

9

TAKING AQUA SHOPS FROM ASIA TO AFRICA

A case study in Kenya

Susan Otieno, Graham Haylor and William Savage

Portable ideas in a globalizing world

Not all development ideas catch on, or as development specialists might say, “have impacts”. Good ideas, however, have a habit of spreading far and wide, especially when they address an important and widely experienced set of challenges. Such ideas inspire people to talk about them; they may encourage donors to fund them; they may garner investment from entrepreneurs; and they may end up fulfilling a genuine and widespread need. In an era of globalization, there is perhaps more scope than ever before for ideas, goods, services, finance and labor to flow from wherever they emerge to wherever they fulfil a need. This chapter features one such idea that emerged strongly from a process of facilitated advocacy with remote tribal communities in India to also have an impact in Western Kenya.

The One-Stop Aqua Shop concept, which aims to provide a “single-point under-one-roof provision” of services to fish farmers, proved an important component of aquaculture development that took place in remote rural areas of eastern India (see Chapter 5). It derived from asking farmers and fishers about ways that policy changes could help their livelihoods. Rapidly, the concept was taken up by government extension services and by NGOs in nine locations across the states of Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. They supplied goods and services and shared information, especially in the form of picture-rich better practice guidelines. At the time, written extension materials targeted at tribal communities were rare, as literacy rates were especially low among this group and it was supposed that documentation would not be valued. However, although this seemed like a logical supposition, it was in fact not the case. Much local development took place through self-help groups (SHGs), which once established could create savings and avail of banking facilities. At least one SHG member was required to be literate for this purpose and she or he could also read and share picture-rich materials with the group. Follow-up, through monitoring and evaluation, demonstrated that this indeed was happening and that production processes could be better shared when written documents were distributed through Aqua Shops and stored in villages where specifics, that may have been forgotten if shared

orally, could be re-checked before being implemented. Through the STREAM Initiative's network of communications hubs, Aqua Shops also began to develop in other parts of Asia too, including Vietnam (with bilateral donor support) and in Pakistan through an NGO in Gujranwala.

Meanwhile, 5,500 kilometers away from eastern India in Western Kenya Province bordering Lake Victoria, where fish is an important component of the diet, depleted lake fish stocks had led to price rises and diminished access to fish for poorer members of communities. The Kenyan government had responded with a program supporting the building of fish ponds with a view to promoting fish farming. The availability of production infrastructure for aquaculture represented one likely challenge to be addressed, yet as our experience in eastern India had shown, those who would be fish farmers would also need good access to equipment, inputs, services and information. By picking up a telephone, one of us "cold-called" an international NGO supporting farmers in Africa, active in the Lake Victoria region but new to fish farming and unaware of the Aqua Shops approach. The objective was to gauge their interest in playing a role alongside government efforts to help build what might become a critical mass sufficient to stimulate local aquaculture to help to supply the market for fish.

Thus it was that the notion that the Aqua Shops idea may be relevant to the situation in Western Kenya was pitched by us (the original researchers) and an interested international NGO to the donor that had funded the original research and was now looking at improving the uptake of the "best bets" from its development research. One of us and a colleague from the NGO bravely agreed to take part in the donor's event in Nairobi that was loosely based on the popular British TV format *Dragons' Den*, where budding entrepreneurs get three minutes to pitch their business ideas to five multimillionaires who are willing to invest their own cash to kick-start the businesses. After each pitch, the Dragons have the opportunity to ask questions about the venture. In this case, the "dragons" were administering development assistance, and the "entrepreneurs" were research leaders promoting their findings. Our pitch was to provide an opportunity for the Aqua Shop concept to jump across the Arabian Sea and land near to the new fish ponds being developed in Western Kenya. Despite our misgivings about the process, somehow the pitch found its "dragon" and an opportunity was opened up to support a process that would begin with six real Kenyan entrepreneurs undertaking an intensive training process around the Aqua Shops concept.

