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Aligning fisheries aid with international development targets and goals

Robert Blasiak[a,b,*], Colette C.C. Wabnitz[c]

[a] Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University, Kräftriket 2B, 114 18 Stockholm, Sweden
[b] Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, The University of Tokyo, 1-1-1 Yayoi, Bunkyo-ku, 113-8657 Tokyo, Japan
[c] Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, The University of British Columbia, 2202 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T1Z4

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ABSTRACT

Official development assistance (ODA) is intended to spur progress and increase security among recipient countries. Billions in ODA have been allocated to fisheries to support nutrition and livelihoods worldwide. Yet, from 2010 to 2015, fisheries allocations decreased by > 30%, while grants for non-fisheries sectors increased by > 13%. Globally, grants for climate change adaptation and mitigation fell for fisheries, while rapidly increasing in sectors like agriculture and forestry. In Oceania, a region highly dependent on fisheries for food security and particularly vulnerable to climate change, disbursements fell by 44%. Grants for fisheries research, education and training fell in absolute numbers, and as a proportion of total ODA to fisheries. These findings are out of alignment with recent international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), The Future We Want (2012), and relevant Aichi Targets (2010). Risk aversion among donors; redirection of climate finance into other sectors; and allocation decisions based on factors unrelated to fisheries are identified as contributing to observed findings. Increasing the volume of fisheries-related ODA and better aligning it with international commitments could bring substantial co-benefits and contribute to the sustainable use of marine ecosystems, support sustainable trade and economic opportunities, increase adaptive capacity, and foster human well-being.

1. Introduction

The importance of capture fisheries and aquaculture for income, food security and livelihoods, and the severity of the challenges faced by these sectors, particularly in small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), have contributed to their prominent inclusion in recent international policy documents. In 2010, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including multiple targets focused on marine ecosystems. Two years later, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the “Future We Want”. This document dedicates 20 paragraphs specifically to “oceans”– more than any other thematic issue – with commitments such as to “assist developing countries […] to sustainably manage and realize the benefits of sustainable fisheries” (paragraph 174). In 2015, similar language was used in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 14 entirely dedicated to Life Below Water. Sub-targets include to, “by 2030, increase the economic benefits to [SIDS] and [LDCs] from the sustainable use of marine resources” (SDG 14.7) and “increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology” (SDG 14.A). (See Supplementary Table S1 for an extended list of international commitments related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources).

This growing focus on marine issues within the international community is understandable, for fisheries and aquaculture supply some 17% of animal protein and provide livelihoods to an estimated 12% of the world's population [1]. Yet, capture fisheries suffer from over-capitalization and over-capacity, with a shrinking number of developing stocks, and none considered undeveloped [2]. In recent decades, the increase in fish supply has been supported by aquaculture, which surpassed capture fisheries in production volumes for the first time in 2014 [3]. However, today's production and distribution patterns, and the human and technological capacity limitations faced by many developing countries, indicate that aquaculture may not be able to support food security where it will be most threatened in the future [4,5]. In addition, both sectors, particularly capture fisheries, are threatened by climate change [6–8]. Warming temperatures, declining oxygen concentrations, pH and primary production, are projected to lead to shifts in the distribution, productivity and resilience of fish stocks across the Exclusive Economic Zones of many of the world's poorest countries [9,10]. Associated declines in fisheries catch potential are likely to have a marked negative impact on the availability of and

* Corresponding author at: Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University, Kräftriket 2B, 114 18 Stockholm, Sweden.
E-mail addresses: robert.blasiak@su.se (R. Blasiak), c.wabnitz@oceans.ubc.ca (C.C.C. Wabnitz).

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access to fish, in turn affecting countries' food security, livelihoods, gross domestic product, and marine tourism industry [11–17].

One option for the international community to translate words into action is through the allocation of official development assistance (ODA). Since its definition in 1972, ODA has been a key metric of support provided by donors to achieve development cooperation targets [18]. It encompasses assistance from official agencies, aimed at promoting economic development and welfare in eligible countries and territories, either bilaterally or through multilateral institutions as defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (e.g., World Bank, United Nations agencies) [19]. While an aspirational target to provide ODA at a rate of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) remains unmet by the majority of the DAC member states [20], the total volume of ODA has been increasing for decades [18]. In 2016, preliminary figures showed a record total of USD142.6 billion in ODA being disbursed to support the implementation of projects around the world – an increase of 7.1% compared to 2015 [21,22]. ODA is a key source of finance for many of the world's least developed countries, despite its contentiousness due in part to concerns about creating dependency, and the varied motivations of donor countries [18,23–25].

The following study assesses (i) whether the wealth of recent commitments to advancing marine issues has been reflected in ODA allocations to the capture fisheries and aquaculture sector; and (ii) whether an increase in climate change related projects has been observed over time, given that ODA allocations are considered one of the primary global mechanisms to mitigate against and build adaptive capacity to the impacts of climate change [26,27].

