

Aid for oceans and fisheries in developing world drops by 30%

Sustainable fisheries make good sense for jobs, nutrition, and climate change resilience¹

Financial aid to fisheries in developing countries has declined by 30% between 2010 and 2015, finds a new study from University of British Columbia (UBC) and Stockholm Resilience Centre researchers, published in the journal Marine Policy.² Projects focusing on climate issues in fisheries had a 77% decline over the five years studied.

“Sustainable fisheries make good economic sense not only as a source of employment and regular catches, but also because of their nutritional value,” said co-author Colette Wabnitz, Research Associate at UBC’s Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries and the Nippon Foundation – UBC Nereus Program. “Investments in small-scale, sustainable fisheries enhance climate change resilience and give vulnerable communities access to healthy food while preserving traditional diets”, she added.

These sustainable food sources also limit the spread and prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases. Fisheries and aquaculture supply 17% of animal protein and provide livelihoods to 12% of the world’s population. Official development assistance (ODA), commonly known as aid, is financial assistance to the developing world. From 2010 to 2015, ODA levels increased by over 13% to USD 133 billion, with further increases in 2016 and 2017. Yet, funding to fisheries projects in Oceania dropped by almost half.

“Demonstrating tangible results in fisheries as a result of donor support is often more difficult in oceans than it is on land,” said co-author Robert Blasiak, postdoctoral researcher at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and a Nippon Foundation Nereus Program Fellow.

ODA funds are used to help people fish more sustainably, protect the environment, and create better jobs. These funds are used in fisheries for varied projects, including undertaking research, supporting policy, providing equipment, and training and capacity building. Practical research could, for example, focus on how to improve fishers’ access to less vulnerable stocks, and transfer fishing effort away from vulnerable ecosystems such as coral reefs to less threatened open ocean stocks, with strategically located fish aggregating devices (FADs).

“The types of projects are vast and include testing water quality and measuring ocean acidification, improving marketplaces; offering training and research opportunities for local staff; and providing solar-powered fridges to remote communities to reduce spoilage and losses,” said Wabnitz. “According to our research, fisheries ODA has also increasingly been channelled towards improving policy and monitoring as well as management rather than fishery development.”

Small Island Developing States that rely heavily on fisheries for food security, livelihoods, customs, and culture, will be particularly impacted by this loss of funding aid. Coastal communities in low-income countries are especially reliant on the micronutrients provided by fish. Many of the small Pacific islands have minimal land area and cannot turn to agriculture for their nutritional requirements.

“Fish supplies 50 to 90% of the animal protein to Pacific Island rural communities diets,” said Wabnitz.

Research can improve understanding of the future impacts of climate change on fish stocks and link results from modelling work with on-the-ground monitoring and assessment efforts to improve adaptation strategies.

“Tremendous advances in modelling have made it possible to identify countries that will be particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Science is enabling practical action to prioritise the most vulnerable areas, in line with stated international commitments,” said Blasiak. “Fisheries are at the nexus of health, nutrition, livelihoods, and economic security; if aid can help to get fisheries ‘right’, the positive impacts will extend into lots of areas.”

While recent activities appear to show promise in increasing funding allocations for oceans and fisheries, it is up to the international community to ensure that ODA allocations for fisheries under climate change are in line with international development goals and targets.

About the Nippon Foundation-UBC Nereus Program

The Nereus Program, a collaboration between the Nippon Foundation and the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries at the University of British Columbia, has engaged in innovative, interdisciplinary ocean research since its inception in 2011. The program is currently a global partnership of 20 leading marine science institutes with the aim of undertaking research that advances our comprehensive understandings of the global ocean systems across the natural and social sciences, from oceanography and marine ecology to fisheries economics and impacts on coastal communities. Visit nereusprogram.org for more information.

¹ Source: <http://oceans.ubc.ca/2018/01/16/aid-for-oceans-and-fisheries-in-developing-world-drops-by-30/>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X17306310>