

Sustained interventions boost aquaculture and nutrition security in Myanmar

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Sustained interventions to promote best management practices (BMPs) and improve nutrition have shown promising results among small-scale aquaculture producers in Myanmar, according to a new study from the CGIAR Initiative on Aquatic Foods.

Small-scale aquaculture is critical to food security in Myanmar and, as one of the fastest-growing agri-food sectors in the world, it has great potential to support rural development in the country and elsewhere. However small-scale fish farmers often have limited access to the technologies and information that could help improve production, earnings, and household nutrition.

The study looked at whether interventions to support BMPs in aquaculture – such as the use of the most appropriate fish species and production sites – together with the provision of nutrition training had improved pond productivity, livelihoods and food security for small-scale fish farmers in the country's Sagaing and Shan regions.

Focusing on 379 producers involved in the Myanmar Sustainable Aquaculture Programme (MYSAP Island) intervention – implemented by WorldFish, with support from the German Development Corporation (GIZ) – it considered seven variables: fish yield, fish revenue, revenue per acre, household income, weekly fish consumption, and dietary diversity. Crucially, researchers also examined whether the BMP interventions and nutrition training length was important.

They found significantly higher dietary diversity – a reflection of improved food security – in those producers who adopted BMPs and received nutrition-related training. Notably, they also found significant improvements in almost all variables if producers were exposed to BMPs and nutrition-sensitive training for two years, compared to those who received only one year of exposure and control groups who received none. The researchers state that this is likely to be the combined result of continual practice (learning-by-doing) and learning from others, with access to support from extension services, which help to build farmers' skills and confidence over time.