Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SHAMBA CENTRE for food & climate

The case for the food security and nutrition aid tracker

BACKGROUND NOTE

The case for the food security and nutrition aid tracker

BACKGROUND NOTE

Mali Eber Rose
Research and Policy Analyst, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate

David Laborde
Director, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Lysiane Lefebvre
Senior Policy Advisor, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate

Elsa Olivetti
Research Analyst, FAO

Carin Smaller
Executive Director, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
and
Shamba Centre for Food & Climate

Rome, 2024

Required citation:

Eber Rose, M., Laborde, D., Lefebvre, L., Olivetti, E. & Smaller, C. 2024. *The case for the food security and nutrition aid tracker – Background note.* Rome, FAO and Geneva, Switzerland, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd2832en

ISBN 978-92-5-139217-1 [FAO]

Contents

Abstract

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) Zero Hunger requires a measurable improvement in the quantity and quality of official development assistance (ODA) to food security and nutrition. To achieve this, it is essential to obtain the consensus of donors on how to track, monitor and analyse this ODA. Currently, there is no coherent picture of the resources being spent on food security and nutrition despite a commonly agreed definition of what constitutes food security and nutrition. No single aid tracker provides donors with a tool to comprehensively analyse the quantity and quality of ODA to food security and nutrition that would allow them to improve their current spending. This lack undermines efforts to better coordinate and allocate resources more effectively, and to make decisions based on evidence of the most effective interventions and on countries with the highest priority needs. To progress towards a framework that analyses the data with a view to enable evidence-based decisions, this paper makes the case for the food security and nutrition aid tracker. Informed by two background papers by Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a, 2024b] and extensive consultations with representatives from donor agencies and international organizations, the new tracker will enable better evidence-based decisions and an improved allocation of scarce public financial resources. This process has led to five key recommendations to be implemented in the new tracker:

- Develop country profiles for donors and recipients which enhance the evidence base on which to make decisions.
- Link existing ODA spending to detailed scientific evidence on where resources need to be allocated to support forward-looking decisions.
- Include new, important donors of ODA for food security and nutrition, including China.
- Provide transparency on ODA definitions for food security and nutrition.
- Develop text-mining and tagging to identify resources not captured in standard definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition.

Acknowledgements

The report was prepared by Mali Eber Rose, Research and Policy Analyst, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate; David Laborde, Director, Agrifood Economics and Policy Division (ESA), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Lysiane Lefebvre, Senior Policy Advisor, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate; Elsa Olivetti, Research Analyst, ESA, FAO; and Carin Smaller Executive Director, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate.

This report is an outcome of the Hesat2030 project, which seeks to help policymakers and donors make high-impact decisions based on data. It was made possible through the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The authors would like to thank Daniela Verona, ESA, FAO, for the coordination, design and publication of the report, Natalie Mouyal, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate, for her support, and Barbara Hall, for copy-editing the final version.

1. Introduction

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) Zero Hunger requires a measurable improvement in the quantity and quality of official development assistance (ODA) to food security and nutrition. A central component of that work is obtaining the consensus of donors on how to track, monitor, and analyse ODA to food security and nutrition.

Currently, there is no coherent picture of the financial resources being spent on food security and nutrition. Despite commonly agreed definitions of what constitutes food security and nutrition, different entities use different measures to define the volume of ODA required to achieve food security and nutrition. This creates a great deal of confusion with different definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition yielding vastly divergent estimates of how much is spent. For example, the European Commission uses the broadest definition, and shows a much larger spending of USD 62.6 billion ODA grants for 2021 compared to the G7, which uses a much narrower definition and estimates spending at USD 7.1 billion (see Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a]). Ultimately, the lack of consensus on what counts as ODA for food security and nutrition undermines efforts to achieve the SDGs and transform food systems.

Existing aid trackers do not enable donors to comprehensively analyse their spending compared to other donors, nor to understand the extent to which their spending is aligned with the scientific evidence on the most effective ways to achieve food security and nutrition, as committed to in SDG 2. They are also not designed to help donors identify where there is an overconcentration in spending or where there are gaps, neither at the country level nor by intervention area. This undermines efforts to coordinate and allocate resources more effectively, based on the countries with the highest priority needs and the most effective interventions areas in these countries.