Investigating the "transfer of a technology"

Our team began coming together over several months of visits to villages, farms, shops, research stations and local, district and national government offices. Every now and then our travels were punctuated by a stop at locations such as a fish barbeque restaurant on Lake Victoria near Kisumu in Western Kenya. Lake tilapia as large as dinner plates were displayed on racks, awaiting customers' orders for them to be grilled, then smothered in a spicy sauce of greens and tomatoes, and served alongside the Kenyan grain-based staple of *ugali* (see Figure 9.1). We also found ourselves at other times in conversation with and learning from such colleagues as members of a fish farming cluster group, while walking among their ponds in Nyakach District. Other visits were made to so-called agro-dealers/stockists (e.g., agriculture cooperatives and other ventures) (see



FIGURE 9.1 A roadside tilapia restaurant on Lake Victoria, Western Kenya Province

Figure 9.2), with displays of wall posters showing the partners working together there and extension messages about specific crops and products, set among shelves with bags of seeds and fertilizers, rows of tools and other farming implements, and soil and water testing kits. And then there were the serious-minded – though laughter-filled – hours spent in workshop settings that were also graced with prayers, singing, clapping and enthusiastic movement.

“We” were representatives of the partner organizations – an Africa-focused UK-based international NGO, two private development consulting companies, and a UK-based university – with an obligation to report back to local, district and national levels of government in Kenya. We were working together on an aquaculture development initiative – using a case study format – that aimed to build services through an Aqua Shop micro-franchise scheme, by developing and sharing of best practices and by taking steps towards a supportive policy environment. The Aqua Shops were intended to be hubs for commercial and small-scale fish farmers to conveniently access aquaculture inputs, technical support and links to markets. The initiative was also meant to support the development and provision of packages of information essential to profitable and sustainable aquaculture enterprises. It built on the research conducted in India (see Chapter 5) to develop effective ways to encourage the private sector to drive the growth of the aquaculture sector and to create private-public partnerships in service provision, through the Aqua Shops. The work involved piloting a franchise model to promote



FIGURE 9.2 Open for business

aquaculture, to address constraints faced by fish farmers in Kenya, and to meet the growing demand for fresh fish.

The initiative's three components were to:

- 1 Build Aqua Shop franchises and services that resulted in up to six locations in Kenya, with up to six out-grower groups (fifteen members) associated with each, for a total of up to 1,000 farmer-clients
- 2 Share best practices in aquaculture development in relevant languages to consolidate existing research, improve access to information and links among out-growers, private hatcheries and quality seed and fingerling suppliers and to prospective and current fish farmers in Kenya, and
- 3 Understand the likely policy, structural and regulatory changes to be created or revised to improve opportunities for commercial and small-scale aquaculture development, to contribute to appropriate changes in Kenya.

Our team's focus was on the last of these components and – through the professional connections and relationships that eventuate over time among people working in organizations that do similar work around the world – we had been asked to take a facilitated advocacy approach to what could otherwise be construed as a “transfer of technology”, extending the reach of Aqua Shops into a new country and a new continent.

Engaging people in policy issues

The initiative's third component aimed to engage a spectrum of people who made, or were affected by, policy concerning commercial and small-scale aquaculture and supporting services, to prioritize changes in policy, structure and regulations that would enable the aquaculture sector in Kenya to continue to grow. Our team first visited Nyakach District in Nyanza Province and Samia District in Western Kenya, to meet with farmers, NGOs and government staff to understand their involvement in aquaculture, the support they receive, the impediments they face and the communications in which they engage, in order to elicit their recommendations for policy change (see Figure 9.3). The team then met in Nairobi with officials of the ministry responsible for fisheries to discuss how to proceed in anticipation of two workshops to be held later in the year in the same two districts. The component's specific objectives were to:

- 1 Identify appropriate key informants
- 2 Identify policy issues related to the development of commercial and small-scale aquaculture and supporting services
- 3 Understand and document the different policy perspectives of key informants at cluster, district and regional levels, and
- 4 Identify and engage representatives of particular communities, farmer associations and service providers to produce more in-depth documentation of their experiences of service provision and recommendations for change (toward the second component).

