

‘Where there is water there is fish’

Myanmar proverb

FISH IN THE MYANMAR FOOD SYSTEM

The world consumes almost 142 million tonnes of fish a year and the fisheries sector provides a source of income and livelihoods for an estimated 45 million people worldwide. Fish is important for the health of Myanmar’s people because of its role in the country’s culture and economy. Fish accounts for half the animal-source food consumed and is second only to rice in the diet of Myanmar people. Fish is rich in micronutrients and essential fatty acids critical for development, particularly in the first 1,000 days of life and for the long-term cognitive development and learning potential of children.

The fisheries sector is an important generator of employment and wealth along supply chains in domestic markets. Processing fish is an important source of income for many people, particularly for women. Fish is important not just for rural households but also for people in distant urban markets. The food security and livelihood functions of fisheries and aquaculture are particularly important in inshore areas where few alternatives exist for rural people.

Fish is the world’s most traded food commodity, and Myanmar is on the cusp of becoming a major international source of food in international markets where demand may outstrip supply. According to Department of Fisheries (DoF) statistics, in 2013-14, fish generated 536 million dollars in export earnings. Opportunities exist to improve fisheries management to capture more economic, social and environmental benefits for the long-term.

MYANMAR FISHERIES PARTNERSHIP

The Myanmar Fishery Partnership (MFP) is a new initiative being established to assist the Myanmar government in strengthening effective collaboration for the sustainable development of Myanmar’s fisheries and aquaculture sector. The MFP builds on the work of the Rakhine Fishery Partnership and Ayeyarwaddy Fisheries Partnership that involves DoF representatives, members of parliament, the private sector, CSOs, NGOs, universities and fishers, in developing improved state & regional fisheries legislation in Myanmar...At the national level, a series of workshops have been held with the Ministry of Fisheries, Livestock and Rural Development, in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay and Yangon aimed at producing an agreed framework for the development of a national strategic plan for fisheries and integrated resource governance. The drafting of these fisheries policy briefs are expected to be significant contributors to these processes.

TRANSFORMING THE MYANMAR FISHERY SECTOR — WHERE TO GO NOW?

This set of five policy briefs outlines possible futures and suggests pathways for sustaining and increasing the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to Myanmar’s development. Key messages from the briefs include:

Offshore Fisheries: Overexploited marine fish stocks can be rebuilt through partnerships that reinforce marine governance. Modernization of existing laws and policies and institutional reforms, together with adaptive management can unlock the potential for creating jobs and wealth for the people of Myanmar. This will support national food security and international trade while safeguarding Myanmar’s marine resources and wildlife.

Inshore Fisheries: Strengthening coastal communities and fisheries-based livelihoods can be achieved through cohesion of laws and policies affecting the sector. This involves alignment of Union and state/regional level agencies and institutions, securing tenure, co-management and better law enforcement. Improving information and statistics for coastal fisheries management is urgently needed to support improved management.

Freshwater Fisheries: Basic knowledge about the freshwater resources is urgently needed and initiatives like co-management and fish production in irrigation reservoirs has potential to increase production in more sustainable and equitable manner. New legislation is needed to improve the contribution of fisheries to food security and livelihoods.

Aquaculture: Aquaculture holds substantial potential to raise rural incomes and meet demand from domestic consumers and foreign markets. The government can support this process through transparent and responsible regulatory frameworks, strengthening institutional capacity and human capital, and investments in infrastructure. Farmers also need access to information service and markets.



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ALIGNMENT WITH UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Following the adoption of “the Future We Want” resolution by 193 countries (including Myanmar), the SDGs aim to address and incorporate the three dimensions of sustainable development (environment, economics and society) and their inter-linkages. 17 SDGs have been identified that are action-oriented, aspirational, and universally applicable.

Two other important global-level policy instruments that can guide fisheries policy development in Myanmar include:

- **FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).** The CCRF has been adopted by 170 countries, including Myanmar, and sets out principles, goals and elements of action, representing a global consensus on a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture issues. It is intended to support governments in developing and strengthening their national fisheries policies and legislation towards conservation and sustainable management.
- **Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small Scale Fisheries (VG-SSF).** Developed as a complement to the CCRF, these guidelines are the first internationally agreed upon instrument fully dedicated to the small-scale fisheries sector. They place a high priority on the realization of human rights and provide consensus principles and guidance towards sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication.

PURPOSES OF THE POLICY BRIEFS

The four policy briefs have been developed by the Myanmar Fisheries Partnership to help the government address the most challenging issues facing fisheries in Myanmar. The political transition period provides a window of opportunity for the Myanmar government to revitalize the fisheries sector through actions such as recovering fish stocks and habitats, ensuring decent employment and labour conditions, and providing transparency in revenue raising and licensing. Sustained engagement by government agencies has the potential to transform the sector and to allow the fisheries sector to fully contribute to Myanmar’s development.

The purpose of this set of briefs is to contribute to the national dialogue and strategic development as the government shapes a new vision for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. If fisheries are to function in a more socially equitable way, the status quo is unacceptable. The briefs also provide guidance on the integration of national fisheries obligations into wider regional and international planning processes and frameworks.

The policy briefs represent current thinking on the fisheries sector in Myanmar. They provide a snapshot of each sub-sector’s stage of development, highlight the importance of fish and fisheries to the people of Myanmar and summarize the main opportunities and challenges facing each of the four sub-sectors—offshore, inshore, freshwater and aquaculture.



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