

WORLD FISH CENTER



Fish for thought

As a result of the growing world population, the oceans are becoming increasingly depleted. Stocks of numerous species of fish such as cod, halibut or tuna have already shrunk to a tenth of what they were 50 years ago. In an effort to make sure fish remains available to humankind as a valuable source of nutrition, Fred Weirowski is working at the World Fish Center to develop new forms of collaboration in the fishing and controlled aquaculture sectors.

You are standing at the supermarket freezer, trying to decide whether to buy shrimps from the North Sea or Bangladesh. There is little difference in price, so which do you reach for? Maybe the shrimps from Bangladesh – because they are organically farmed and have Naturland certification, which means they meet the very highest ecological quality standards. And yet shrimps from Bangladesh do not exactly enjoy the best reputation and in the past the European Union has often imposed punitive import bans on them.

The explanation for the certified organic shrimps from Bangladesh in the freezer is that they are the product of a public-private partnership (PPP) called Happy Shrimps. The initiative for this project came from a German consultancy firm that was convinced that sustainable shrimp production in Bangladesh was both necessary and possible and managed to get producers, trading companies, a development bank, several NGOs and the World Fish Center on board.

Fred Weirowski plays a part in getting PPP projects like this one off the ground; they are projects in which state, private and civil society actors get together to achieve a common goal. For three years, this fisheries expert has been getting PPP projects underway at the World Fish Center and advising on their im-

plementation. 'Like Happy Shrimps, most of these projects are concerned with improving the supply chain and the quality and safety of the produce,' says 57-year old Weirowski. This benefits first and foremost the many small fishing and aquaculture businesses because the newly introduced working practices and processes, along with strict compliance with international standards, guarantee that their goods will be purchased and that they will get a fair price for them. The major weak point in Bangladesh – which became clear very early on in the project – was the frequent lack of ice to keep the shrimps chilled during transportation. That resulted in 'unhappy' shrimp consumers and ultimately in import bans.

'In my work, I try to bring the interests of the public and private sector together in PPP projects in the fishing and aquaculture sector. In this, we are seeking not only to increase productivity, improve environmental soundness and conserve resources: we also want to ensure that fish remains a food source for people in the future, in particular for people in developing countries.'

Fred Weirowski, CIM expert at the World Fish Center
www.worldfishcenter.org

A lot of untapped potential

As well as improving quality and food safety, there are a number of other concerns, which the various participants in PPP projects of this kind in the fishing industry are pursuing: improving production capacity, opening up new markets, developing new products and reducing environmental pollution, for example by minimising waste and by stricter control of water quality in aquaculture. But Fred Weirowski is also aware of scores of other aspects to which he believes the fishing industry still pays far too little attention. He is trying to drum up more interest: 'We have to improve access to markets, advisory services and finance options, for example, for small fishing businesses. We have to ensure that cultivated species of fish that produce higher yields and conserve resources reach smaller businesses as well as large ones. But, whatever else we do, we must continue to optimise the supply chains and infrastructure in many countries to prevent a quarter of the fish being unfit for human consumption by the time it reaches the consumer.'

Unlike with coffee or cocoa, for instance, in the fish sector there are scarcely any international associations to help pursue these interests and still not enough awareness of the necessary standardisation processes that are needed both to protect the environment and ensure consumer safety. 'There is still very little knowledge in this sector about the opportunities that can arise from cooperative ventures between the public and private sector, i.e. between governments, development agencies, research institutes, fishing and breeding businesses, processing companies, trading companies and civil society organisations. Similarly, most people do not realise that PPP approaches make it easier to shoulder risks and costs and are unaware of the public funding and programmes that are available. An added difficulty for most projects with international involvement is the fact that each country interprets PPPs differently and has its own work priorities and application procedures,' says Weirowski explaining the daily challenges he faces in his work.

Aquaculture – a way out of the crisis?

A further factor is that public funding for further development in agriculture and fishing and for agricultural research was in decline for a long time – particularly in developing countries – despite the fact that demand for food continues to rise and climate change is increasingly necessitating new cultivation methods and varieties in food production. So it is no wonder that investment in the form of finance or technical expertise from alternative sources, and therefore PPP approaches, are in greater demand than ever before. According to Fred Weirowski, far too few PPP projects in the fish production sector actually get off the ground. 'Often a project never gets beyond the idea stage – because, for example, there is not sufficient benefit to the public.'

'Aquaculture, which constantly comes under criticism – particularly as a result of shrimp production – is currently the only way for humankind to produce more fish and make sure it is affordable in the future too,' says Weirowski with total conviction. In recent years, fish production from aquaculture has risen by 8% a year. In 2009, half the fish and shrimps consumed by humans were farmed, not caught on the open sea. Fred Weirowski has few reservations about aquaculture. He served an apprenticeship to become a fully qualified fisherman and went on to work for many years in the field of fish health. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was involved in building up the first aquaculture businesses for carp and trout production in the former East Germany. 'I would often go around from pond to pond and monitor stocks. We were able to increase trout production at the time from 50 to 5000 tonnes per year,' the East Berliner recalls, as he thinks back over an episode of German history and also an episode of the history of the fishing industry. Weirowski's favourite fish has always been the sturgeon. In the 19th century it was still food for the masses and enjoyed little popularity. It has now completely disappeared – at least from German waters – and there are numerous research endeavours to re-establish it.

The participants

The **World Fish Center** is one of 15 international agricultural research centres that constitute the **Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research** (CGIAR). The common goal of these public-sector research establishments is to solve urgent agricultural problems through application-focused research with the overriding aim of averting poverty and safeguarding food supply.

The **Centre for International Migration and Development** (CIM) and the **Advisory Service on Agricultural Research for Development** (BEAF),

which is a GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH) project, support these endeavours – for example by placing German experts at these agricultural research centres and contributing to funding their deployment. Fred Weirowski is one of 30 German experts currently working in key positions at the 15 research centres to ensure that important scientific findings are translated into practice and lead to genuine development progress.