To address these problems, this paper makes the case for the development of a platform for donors: the food security and nutrition aid tracker. Informed by two background papers (see Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a, 2024b]), and extensive consultations with representatives from donor agencies and international organizations, the new tracker will enable better evidence-based decisions and an improved allocation of scarce public financial resources.

The new tracker will solve five key problems that are currently not addressed by existing trackers and databases.

First, it will provide the evidence base for donors and recipients on current aid levels and trends, thus enabling donors to make evidence-based decisions and minimize the influence of politics on foreign aid. This will improve donor coordination and maximize the effectiveness of aid resources.

Second, it will link current spending levels to scientific evidence on how resources should be allocated, by country and intervention area, to help donors make forward-looking decisions based on strategic gaps or an overconcentration of donor projects.

Third, it will incorporate data on aid flows from non-traditional yet increasingly important donors for food security and nutrition, such as China, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of aid for food security and nutrition.

Fourth, it will bring transparency to the various definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition, contributing to ongoing discussions on the need for convergence on how to measure ODA for food security and nutrition.

Fifth, the tracker will use text-mining and tagging to identify resources not captured in definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition in order to ensure that estimated volumes of aid for food security and nutrition are not bound by binary administrative reporting approaches.

The food security and nutrition aid tracker will thus offer a comprehensive and analytical overview of the ODA flows that have an impact on food security and nutrition. Ultimately, the analysis included in the tool will be used to make the case for more and better ODA for food security and nutrition in the most effective intervention areas and for the countries with the highest priority needs. The new tracker will therefore contribute towards the broader realization of SDG 2.

2. Supporting evidence-based decisions and minimizing the influence of politics on foreign aid

Making evidence-based strategy and policy decisions in the allocation of aid is critical in the face of complex multidimensional food security and nutrition challenges and increasingly constrained aid budgets. Donors face the difficult job of allocating limited resources more effectively to maximize impact. Obtaining accurate data and evidence is the first step for such efficiency gains. Donors need a clear, simple, timely and accurate picture of their expenditure profile and where resources are spent, both at a country level and at an intervention area or project level. Importantly, they need to understand current spending levels in terms of their own budgets, compared to the budgets of other donors (both public and private) and to historical trends. Without this information, donors cannot identify gaps in current portfolios and formulate policy and projects to cover them. Currently, this comprehensive and strategic picture is missing, or only available years after the decisions need to be made.

Furthermore, given current geo-political tensions, there is a shift back to the influence of politics on aid priorities and programmes of donors. In consultations, donors expressed that there has been a broad and ongoing shift towards the use of aid for domestic and geo-political interests.

> "There has been a massive culture shift in the aid community. It's significantly more concerned with geo-strategic matters and influence, and soft diplomacy than 10 years ago.[…] Senior executives are not interested in development for its own success; they are looking to use development budgets to advance geo-political interests. This broad cultural shift is still playing out and hasn't reached its final point yet."
>
> Donor representative

In other cases, however, the intention may be less about geo-political interests, but remains tied to politics. The support of politicians and taxpayers is central to maintaining or growing aid budgets. As a result, allocation decisions may be based on what makes a good case study, story or photo opportunity, as opposed to what the evidence shows would be the most effective use of public resources. Political interests and commitments are increasingly driving aid policy. For example, donor commitments and alignment with multilateral agreements on climate change and/or biodiversity are increasingly the major impetus for mobilizing ODA investments.

