



Photo: Jonah van Beijnen

Myanmar: Aquaculture's next big frontier?

The potential for growth is there, and groups as varied as the US government, Mitsubishi and Gold Coin are ready to usher it along.

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A new report on Myanmar's fish farming industry by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Michigan State University (MSU) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) is highlighting the "rapid growth" it underwent in the past 10 years.

But while it is supporting higher rural incomes, greater job opportunities, as well as improved nutrition, health and well-being, it also showed some of the country's persisting challenges to develop the sector.

Researchers of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded report -- "Aquaculture in transition: value chain transformation, fish and food security in Myanmar" -- are now calling for several changes to be made to "transform" the industry.

Recommendations include fewer restrictions on land use, better access to formal credit for fish farmers and other small and medium enterprises in the value chain, and increased private investment and competition in the feed sector to bring down cost to the farmer and improve quality.

In addition, they said there must be greater development of "hard" infrastructure, including roads, electricity and water control to increase efficiencies along the supply chain, as well as public investments in seed production technologies for "promising species," and more development of "soft" infrastructure such as human capital, extension and veterinary services to support more responsive public and private service provision for farmers in areas such as disease control.

John Diener, managing director aqua division at Singapore-headquartered Gold Coin, echoed these recommendations. Two years ago, the [company](#)

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teamed up with the Myanmar government to kick-start vannamei shrimp cultivation in the country.

However, in early 2015 the company decided to pull out from the project.

"We had that JV in Myanmar and tried very hard to make it work but there were too many factors working against us," he told **IntraFish**.

Infrastructure issues had been among the main problems, he said, in addition to "no supply for chemicals for water treatment" and "very unstable demand."

He also sees bigger potential in black tiger shrimp farming rather than vannamei.

"It would see it growing as a monodon supplier pretty well," Diener said. "It was premature to go in with vannamei but it will come. We still have a legal entity there and are prepared to go back in when the time is right."

According to the report, Myanmar's aquaculture industry is nevertheless looking back at "rapid growth...evidenced by an estimated 250 percent increase in fish farm output from the Delta region over the past 10 years."

The land area for ponds in the Delta area, which accounts for 90 percent of Myanmar's farmed fish, is also estimated to have doubled, the researchers suggested.

Myanmar's 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, they said.

The report was authored by Ben Belton, Aung Hein, Kyan Htoo, L. Seng Kham, Ulrike Nischan, Thomas Reardon, and Duncan Boughton, and supported by the USAID, Michigan State University, and International Food Policy Research Institute.

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