Economic Status of Brackishwater and Freshwater Operators: Case study of Aquaculture Industry in Malaysia

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Aquaculture has been identified as one of the potential growth sector that could contribute to national income, export earnings as well as poverty eradication in Malaysia. Brackishwater and freshwater productions were identified as activities potentially able to eradicate poverty Poverty issue especially in rural area is gender related. Hence this study was conducted to investigate the economic status (as measured by household income) at the household level of operators involved in brackishwater and freshwater aquaculture. The study involved 154 men of which 79% were farming brackishwater species and 21% were farming freshwater species.The majority (37.1%) were operating fishponds, 53% were operating cages and less than 10% had both cages and ponds. The mean age of the respondents was 42.4 years old and more than half work fulltime as aquaculturist while the other 45% were part-time. The data revealed that the mean monthly earning from brackishwater was significantly higher (RM 1,790.47) compared to freshwater aquaculturist (RM 1,052.78). There was significant difference in income among part timers compared to full time operators. Those part-timers tend to have low earning (RM1,362.30) from aquaculture activities compared to those working full time (RM1,888.99). Half of the respondents had household income below RM1,500 which was considered as low income. Almost three quarters (74%) of the freshwater aquacultutist compared to 49% of brackishwater aquaculturist in the study earned below RM1500 from their aquaculture activities. The proportion of respondents with savings was high (92%) and the mean saving reported by 113 respondents was RM3,125. The respondents spent on the average RM486 monthly for food; and on average the respondents spent 38% of their monthly household income on food. The data revealed that more than half of the respondents spent more than 33% of their household income on food. This is an indicator of poverty among respondents in this study as food poverty line proposed by Orshansky (1963-65). In general, the economic status of those involved in aquaculture in this study is generally low with half of the respondents earning below RM 1,500, which always been expected as ‘high income activity’ especially the brackishwater, because aquaculture has been identified as one of the potentially lucrative endeavour. Further study is needed to cover a wider population to provide a better picture and such data can also be used as input into the development of more effective strategies to eradication poverty through scaling up the aquaculture activities.