> "You have no idea how our whole ODA budget is stretched and fixed around commitments. There will be a wall of 30 different commitments, and every single project has to fit to a corporate portfolio. It is most difficult when the commitment is a proportion of the budget, for example, the G7 commitment to spend 10 percent of ODA on education, or 100 million for biodiversity finance."
>
> Donor representative

The consequence of political influence on aid budgets can also be an incentive to interpret the available data more flexibly. Senior managers and politicians, for example, may want to use flexible language and coding to enable funding envelopes to cover a larger range of issues and codes, leading to an exaggeration of the scale of resources

available. For example, it emerged from a consultation that the language of Target 10 in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework specifies that the sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry, and the sustainable use of biodiversity include "a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification" (Convention on Biological Diversity [2022], p.10). Due to this language, projects coded under agriculture (311) that contribute to sustainable intensification now meet biodiversity finance criteria. Although this has been opposed by environmentalists who seek to create new funding streams, it creates greater flexibility for politicians and donors in the range of projects they can introduce while meeting their biodiversity financing targets. In this way, political preferences can override the scientific evidence on the need for increased resources towards a given area, enabled by the flexible interpretation of data and coding practices.

Therefore, it cannot simply be assumed that the provision of better evidence will lead to better decision making, larger aid budgets, and more effective disbursement of aid. While ODA budgets are partly decided by the evidence of effective interventions and priority countries, the influence of politics, which is intrinsically linked to aid, cannot be ignored. Evidence determines what is proposed from the bottom up, but politics and policy decisions from the top down have considerable influence on investment decisions.

Nonetheless, a stronger evidence base is one of the best tools to deter the influence of politics on aid budgets. While the influence of politics will never be separated from aid allocation, a better understanding of where resources are allocated at a country and intervention level will provide technical advisers with a stronger evidence base on which to make the case for strategic policy interventions and decisions. Donors interviewed for this report overwhelmingly said that there was a need for a tool to enable them to conduct a comprehensive and analytical overview of the ODA that contributes to food security and nutrition.

TRACKER SOLUTION: Providing country profiles for donors and recipients that enhance the evidence base on which to make decisions

The new tracker will provide country profiles that analyse, from both the recipient and donor perspective, the portfolio of spending over time. Both the overall and disaggregated spending will be shown to provide insights into how donor spending is changing and where there are areas of opportunity. In short, donors will be able to view and analyse their own spending profile, compare it to that of other donors, both by recipient country and intervention area, and analyse historical trends.

Of the 19 trackers reviewed in Eber Rose *et al.* (2024b), it was found that most included some form of donor and recipient profiles, but with varying levels of analysis, narrative and data visualizations, and a different selection of countries, multilaterals and philanthropies. The new tracker will include dashboards, presenting the quantitative data as well as qualitative analyses for all official bilateral donors and recipients, as per the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) database, and the major private and philanthropic sources included in the OECD DAC. New donors will also be included (see Section 4).

These country profiles will be standardized and automatically populated with data from the tracker, highlighting key numbers for each. This will allow donors to monitor their own spending over time according to the recipient country and intervention area. Users will be able to see the flow of resources from a specific donor or in a specific recipient country, for specific years, and according to a specific intervention area. This will enable donors to see whether there is an overconcentration of investments in their own investment portfolio by recipient country and/or intervention area. Uniquely, there will be a more advanced capability for donors to monitor their own resources spent by the recipient country and intervention area compared to one or multiple other donors. This will allow donors to better understand where there is an overconcentration of or gaps in resources for specific countries and specific intervention areas on a global scale. For example, it will enable donors to observe if they are, individually or collectively, funding dozens of irrigation projects in Malawi, and therefore need to better coordinate at the country level.

> "There is a drive for evidence-based decision making in the context of limited ODA, and this tracker would be very helpful in this regard."
>
> Donor representative

The consulted stakeholders stated that, by providing donors an insight into their expenditure profile and also providing a broader picture of where resources are allocated at a country and intervention level, donors can identify strategic gaps in current portfolios and formulate policy and projects to cover them. As expressed by one donor, there are field offices almost everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, South America and Asia, and the analysis offered by the platform would be very important and useful in informing policy approaches and strategy. More broadly, the tool would assist donors in identifying potential partners with whom to collaborate on a given project or country/intervention focus, enabling greater donor coordination and the effective use of resources. Essentially, donors said that it would assist them in identifying what is needed in terms of ODA and in structuring themselves to meet these emerging needs.

