

Press Release, 28 January 2016:

A quiet revolution in the fish-farming industry

Rapid growth in Myanmar's fish farming industry is supporting higher rural incomes, greater job opportunities, and improved nutrition, health and well-being, according to research by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Michigan State University (MSU) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). The research report, "Aquaculture in transition: Value chain transformation, fish and food security in Myanmar", was released to industry stakeholders and government representatives on 28 January 2016.

The USAID-funded research challenged many existing perceptions of the industry, including the conversion of rice paddy land to fish farms, and the perception of the industry as sluggish, unproductive and focused largely on the export market.

Fish is of fundamental importance to food and nutrition security in Myanmar, as it is a major source of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), which are particularly important for child development. Fish is also an important part of household food budgets in Myanmar, with nearly as much money spent on fish (14% of food expenditure) as on rice (19% of food expenditure). The fish farming industry also provides rural employment, with the harvesting of fish for transport to market requiring roughly twice as many person days of work per acre than rice paddy farming. Some fish farming operations are also potentially more profitable than alternative forms of agriculture, with commercial fish farm nurseries able to generate an estimated 5-10 times more income than that produced by mango or rice paddy farming.

Rapid growth in the fish farming industry is evidenced by an estimated 250% increase in fish farm output from the Delta region over the past ten years. The land area for ponds in the Delta area, which accounts for 90% of Myanmar's farmed fish, is also estimated to have doubled. The fish farming industry has also supported the rapid growth of a variety of related businesses and services, including pond digging services, feed mills, ice manufacturing, rural transport and urban wholesale markets.

The research undertaken by CESD, MSU and IFPRI examined the strong growth of the industry, and the industry's contribution to raising rural wages. It also looked at obstacles to growth, and provides recommendations to deliver greater and more inclusive rural growth. Recommendations included better access to formal credit for fish farmers, fewer restrictions on land use, and increased private investment and competition in the fish feed sector.

Dr Zaw Oo, CESD Executive Director, said the restrictions on land use were a major inhibitor for fish farming. "Relaxing regulations on the use of agricultural land to allow small land holders the ability to practice fish farming legally, and with secure tenure rights, would remove one of the biggest hurdles to the fish farming sector's development," said Dr Zaw Oo.

Ben Belton, Assistant Professor at Michigan State University and one of the authors of the research report, said there was great potential for fish farming to drive rural development in Myanmar. "Policies that create a level playing field for small land holders and small and medium enterprises in aquaculture value chains can stimulate the development of a much more competitive and inclusive fish farming sector, and boost job creation and incomes in rural areas throughout the country," said Dr. Belton.

Speaking of the research findings and recommendations, Aung Hein, Research Supervisor at CESD and an author of the research report said "Aquaculture is already making an important contribution

to Myanmar's domestic food security and international trade, but this has the potential to become much greater in the future. It can be achieved by ensuring land tenure security for small and medium fish producers, improving access to finance for small land holders and related enterprises, and encouraging greater competition in the fish feed sector".

The research is the outcome of the most comprehensive assessment ever conducted of the inland fish farming industry in Myanmar. The research was conducted in seven townships (accounting for 75% of the country's total fish pond area), and in San Pya market, Yangon's main fish wholesale market. Interviews were conducted with 251 people, including those working at fish nurseries, hatcheries and farms, fish traders, transporters and ice sellers. Previous research was also reviewed. An analysis of satellite data from the past ten years provided evidence on the rapid expansion of fish farms in Myanmar.

The research was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and financial assistance from the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), supported by Australia, Denmark, the European Union, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the Mitsubishi Corporation.

End

Attachments

- *Food security policy project brief #1: A quiet revolution emerging in the fish farming value chain in Myanmar: Implications for national food security* (File name: CESD MSU IFPRI - Policy brief - fish farming - Nov 2015.pdf)
- *Project images, captioned below, available for use with use of the material in this press release.*

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About CESD:

The Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) is Myanmar's leading think tank supporting evidence-based policy making.

CESD undertakes participatory policy research studies related to economic reform, poverty-reduction, sustainable development, and good governance in Myanmar. It also provides training and education services for key institutions and organizations contributing to the ongoing process of reform in Myanmar.

CESD is working with the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) to implement the Michigan State University's USAID-funded 'Food security policy and rural development program'. The program of work will support the goals of inclusive growth in the agriculture sector, and improved nutritional standards for women and children in Myanmar.

Further information is available on the CESD website, <http://myanmarcesd.org>



01. CESD and MSU surveyors collect primary data at one of the pioneer fish hatcheries in Khayan, Yangon Region.
Photo credit: CESD



02. A fish farm in Myanmar's delta region: research by CESD, MSU and IFPRI reveals a quiet revolution in Myanmar's fish-farming industry.
Photo credit: Kyan Htoo, CESD



03. A fish farm in Myanmar's delta region: research by CESD, MSU and IFPRI reveals a quiet revolution in Myanmar's fish-farming industry.
Photo credit: Kyan Htoo, CESD



04. The San Pya Central Fish Wholesale Market, Yangon: research by CESD, MSU and IFPRI reveals a quiet revolution in Myanmar's fish-farming industry.
Photo credit: Kyan Htoo, CESD



05. The San Pya Central Fish Wholesale Market, Yangon: research by CESD, MSU and IFPRI reveals a quiet revolution in Myanmar's fish-farming industry.
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