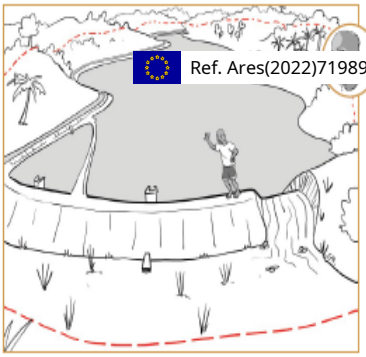
Capacity building of actors in the fish farming sector in the Republic of Congo



At-a-glance

Objective:. The project aim at improving fish production in a sustainable and cost-effective way and at strengthening the value chains.

Lead countries/organization(s): EU, APDRA

Place: Republic of Congo

Background and Objectives

The EU-funded RECAFIP project, implemented by APDRA Pisciculture Paysanne and the Congolese NGO Forum for the Promotion of Rural Groups (FPGR), aims to strengthen civil society actors and local authorities in the fish farming sector. The project will improve fish production in a sustainable and cost-effective way and strengthening local value chains.
The project responds to strong local demand for fresh fish. Due to a largely insufficient production, demand is partially satisfied by frozen fish imports. The action aims to promote short supply chains by strengthening the organization of the fresh fish value chain. The integration of producers into networks will contribute to their enhanced role in the local economic fabric.
The second phase of this project aims at increasing supply and improving the quality of fish put on the market.

Actions

The project strengthens the capacities of farmers. The principle is to help fish farmers to make investments by mobilizing their own resources and to develop their economic activities on the basis of economically-viable techniques that are environmentally sustainable.
Technical support is provided to help farmers build their ponds. The training method is based on a collective approach to learning integrating exchange of experience and promoting the empowerment of producers in the sector. Fish farmers are organized in groups to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and know-how. The project provides support for the networking of groups to allow the emergence of a real profession in the field of fish farming.
In addition, local and international exchange trips (example with Côte d'Ivoire) are organized as well as sponsorship of beginner fish farmers by experienced fish farmers.
Trials are carried out by fish farmers with the support of experts, so that the most suitable solutions are identified.
The organization of the value chain is improved for the transportation and distribution of fish in the surrounding cities.

Results

In the first phase of the project, 200 fish farmers were supported and fish production increased by 20% in 40 hectares of functional ponds. 30 women were trained in marketing of the fish and 20 local craftsmen/service providers worked for the groups of producers. In the second phase of the project the following results are expected:

Environmental : The principle of the project is to use only the resources available locally. Agricultural by-products (cassava, taro, sweet potato leaves) or compost made from plant waste or animal waste are recycled to fertilize ponds. The integration of rice farming with fish farming contributes to environmental performance. The pond water can be used for other uses within the family farm, such as gardening or extensive pig or poultry farming. This practice based on recycling has another advantage in addition to fertilization and free feeding of fish: greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated by the production and transport of synthetic inputs will not occur.

Social: the project strengthens capacities of 1000 farmers, 20 farmer organisations, and value chain actors.

Economic: The project is clearly oriented towards the diversification of the livelihoods of small family farms. The fish farming activity provides additional income while contributing to the food diversification of households (600 kg of fish per ha every 6 months). Food diversification is reinforced by the possibility of associating rice and vegetables production. The simultaneous breeding of several species (tilapia, catfish, heterotis, hemichromis) enhance the natural productivity of the pond.

Successes and Lessons Learned

The peasant fish farming approach developed is based on an intangible principle: there is no financial or material support. The fish farmer must invest himself. The project only intervenes in advisory support and on the supply of the first fingerlings once the dam pond is considered complete to start production. This approach, not always well accepted by villagers accustomed to projects that buy membership through various subsidies (food, cash for work, materials), undoubtedly guarantees better sustainability. The viability of the model is reinforced by its independence from any input that is not available on the farm. The action therefore favours a logic of autonomy for the producers for the construction of the facilities and for the operation of the ponds. The limit of the approach is the selection "at entry" which implies a strong capacity to mobilize resources to carry out the work. These constraints concern more particularly women, young people and more generally, people who do not have secure access to land. In order for the project to be as inclusive as possible, it emphasizes self-help groups and the sharing of experiences and know-how. In addition, the action takes place throughout the fish farming sector. Farmed fish, which represents only 0.5% of Congolese freshwater fish production, is usually sold directly near the pond. The development of farmed fish production contributes to the diversification of the local economy and is accompanied by the emergence of different types of actors around this activity. Finally, the partnership with a Congolese NGO ensures the continuity of the action and its extension to other sites.

Website for more information: https://www.apdra.org/index.php/en/our-projects/congo-en