> "(The tracker) would help us look at whether our expenditure profile was sufficient or different to others, and advocate for greater resources or changes in the investment profile in what we do. It would be useful to know what others are spending and where they are spending it because it would inform how we engage with them."
>
> Donor representative

Ultimately, in having a more comprehensive understanding of their current budgets, the platform will provide a basis on which to encourage donors to disburse ODA aligned to priority countries and intervention areas, as opposed to political preferences. This would promote a better disbursement of future ODA in order to maximize effectiveness in achieving food security and nutrition.

3. Forward-looking aid decisions

Better evidence on how to spend aid is not merely about offering insight into existing expenditure trends; it is about trying to inform real-time and forward-looking expenditure decisions. One of the key challenges with the current OECD DAC data is the two-year lag in publishing data. Consequently, most of the existing trackers only present and analyse information that is already dated. There is currently no tracker offering a real-time or forward-looking perspective, although the dashboard of the Global Alliance on Food Security (GAFS, 2023) has tried to rectify this gap, particularly with data on humanitarian spending.

Information dating back two years has limited relevance to real-time decisions and is often too outdated to influence politics and priorities. For example, outdated data on the allocations and trends of spending on food security or climate change are unlikely to enable policymakers to make statements or proposals on what should be done regarding them in real time and in response to crises. In order to best support evidence-based decision making, especially in the absence of timely data, existing patterns in spending need to be linked to scientific evidence on the priority countries and most effective intervention areas. Hence, forward-looking evidence on how financial resources can most effectively be used.

To support government efforts, considerable research efforts have been undertaken to augment the evidence base and inform policy decisions regarding the use of public resources to achieve the SDGs. Research efforts have reviewed the extensive literature on the variety of interventions that contribute towards ending hunger and malnutrition, and combined it with economic modelling to estimate the additional public investment needed to achieve SDG 2. To date, there have been eight costing exercises with estimates of the additional average cost to end hunger and malnutrition ranging from USD 86 billion to over USD 4 trillion by 2030 (El Harty and Smaller, 2024; FAO, 2015; Laborde, Parent and Smaller, 2021; Laborde and Torero, 2023; Mason-D'Croz *et al.*, 2019; Shekar *et al.*, 2017; The Food and Land Use Coalition, 2019; ZEF and FAO, 2020). The difference in estimates is mostly due to differences in the objectives, timeframe, guiding questions and investment strategies considered, as well as the modelling assumptions made. While the findings vary, ultimately, the resulting body of scientific literature proposing what needs to be done and how much needs to be spent to achieve SDG 2 should be used to support forward-looking decisions.

It is important to not solely concentrate analyses on the high-level investment gaps related to food security and nutrition. As noted by one donor during consultations, focusing on the current levels of investment and comparing them to what is needed to achieve a given development objective can be damaging to the dialogue surrounding aid and development efforts, creating a sense of despair over insurmountable issues.

Furthermore, in looking only at the volume of resource flows, there is the risk of entering into competition over the amount of aid rather than its value and impact. To avoid these issues, a forward-looking analysis of where ODA needs to be allocated should be conducted at a granular level, by intervention, country, and ideally, project level, using the best available quantitative and qualitative evidence.

TRACKER SOLUTION: Linking existing ODA spending to detailed scientific evidence on where resources need to be allocated to enable forward-looking decisions

The profiles in the tracker will provide donors and recipient countries with an analysis of current spending patterns measured against financing needs, as defined by scientific evidence such as *Ceres2030: Sustainable Solutions to End Hunger*, to help identify gaps by country and by intervention area. This will help identify, for example, whether there are any projects to improve storage infrastructure in Burkina Faso, and therefore if there is a need for one or more donors to step in, especially where they may have experience and expertise in the country and/or intervention area.

The tracker is therefore unique in that it will not only show gaps in spending by country and intervention area, but it will also benchmark or measure current spending against where the money needs to be allocated in order to achieve SDG 2. In offering a forward-looking analysis, the tool assists donors in developing ODA priorities and needs, and making evidence-based decisions. None of the reviewed trackers offered any analysis of existing spending patterns compared to evidence on the resources required, either in terms of country or intervention area, to achieve global goals related to food security and nutrition.

