**PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE RICE-FISH AQUACULTURE IN IRRIGATED SYSTEMS IN MALI**

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Through a series of hands-on trainings in Mali and China from mid-2008 to 2010, rice producers in Mali learned and applied updated techniques for producing crops of fish along with their rice crops. The AquaFish CRSP Mali project, which ended in December 2010, partnered with Mali’s Direction Nationale de la Pêche (DNP) and China’s Shanghai Ocean University on this work. Project activities involved various stakeholders in the Mali aquaculture industry, including farmers, extension and technical personnel, and members of local NGOs. In little under two years, the project identified appropriate strategies for the implementation of integrated rice and fish farming, adapted rice-fish technologies from China to Mali (2 trainees from Mali studied in China), set up and ran rice-fish demonstration plots in the Baguineda irrigation area, and conducted workshops on appropriate aquaculture technologies for Mali.

In the first workshop, “Up-to-Date Techniques for Rice-Fish Culture in China,” the Malians who had trained in China shared technical information on rice-fish culture, including options for modifying and managing rice fields, with potential farmers and interested government and NGO personnel in Mali. The second workshop, on “Appropriate Aquaculture Post-harvest Technologies,” involved fishers, fish farmers, fish traders, marketers, processors, government officers responsible for aquatic food quality and safety. The objectives were to examine the current status of post-harvest processing practices, review available technologies, identify constraints and problems in post-harvest processing, and recommend appropriate technologies for small post-harvest businesses. The third workshop, on “Training and Extension Capacity for Rice-Fish Culture,” followed immediately after the first in late November 2009 and involved 27 participants. It aimed to build training and extension capacity for government extension officers, university teachers, and others working to develop rice-fish culture techniques. The fourth short-course was a four-day stakeholder workshop on “Best Aquaculture Practices (BMPs) and Aquaculture Policy in Mali,” organized by the DNP for approximately 20 participants in early 2010. The objective was to generate recommendations regarding development and implementation of BMPs for Mali aquaculture through careful review of the current status of aquaculture practices and policies in Mali, critical examination of existing guidelines and standards, and consultation with multiple stakeholders and experts. A document on fisheries standards in use in China was translated and recommended for submission to the DNP: *Le standard industriel de la poissonnerie dans la République populaire de Chine*.

Four rice-fish demonstrations were started in July 2009 and the fish were harvested from the first rice field, that of farmer Mamadou Samake, in late November. His field of approximately 840 m2 (0.084 ha) in area yielded 115 kg of fish, or about 1360 kg per hectare. This result was very appealing to Mr. Samake because of the additional income he was able to receive by selling the fish. These results generated a great deal of interest among other rice producers in the Baguineda area. Local interest in rice-fish increased five-fold following the initial demonstrations, with at least 22 new farmers eager to invest their own resources in this new rice-fish enterprise based on the successes they saw their neighbors achieve. Several new designs for the layout of fish sump and access channels in the fields are being tried, and DNP technical officers have been monitoring the preparation and stocking of fields. The rice-fish farmers of the Baguineda area have formed a cooperative to better organize themselves for sharing and spreading this new technology. Also, farmers far from the original test sites have indicated their interest to DNP technicians, who plan to begin extending technologies in the next year. After many reported failures in rice-fish culture in Mali, this experience speaks to success and a way forward for small-scale farmers in Mali.