

Q&A: Asian program advances aquaculture education

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By *Neil Ray*, SeafoodSource contributing editor, reporting from Bangkok

18 October, 2010 – The European Union–Asia Link program is based in Pathunthani, near Bangkok, Thailand. Part of the organization's aim is to offer internships to those interested in fish farming, in an effort to improve aquaculture education. The graduates coming to work on a research program have a unique opportunity to learn and help. SeafoodSource talked to Dr. Ram C. Bhujel, the program's coordinator, about how it works:

Ray: How does the EU–Asia Link program work?

Dr. Bhujel: The Asia Link program was one of the EU's popular programs for international cooperation, especially designed to strengthen the ties between EU and Asian countries. Under this program, research, academic and SMEs of Europe and Asia work together for their specific project. It's all on a competitive basis. This particular Asia Link program ran about five to six years. However, there are other similar types of programs ongoing. The EU countries were helping developing countries individually, but they found the impact is not so significant in order to tackle the world problem. They realized that they need concerted efforts.

What's your role with the Asia Link program?

I am serving as coordinator. The Asian Institute of Technology is hosting it, and that started in 2005 with the partners in UK (University of Stirling, Scotland), Portugal (University Aveiro), Nepal (Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science), Bangladesh (Bangladesh Agriculture University) and Vietnam (Research Institute for Aquaculture No. 1, Hanoi and Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City). There are actually two programs combined as a part of the program to improve aquaculture education.

At the end of an internship, do the students make recommendations based on their research?

Yes, interns write reports and submit to me including about their stories, describe what they have learned, how that will be valuable for their future career and also suggest some practical way of improving it further.

How relevant is this to small fish farmers?

It all depends on how the group proposes the program. Research can be done to assist small-scale

farmers such as in Nepal. We are supporting more than 300 families to produce fish for their family consumption and sell surplus fish to earn some income. They are in groups and cooperatives. Interns go there and help farmers and, at the same time, they learn from them.

Where is most of the research conducted?

Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand and Vietnam at the moment, but some of our work we did in the past in Cambodia and Laos as well.

Is this an ongoing program with regular funding? Do you have to reapply for funding?

I have to reapply. It was nearly a EUR 1 million project, but it is going to end this December. During this period, we had a plan to support certain number of students of Asia and also Europe with this program running. One of the main issues for getting approval is that of its sustainability beyond the project period. The internship experience I am offering could be a life-changing experience.