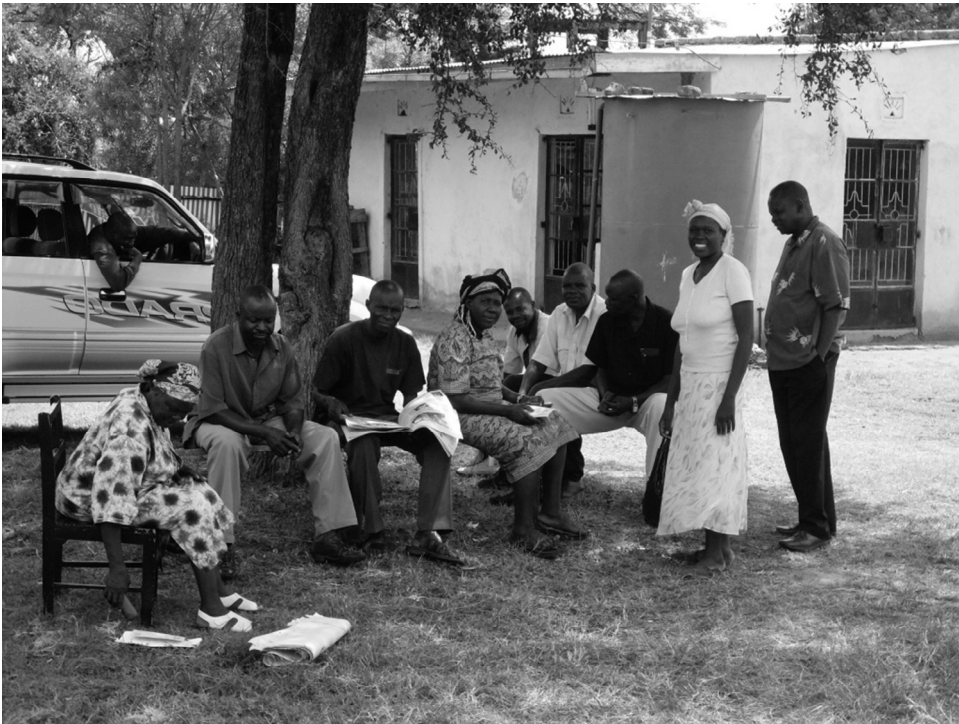


FIGURE 9.3 In conversation outside the local meeting hall

It was anticipated that the emergent Aqua Shop franchises – after receiving adequate support and capacity building – would continue operating as successful, commercially viable, stand-alone enterprises.

Key informants were identified at cluster, district and regional levels to represent people who had a direct involvement or interest in aquaculture and supporting services, from among:

- Aquaculturists (local, non-local, private, corporate)
- Processors, wholesalers and retailers
- Fry, fingerling, seed and broodstock producers and suppliers
- Feed manufacturers and suppliers
- Drug, chemical and equipment manufacturers and suppliers
- Fishers, farmers and local residents close to or adjacent to aquaculture farms or sites
- Other water resource users
- Government planners in aquaculture, agriculture, fisheries and coastal zone management
- Government aquaculturists
- Extension workers
- Aquaculture researchers
- Aquaculture development project workers, and
- Contributors of financial and technical resources (government, donors, banks and other sponsors)

The workshops and their outcomes

The process involved key informants attending the two district-based workshops as the primary method of identifying issues and understanding perspectives. The interactions were structured around this set of focus questions that had emerged from the first site visit in Nyakach District and the subsequent discussions with government officials in Nairobi:

- 1 What is your *involvement* in aquaculture (commercial and/or small-scale), its development, and/or service provision for aquaculture?
- 2 From your perspective, what has already been *supportive* of aquaculture development and/or service provision for aquaculture, in terms of government policy, public and private structures, and the regulatory environment?
- 3 From your perspective, what have been *impediments* to aquaculture development and/or service provision for aquaculture, in terms of government policy, public and private structures, and the regulatory environment?
- 4 What policy, structure or regulatory *changes* would have a positive impact on aquaculture development and/or service provision for aquaculture?
- 5 In what ways can there be more constructive *engagement and communication* among you, government officials and private sector representatives?

