

fish farming international

Kenyan university moves industry forward

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THE staff of MOI University in western Kenya wants the East African country to be able to take advantage of the huge potential it has in freshwater aquaculture, says Charles C Ngugi of Moi's School of Natural Resource Management, Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences.

The university has been teaching aquaculture for nearly 20 years in an effort to contribute to the country's food security and to provide incomes and livelihoods to the producers and fish farmers.

In Kenya, aquaculture has been practiced since the early 1920s, with farmers in central and western Kenya constructing fishponds for tilapia since the 1940s.

Still, the industry has not come far and remains young, practised mainly on a small scale using tilapia and African catfish, producing only about 4000 tonnes a year. However, Ngugi tells FFI he wants to see this changed.

He says that the natural resources are there in Kenya to develop its industry. Despite images of Kenya's parched north and northeast areas, western Kenya has numerous natural freshwater and saline lakes, including Lakes Victoria, Nakuru, Bogoria, Baringo, Turkana and Naivasha. Many wetland habitats and rivers that drain into Lake Victoria have their source from this region, making this catchment one of the most important ones in East Africa.

"The development and management of aquaculture resources demands multi-disciplinary training in order to provide knowledge, skills and technological know how necessary in understanding the complex dynamic systems and sustainable utilisation of aquatic resources which Moi provides," says Ngugi.

He says that Moi's aquaculture courses are well subscribed. "BSc classes average 25 students, MSc eight and a new PhD programme has two.

"Students from our university are exposed to fieldwork in their third year of study

where they experience the aquaculture environments they will work in upon graduation – mariculture in mangroves under hot weather, for example, can be very challenging.

“Most of them join the university from rural areas and have no trouble going back to serve their communities.”

The department has 11 academic members of staff, four technical and three ancillary staff. There are also visiting professors through academic links and exchange programmes.

In addition, efforts by the university to setup extension and community outreach activities have been directed towards local community aquaculture development, especially women’s groups.

On-farm trials conducting in central/eastern Kenya and central/Rift Valley have changed farmers’ attitudes towards fish farming in Kenya and Ngugi says more have been planned.

Still, despite the best efforts of Moi, one thing that is holding back graduates from helping to develop the industry is the lack of jobs for them to move into.

“At the BSc level, only 25% of our graduates get jobs in aquaculture because the industry is still young in Africa,” says Ngugi. “However, due to the multidisciplinary nature of our programmes, they find jobs in other related fields such as natural resource management or even in banking.”