4. Incorporating non-traditional aid flows

A further challenge in analysing development finance is the absence of China and other non-traditional donors from the OECD DAC database. Non-traditional donors, such as China and India, are increasingly important sources of development aid, including for food security and nutrition, and yet data on their aid spending are limited. For example, China represented the largest source of bilateral aid loans to African countries between 2009 and 2017, and the volume of Chinese ODA grants for agriculture, forestry and fishing increased from USD 33.9 million in 2007–2009 to USD 69.9 million over 2015–2017 (in constant 2020 USD) (see Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a]). However, the development finance of non-traditional donors is not tracked in the OECD DAC reporting system. As a result of this omission, an analysis of the resources for food security and nutrition solely based on the OECD DAC is incomplete and likely to underestimate the volume of relevant resources.

TRACKER SOLUTION: Including new, important donors of ODA for food security and nutrition, including China

Similar to other trackers, the primary source of data will be the OECD DAC database. However, where possible, the new tracker will complement analyses of the resource flows from official donors in the OECD DAC with data on other important donors.

Specifically, to address the lack of data on Chinese aid, data will be integrated where possible using the methodology of Custer *et al.* (2023). This database systematically tracks and analyses China's Global Chinese Development Finance in accordance with OECD DAC reporting directives. As a result, it provides data on what could be considered "Chinese ODA" and "Chinese Other Official Flows". Incorporating these data will enhance the coverage of the aid flows impacting global food security and nutrition. Where further data sources are found that can complement the analysis of the OECD DAC, they will also be integrated into the food security and nutrition aid tracker.

5. Transparency in defining official development assistance for food security and nutrition

Despite agreed definitions of food security and nutrition, and a common aid database, a common definition to track ODA for food security and nutrition is currently lacking (see Eber Rose *et al.*, [2024a]). The implications of the different definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition are vastly divergent estimates of how much is spent, where it is spent, what it is spent on, and the subsequent analysis of trends and outcomes. The G7, for example, uses a definition based on 31 codes from the OECD DAC, which, between 2019 and 2021, yielded an estimated average of USD 6.9 billion in ODA grants per year for agriculture, fishing, food security and nutrition, whereas the European Commission uses 74 codes, which yielded in an estimated USD 63.8 billion per year. In part, the differences in the definitions are due to the different questions being asked. The G7 definition aims to track resources spent on agriculture and rural development, whereas the European Commission definition tracks resources for food and nutrition security. Indeed, the multiple definitions creates confusion and undermines donor efforts to achieve the SDG 2.

In consultations, some stakeholders were surprised to learn that what they perceived as the basics of food security and nutrition were not applied across donors. Other stakeholders fully agreed with the frustrations and complications caused by the multiple definitions stemming from the OECD DAC coding system while simultaneously reaffirming the necessity of the system (see Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a]).

> "The existing arrangement is not very useful and helpful. We would absolutely utilize and benefit from a metric that was more comprehensive and allowed us to formulate policy in a more evidence-based way."
>
> Donor representative

Nonetheless, most donors stated that while consensus on the definition of ODA to food security and nutrition may be a long-term goal, it is an elusive one. This is partly due to the political nature of defining ODA for food security and nutrition, and the implications of different definitions on the perceived standing of a certain donor or the size of their portfolio (see Eber Rose *et al.*, [2024a]).

One of the key issues that emerged when considering the various definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition is the significant impact of whether or not short-term humanitarian assistance was included in a given definition. On this topic and the complementarity of long-term and short-term assistance, donors diverged significantly. Some donors proposed that the difference between emergency food assistance and long-term development is less acknowledged in political spheres and that greater complementarity between the two is needed. They suggested that donors need to better integrate investments in long-term development and resilience building into the disbursement of emergency food assistance in order to help mitigate against future shocks.