These questions and associated tasks were introduced and the participants were randomly assigned to focus groups to discuss and compile their responses to the questions (see

Figure 9.4). Following the initial presentations by groups in a plenary session, feedback was provided and a final poster of recommendations was produced to share on the final day of the workshop with selected representatives of NGOs and government fisheries offices.

The combined recommendations for change from the workshop participants in both Nyakach and Samia were eventually conveyed to policy-makers through the communication channels that the initiative had established with government colleagues. The recommendations fell into a variety of categories (such as the examples in italics below) that demonstrated the range of issues of concern to a diverse group of stakeholders.

Public-private partnerships could be incentivized by government to attract investors into aquaculture businesses and other aquaculture-related activities, such as constructing fish processing facilities (e.g., filleting machines) at district level for value-addition, and assisting local entrepreneurs to set up Aqua Shops.

To *create awareness*, aquaculture should be promoted as a serious commercial venture by government. Provincial level officials could educate communities on the importance of fish farming and promote it as a business, while also making efforts to sensitize the public about environmental conservation and the proper utilization of buffer zones and water sources to avoid animal-human conflict.

Land issues that need to be resolved include the funding and construction of ponds on leased land for specified periods, or on individuals' pieces of land, and whether pond location should be the responsibility of the local fisheries officer. Government also needs to review policies on land ownership and the development of wetlands into production areas.



FIGURE 9.4 Another conversation near the fish ponds

There is a need to review *water management* policies, since the more ponds that are built for fish farming, the more complicated the water and land pollution issues will become. Farmers should be encouraged to use harvested rain water to raise fish at home, with pond lining used in dry areas. Reservoir dams can provide water during droughts and water should not be chlorinated at source so as to be suitable for fish ponds.

Facilities that are needed include fish hatcheries, fry and fingerling production centers, cold storage and fish feed plants. These should be located strategically within the districts so that they are close to farmers and help to stabilize prices. Farmers should be encouraged to produce and source *seed and inputs* freely according to the opportunities for profitability. With regards to wider *market* issues, government should continue to waive taxes on fish feed to reduce production cost and reduce taxes on aquaculture inputs to promote aquaculture development (as it has done in other poverty reduction initiatives). Government and farmers should come together to develop a reliable fish marketing system by protecting fish farmers from fish hawkers, building post-harvest handling capacity and initiating measures to enter distant and international markets.

Farmers should strengthen their *common interest groups* at local levels by forming community clusters or cooperatives. These could be registered, open bank accounts and set up savings and loan arrangements, while individuals should also continue to farm on their own if they so choose. Such groups can also help to address cultural issues, e.g., sons having to build homes outside of the local community, scale-less fish not being eaten by some Christians, and lake fish being considered better than farmed fish.

There is a need for more investment in and improvement to *extension services and information dissemination*, including provision of more technical extension officers, programs and learning materials to meet the needs of farmers. Capacity building and education for both extension officers and farmers should be provided by government and NGOs, although existing training institutions need to be upgraded and new ones set up to train fish farmers on current farming methods and to be trainers themselves.

Financial services can be improved through strengthened collaborations among institutions so that financial support is available to farmers, with clear lending policies and better access to micro-finance that motivate, promote and sustain aquaculture businesses. Above all, the government should not pull out of the implementation of the economic stimulus program and should increase its funding in potential areas such as aquaculture.

What we learned

The “technology” of providing services to fish farmers through Aqua Shops was thought to be appropriate and then a process was put into place to ensure that it fitted in with what was already happening. This occurred in part by allowing several layers of stakeholders to cumulatively generate a set of focus questions that were ultimately posed and responded to by individuals in the communities that would both be affected by and benefit from eventual changes to policy and practice. The international NGO has since helped to establish 56 franchised One-Stop Aqua Shops that provide training, quality tools and feed, and act as sales outlets for more than 7,500 local farmers who increasingly see fish farming as a viable and profitable business.