2. Methods

This study considers recent trends in ODA allocations to support the fisheries sector in the 146 ODA recipient countries and territories around the world – defined according to per capita income levels [28] (Supplementary Table S2). OECD reporting on ODA combines capture fisheries and aquaculture under the single category of "fisheries", and this same umbrella term is used throughout the remainder of this paper for the sake of consistency. The analysis draws on accounting data provided through the OECD Creditor Reporting System from 2010 until 2015, the most recent year in the system. The year 2010 was selected as it marked the point at which a series of standardized project markers were mainstreamed, enabling further analysis based on the classification of projects according to their primary objectives (e.g., "gender equality" or "climate adaptation") [29]. The OECD Creditor Reporting System encompasses both bilateral and multilateral aid – both of which are included in this research. The OECD DAC has taken particular steps to avoid double-counting of financial flows by providing reporting distinctions for bilateral ODA as well as core contributions to multilateral organizations and earmarked ODA to be channelled through multilateral organizations [29]. Some caveats are necessary regarding what constitutes ODA, which encompasses grants, soft loans (having at least a 25% grant element) and the provision of technical assistance [21]. First, by definition ODA excludes aid from DAC members to countries that are not included on the list of recipient countries. As such, transfers of funds to dependent territories, including for instance, New Caledonia (France), Guam (USA), Pitcairn (UK), and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (USA), while significant, are not included in the dataset. Second, funds that are transferred for purposes other than development or welfare, towards the military, for instance, are also excluded. Third, Chinese development assistance is not reflected in the OECD data [30].

Statistics are available from OECD for both ODA commitments and actual ODA disbursements. Commitments are recorded in full in the year they are made, despite disbursal of financial resources, goods and services often extending across multiple years. Commitments also exceeded actual disbursements by between 5.6% and 19.7% from 2007 until 2015, with the largest gap coinciding with the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 [21] and the subsequent decision by some countries not to follow through with stated commitments [31]. Therefore, this analysis draws exclusively on records of annual disbursements of ODA, and uses current prices (fixed to 2015 levels using OECD deflators) rather than constant prices. Loans and 'other' non-grant forms of ODA were also excluded as such flows typically mark one-off transfers and are not indicative of multi-year trends (e.g., a USD 306 million export credit in 2014 to the Philippines to rebuild fisheries after Typhoon Yolanda [32]). Extended trends could provide better indications of whether ODA allocations to fisheries projects are being influenced by international commitments.

Over the past decade a growing number of non-DAC member states, most prominently the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, have started to report ODA grants, which totalled over USD 14.5 billion in 2015 (more than 11% of all grants disbursed in 2015) [21]. Countries from outside the DAC membership are therefore an increasingly important element in the donor landscape, and all reported flows from both DAC and non-DAC countries have been included in this research [33].

To contextualise our results and provide explanatory narrative beyond arguments outlined in the literature, which is limited, a number of ad hoc and informal unstructured interviews were conducted with key donors, asking them for their insights on the findings of this study.

3. Results

Grants for development cooperation projects in the fisheries sector have fallen considerably in recent years. In 2015, a total of 814 projects with a funding volume of USD166 million were reported; a change of −30.6% from 2010. The trend is more conspicuous when contrasted with the 13.3% increase in total volume of ODA grants over the same period, and increases for the agriculture and forestry sectors (Fig. 1). Decreases in ODA grants for fisheries were likewise evident across regional groupings, with the largest changes in the Americas (−70.5%), Asia (−49.5%) and Oceania (−43.8%) (Fig. 2). Countries in Africa saw a slower rate of decline (−16.1%), and continued to be recipients of roughly half of ODA grants for fisheries projects.

In addition to the decrease in funding volumes, there has been a change in the focus of fisheries ODA. Financial flows are classified in the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) according to purpose codes. Under the overall code for Fisheries (313), there are five sub-categories for "fishing policy and administrative management" (CRS code 31310),

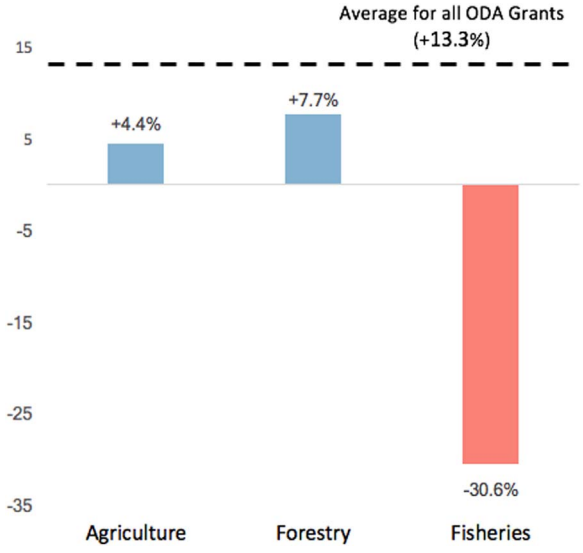

Fig. 1. Percentage change (2010–2015) in the overall value of ODA grants to production sectors.