> "Increasingly, emergency spending is contributing to the resilience space, and emergency responses are staying in spaces longer to held rebuild after an emergency. In order to leverage the growing pool of emergency food assistance for long-term development, we need to minimize the distinction between the two."
>
> Donor representative

For other donors, there is a clear delineation in the purposes of humanitarian response operations compared to investments in agricultural development and food security: the former addresses immediate crises, while the latter contributes towards long-term development and capacity building. Therefore, while there needs to be a balance in the focus between long- and short-term investments in food security, the two should be kept separate.

> "There is a level of difference and discrepancy in the overall objective of humanitarian action and development action, and this difference is quite important. One is to save lives and one is to progress socioeconomic development of the country and build capabilities. There is a profound difference in the purpose of these actions and [of] certain modalities to mobilize these responses, which are profoundly different."
>
> Donor representative

TRACKER SOLUTION: Creating transparency on defining ODA for food security and nutrition

Currently, none of the existing trackers address the issue of the different definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition (see Eber Rose *et al*. [2024b]). The reviewed trackers did not consider the implications of these various definitions, and few specified which definition or methodology they used to calculate ODA for agriculture and/or food security. The new tracker will not impose a single definition, but rather, will allow the user to review the different definitions side by side and therefore understand why the definitions yield different results. The new tracker will enable donors to select and filter the various definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition and compare them. It will also present the different methodologies and OECD DAC codes included in each definition. This will improve transparency regarding the various numbers circulating and the methodologies used. In providing this information, the tracker will contribute to ongoing discussions on the need for convergence on a definition of ODA for food security and nutrition.

6. Missing official development assistance for food security and nutrition

Beyond the issues stemming from the multiple definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition, further complications arise from the various approaches and inconsistencies in how donors record ODA. Due to the large degree of overlap in OECD DAC codes, with interventions suitable for multiple codes, different donors may input the same or similar projects differently. For example, ODA to a project that supports the production of animal feed could be recorded under purpose codes relating to livestock, livestock/veterinary services or agro-industries, since they include animal feed aid, feed resources, and animal feeds production, respectively, in the clarifications /additional notes on coverage offered by the OECD DAC. Recording ODA in the OECD DAC therefore requires a nuanced understanding of the specificities and technicalities of a given project, knowledge that those responsible for data recording may not always possess. Even with such knowledge, however, a given project may be recorded based on political considerations (see Section 2 and Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a]).

> "Have you analysed donor behaviour in assigning codes? From our direct experience, while we try for the most useful mix of codes, the assigning is often done by the programme managers that pay the bills. More often than not they wouldn't be able to tell a potato from a turnip. Unless there is a really rigorous connection with people who work on the content, then you can get really random results."
>
> Donor representative

Differences and issues related to coding are becoming increasingly complicated with the growing trend towards multipurpose holistic development programmes. One donor stated that they have a large number of multisectoral programmes with many activities under one project. They can disaggregate projects as much as possible before aligning components to OECD DAC codes. However, this makes coding much more complicated compared to those for smaller projects that can be expressed through one or two DAC codes. Another donor similarly noted that they are increasingly moving towards multisectoral projects that have multiple DAC codes with allocated percentages. Conducting research into their own margins of error in coding, the donor found that, on average, they used 3–4 purpose codes per agrifood project, but they could have used 8–10 codes. For example, they found that most of their projects have a farmer training on fertilizer management but none used the relevant OECD DAC codes. Not only does this create large margins of error, but such discrepancies also complicate efforts to define the aid resources for food security and nutrition based purely on a selection of OECD DAC codes.

The same donor, analysing their use of the OECD DAC climate adaptation policy markers (see Eber Rose *et al.* [2024a]), found a 56 percent probability that a project with a positive climate outcome was not marked as having a principal objective related to climate adaptation. This is partly due to how the OECD DAC policy markers were developed, in this case, that climate-smart agriculture projects are often not captured by the framing of the climate adaptation indicator. However, it also stems from the distinction between intention and outcome. OECD DAC codes, both purpose codes and policy markers, are based on intention, i.e. what a given project is designed to achieve, and not its outcomes. Therefore, for example, a small-scale irrigation project designed to help with rural poverty, despite having a strong climate adaptation impact, may not be marked as having a climate objective given that it was not a stated intention of the project.

