Aquaculture as a Vehicle for Positive Social Change: Lifting People out of Poverty

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Social responsibility in the seafood industry is more than the absence of forced labor in the supply chain.

Forced labor is the far end of a spectrum of complex social and economic issues and human-rights abuse.

To prevent and eliminate forced labor in the seafood industry, root causes must be addressed.

Root causes are many, and they vary across countries and communities. But one cuts across: poverty.

Poverty is not just a question of low income. It is a web of social and economic marginalization and lack of opportunities and access to services.

Aquaculture can be a critical contribution to breaking poverty spirals. But it must be done right!
The Drivers

- Poverty
- Acceptance of inequality, social marginalisation
- Discrimination
- Unfair labour practices
- Forced labour
Unsafe working conditions

Narratives: “Better off here than with no work”

Lower wages for migrant workers

No contracts, longer hours for migrant workers

Forced labour
Treat the problem! Not the symptoms!

- Fundamental livelihoods and opportunities
- Fair working conditions and safe migration
- A (socially) sustainable seafood industry
Treat the problem — not the symptoms!

- Livelihoods — wages, self-employment, working conditions, alternative use of resources
- Gender equality — jobs for all!
- Youth employment — protect young workers and allow continued education
- Community development — spin-off industries, access and user rights
FIGURE 1
WORLD CAPTURE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION

MILLION TONNES
0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180

Aquaculture production
Capture production
Fish is the most valuable exported agricultural commodity from developing countries
Treat the problem! Not the symptoms!

Aquaculture projects and business

Jobs, alternative livelihoods, food security

Removing some of the drivers behind forced labour
Local Food Chains & Employment

- Income from ‘shrimp’ in extensive ponds southeast Bangladesh is less than half of total pond income
- Employment gains for the poorest groups
‘The fifth quarter... considering the whole animal

Zinc levels in freshwater prawn claw are 100x more than in the premium ‘tail’

Freshwater prawn brains contain n-3 at levels of more 750mg per 100g edible product-equivalent to those in the ‘best’ marine species
LOCAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (LEED) PROJECT
Reasons for LEED strategy to diversify income from wild fisheries

- Contribution from wild catch to national production was declining (3% to 5%).
- Dwindling resources, productivity as a result of income.
- Difficulty in planning their lives. Poverty was high in the community.
- Women and others were not included in the development process.
What LEED project has done in aquaculture in the north

- Carrying out VCD studies in the aquaculture.
- Support to set-up women/coop-managed aqua farms for sea cucumbers, sea bass, milkfish, prawns, mud crabs.
- Promoting value addition and setting up value-added enterprises along the value chain.
- Linking with markets.
- Facilities to establish supporting industries (feed, boats, fishing gears, etc.)
- Linking with the BDS services (training, technology, finance, markets).
Aquaculture’s contribution to poverty reduction in the north

- Aquaculture growth reflected in all value-chain segments of the industry.
- Basic income of USD 30 per month has increased to USD 600-700 per month.
- A source of employment for poor young men and women (more than 60% are women).
- Contributes to food security for those who are more vulnerable (30-40% of beneficiaries are highly vulnerable).
- Assured a consistent income for the poor (more than 80% of the people).
Mainstreaming Gender

- More women are employed, and upward mobility for women assured.
- Changes in attitudes of men regarding women contributing to the family, community and economic role in development.
- Improved active participation of women in membership and board of director levels in cooperatives.
- Women’s equal participation in development activities is widely recognized (local and provincial levels).
- Policy areas: Review of cooperative bylaws and development of status ultimately in national policy to recognize women’s role in cooperatives.
Lessons Learned

• Huge potential for rural economic development (risks of other opportunities are high/lack of market/SME failures).

• Market-based, demand-oriented interventions helps to solve complex issues such as indebtedness and vicious cycle of poverty in the fisheries sector.

• Strict management and technology/monitoring and support services, etc. should be in place. Start with species that depend on naturally available feeds and build on it.

• Will only be viable if it is commercial scale and linked with the market. Income should be visible. Private sector participation is a must (community/cooperative/private sector model).

• Community awareness and participation is also compulsory as there are community level issues to be solved.