

Trading in fish as food

A new, ongoing study hopes to shed light on the impact and consequences of international trade in fish and fish products

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Norway have got together to conduct a joint study on the impact of international trade in fishery products on food security.

International trade in fishery products has increased substantially since the mid-1980s. The total value of exports was valued at US \$20 bn in 1984. It rose sharply to US\$55 bn in 2000. Enhanced demand in the developed countries, cheaper methods of preservation and transportation were probably the main reasons for this increase. However, increases in production, the introduction of the 200-mile exclusive economic zones and lower tariffs also contributed to this development. The trade was largely between developed countries or from developing countries to the developed countries. About half the exports in value terms are from the developing countries. It is noteworthy that as much as 20 per cent of the value of exports come from the low-income food-deficit countries.

The varied impact of trade—at the macro-level, on the countries involved, and, at the micro-level, on the people—has become a matter of global concern and analysis. The formation of the World Trade Organization has brought a more formalized structure to international trade. The once-held conviction that trade should automatically increase the welfare of all the parties involved is now being questioned.

This study will analyze the growing international trade in fishery products, which is marked by diversity. By studying a variety of identifiable 'representative' cases from the overall global context, the study seeks to assess the impact that trade

has on people's food security—the physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times. The case studies will examine the positive and negative impacts that international trade has on fish availability and accessibility; employment and income generation; the fish stocks and the potential for hard foreign currency earnings. All these aspects have a direct or indirect bearing on food security.

The study will focus on fish producers, fishworkers and fish consumers in fish exporting and importing countries. By understanding the *modus operandi* of international fish trade, the study will try and identify the right circumstances, institutions and mechanisms, to facilitate "food security and development-enhancing" trade. The aim will be to understand the consequences of trade—who and what makes the gains and losses, and where and when they accrue.


The study, to be conducted and completed in 2003, will draw on the expertise of several internationally reputed experts in the realm of trade, fisheries and food security issues. The executing agency is the FAO with its vast technical expertise on all the above aspects. Within the FAO it is the Fish Utilization and Marketing Services of the Fisheries Department, which takes the responsibility for the overall conduct of the study. It will be ably assisted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Royal Norwegian Government that will follow the study closely and comment on its progress.

International experts

An International Reference Group (IRG) composed of a distinguished set of international experts and academicians will, in their personal capacities, give



overall guidance to the study from the perspective of achieving its goal of influencing trade policy formulation and suggesting strategies for food security-enhancing trade. The details of the study process will be overseen by an Expert Group (EG) composed of persons with first-hand knowledge of fish trade and food security issues, who, again in their personal capacities, will assist in the choice of case study centres and meet occasionally to review work progress. The day-to-day monitoring of the study will be undertaken by a Chief Consultant (CC) responsible to the FAO and the MFA, and who will play the key role in liaising with the IRG and EG.

The case studies will be undertaken by National Consultants (NC) who will be identified by the EG based on suggestions from the IRG and the numerous contacts that FAO has all over the world. The countries where case studies will be undertaken include: Brazil, Chile, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. 

For more details on the study and its current status, visit <http://www.tradefoodfish.org>