To an extent, the problems with coding relate to the influence of politics on aid budgets (Section 2). Policy funding is approved and driven by commitments and coding preferences. In the above example, despite being a project related to agrifood systems, i.e. working with farmers in agriculture, the main focus was poverty reduction, hence there is a limited requirement to mention food security in the project description or record the funding under an OECD DAC code related to agriculture. This is therefore a missed opportunity to develop a multisectoral, multi-outcome portfolio, and the potential benefits of the resources are missed, or at least not captured in the statistics.

> "From the start, we are confused. There is confusion between the terms 'agriculture', 'sector' and 'food security', outcome, and whether we are measuring the resources allocated to a sector or an outcome. Those in the sector understand the nuances between the two, but senior leadership and ministers blend the words. Reinforcing definitions, boundaries and reducing overlap is key."
>
> Donor representative

However, while stakeholders unanimously recognized the issues around the organization of ODA data on food security and nutrition, and the need for greater harmonization, they emphasized that the many different approaches and inconsistencies between donors create significant complications. Although proposing a new methodology or common definition based on OECD DAC codes may create harmony, there will still be issues with many of the inconsistencies stemming from the way that donors work and input data into the system. Ultimately, the high level of error inherent in DAC coding and the inconsistency between donors are transferred to subsequent analysis based on the OECD DAC coding system.

> "OECD DAC codes have their limitations. We do not want to criticize this work, but there is so much that can be done with the DAC codes but we need to make the point and make the transition."
>
> Donor representative

In light of this growing awareness of the limitations of OECD DAC, donors are increasingly interested in the potential use of text mining in project descriptions to identify a project's purpose and impact.

TRACKER SOLUTION: Using text mining and tagging to identify resources not captured in standard definitions of ODA for food security and nutrition

To ensure that the estimated volumes of ODA for food security and nutrition are not bound by the administrative reporting approach of the OECD DAC, the tracker will use text mining of project descriptions to include analyses of the 'missing' ODA for food security (i.e. amounts not captured by current DAC nomenclature and commonly used definitions). This analytical approach was adopted in the Ceres2030 framework, where the definition of ODA for food security was based on the DAC codes but complemented by text mining of project descriptions to capture relevant spending in other sections of the database (e.g. microfinance support to small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in food processing and distribution, declared under the finance headline). It is further necessary given that, when comparing donations to the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in the DAC to policy information on CGIAR funding, there is approximately USD 150 million missing.

Text mining and machine learning on the long and short project descriptions in the OECD DAC can provide a more holistic overview of the projects in the system that contribute to food security and nutrition outcomes, even if they are not necessarily coded as such (see FAO State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 Supplementary Materials to Chapter 4 for a more detailed analysis). Methods may be restricted by the issues explored above regarding donors reporting in the OECD DAC, data availability and donor consistency. However, text mining and machine learning will enable better estimations of the total ODA available for food security and nutrition, and the achievement of SDG 2, and thus further contribute to potential convergence on a measure of ODA for food security and nutrition (see Section 5). Furthermore, analysing project descriptions and developing a more comprehensive understanding of the projects affecting food security and nutrition may create greater opportunities for synergies.

7. Conclusion

There is strong donor stakeholder support for a food security and nutrition aid tracker that would enable them to better track, monitor, and analyse the quantity and quality of ODA to food security and nutrition. Donors indicated a strong consensus on the need for a tool to help make the case for evidence-based thinking and decision-making. To this end, developing an interactive tool to analyse the broad spectrum of ODA for food security and nutrition, and bring transparency to the relevant programmes and projects would be strongly supported by stakeholders. However, the key issue raised for the value-added of the proposed tracker is its usability. Donors stated that if the new tool is simple, clear, and easy to use and understand, then it will be of value; if not, there will be no incentive to use it, and they will continue using their own tools. Ultimately, the new tracker needs to replace existing tools, provide new insights and reduce complexity.

