

World Wetlands Day – “Fish for Tomorrow?”

Rivers, streams, lakes, rice fields, shrimp farms, inland flooded forests, swamps, coastal mangroves: all of these are wetlands.

Each year, 2 February is World Wetlands Day, which marks the date the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was internationally adopted for the wise use of wetlands. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community undertake actions to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular.

This year, Ramsar touches on the theme of wetlands and fisheries, which affects everyone, wherever you live and whatever you do. At the WorldFish Center, this theme is central in our work to reduce poverty and hunger by improving fisheries and aquaculture.

Facts on fish Ramsar highlights:

- 1 billion people rely on fish as their main or even sole source of protein
- 35 million people are directly engaged, either full- or part-time in fishing and aquaculture - 95% of them live in developing countries and the majority are small-scale fishers. At least 5.8 million of them earn less than US\$1 a day and thus rank amongst the world's poorest people.
- Demand for fish has doubled over the last 40 years and is likely to continue to grow as global population increases
- 75% of our commercially important marine fisheries and many of our inland stocks are currently being overfished or are being fished at their biological limits.

Have the poorest of the poor hit a snag? Yes. But is it the end of the line? Not quite when you consider this:

- Fish is a major source of protein in Asia, supplying 46 per cent of the total animal protein in Bangladesh and as much as 75 per cent in Indo-China. In the floodplains of Bangladesh, 70 per cent of households catch fish for income or food. They are poor, largely landless and survive on less than US\$0.50 a day. Fish is the major -- and often the only -- source of animal protein for the poor in Asia.
- Farmers practicing rice-field culture in Bangladesh have managed to reduce production costs by 10 per cent, and the average farm income has increased by 16 per cent in a mere three years, buoyed by sales of fish fry and fingerlings as well as fish that farmers do not eat. One hectare of rice field typically produces between 250 and 1,500 kilograms of fish.
- In the Mekong delta in South Vietnam, one hectare of land producing just rice alone usually brings in a profit of less than US\$1,000 a year. Raising fish in rice fields can help a farmer increase profits by about 30 per cent, as studies by WorldFish's Vietnamese partner, the Research Institute of Aquaculture, show. A one-hectare pond can hold more than 3,000 fingerlings.

For more information on how sustaining wetlands can help improve the lives of people, please read:

- “Will We Have Fish for Tomorrow?” – by Stephen Hall (Director General, WorldFish Center) & Achim Steiner (Executive Director, UNEP)
- Undervalued and Overlooked: Sustaining Rural Livelihoods through Better Governance of Wetlands
- Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Wetlands & Water Synthesis (<http://www.maweb.org/en/index.aspx>)
- Rice-Fish Culture: a recipe for higher production (http://www.worldfishcenter.org/cms/list_article.aspx?catID=32&ddlID=78)

For more information on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, please visit <http://www.ramsar.org>