and each group of human beings, the demands for foreign trade and financial undertakings. The "blue revolution" must not be a new way of exploiting people, resources and coastal ecosystems. Rather it must be an occasion for rational and integrated management of their potential with the objective of ensuring the right of future generations to enjoy the products that nature has provided as a legacy to their countries.