To meet this need, the proposed tracker will link current spending levels to the evidence base, both by country and intervention area, to identify areas where there is a concentration of donor projects or strategic gaps in order to improve donor coordination and maximize the effectiveness of aid resources. It will also incorporate data from non-traditional donors, enhance transparency in ODA definitions, and use text-mining to identify uncaptured resources. The proposed tracker will be a fully interactive platform with selection and filtering options allowing for a more streamlined and personal, customized experience for the end user. The updated prototype will be presented to stakeholders to receive more specific feedback on the use, design and functionality of the proposed food security and nutrition aid tracker.

References

Convention on Biological Diversity. 2022. *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.* Montreal, Canada, UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf

Custer, S., Dreher, A., Elston, T.B., Escobar, B., Fedorochko, R., Fuchs, A., Ghose, S. *et al.* 2023. *Tracking Chinese Development Finance: An Application of AidData's TUFF 3.0 Methodology.* Williamsburg, USA, AidData at William & Mary.

Eber Rose, M., Laborde, D., Lefebvre, L., Olivetti, E. & Smaller, C. 2024a. *Towards a common definition of aid for food security and nutrition – Background note.* Rome, FAO and Geneva, Switzerland, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1957en

Eber Rose, M., Laborde, D., Lefebvre, L., Olivetti, E. & Smaller, C. 2024b. *A review of existing food security and nutrition aid trackers – Background note.* Rome, FAO and Geneva, Switzerland, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd2180en

El Harty, K. & Smaller, C. 2024. *Modelling the additional investment needed to end hunger: Why are the cost estimates so wildly different?* Geneva, Switzerland, Shamba Centre for food & climate. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62b1cc763de5423a3166f5e3/t/66a0ecfeabc00d59b21af80a/1721822463060/Modelling+the+additional+investment+needed+to+end+hunger_Shamba+Centre.pdf

FAO. 2015. *Achieving Zero Hunger: The critical role of investments in social protection and agriculture.* Rome. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i4951e

GAFS (Global Alliance for Food Security). 2023. Global Food and Nutrition Security Dashboard. [Accessed on 15 April 2024]. https://www.gafs.info/map/?indicator=tffts&state=Action&country=Global

Laborde, D., Parent, M. & Smaller, C. 2021. *Ending hunger, increasing incomes, and protecting the climate: What would it cost donors?* Cornell University, IFPRI and IISD. https://www.foodfortransformation.org/files/upload/z_archiv%20WOH/8%20Veranstaltungen/Event%20Was%20zu%20tun%20ist/Dokumente/ceres2030-what-would-it-cost.pdf

Laborde, D. & Torero, M. 2023. Modeling Actions for Transforming Agrifood Systems. In: J. von Braun, K. Afsana, L.O. Fresco & M.H.A. Hassan, eds. *Science and Innovations for Food Systems Transformation*. pp. 105–132. Cham, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15703-5_7

Mason-D'Croz, D., Sulser, T.B., Wiebe, K., Rosegrant, M.W., Lowder, S.K., Nin-Pratt, A., Willenbockel, D. *et al.* 2019. *Agricultural investments and hunger in Africa modeling potential contributions to SDG2 – Zero Hunger.* World Development, 116: 38–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.12.006

Shekar, M., Kakietek, J., Dayton Eberwein, J. & Walters, D. 2017. *An investment framework for nutrition: Reaching the global targets for stunting, anemia, breastfeeding, and wasting.* Washington, DC, World Bank. https://hdl.handle.net/10986/26069

The Food and Land Use Coalition. 2019. Annex B: Technical Annex. In: *Growing Better: Ten Critical Transitions to Transform Food and Land Use*. https://www.foodandlandusecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FOLU-GrowingBetter-TechnicalAnnex.pdf

ZEF (Center for Development Research of the University of Bonn) & FAO. 2020. *Investment costs and policy action opportunities for reaching a world without hunger (SDG2).* Joint report. Bonn, Germany. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1497en

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Agrifood Economics and Policy – Economic and Social Development
www.fao.org/agrifood-economics

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

Shamba Centre for Food & Climate
Geneva, Switzerland
www.shambacentre.org

Hesat2030
www.hesat2030.org

ISBN 978-92-5-139217-1

9 789251 392171

CD2832EN/1/10.24