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Innovation & Investment

IDH aquaculture director challenges major foundations

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By James Wright

Hilbrands to funders: Join the conversation, look at aquaculture



Aldin Hilbrands

Dozens of organizations worldwide are endeavoring to drive change along the seafood industry supply chain. Some collaborate or even partner with industry stakeholders, while others employ activist tactics to obtain a platform. And then there are the foundations that finance many of the leading conservation groups' efforts.

Despite their enormous influence and financial clout, they often choose to remain in the background, a step back from the front lines of debate. The three most prominent funders working in fisheries and aquaculture are the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the David & Lucile Packard Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation, all based in the United States. One longtime retail executive in Europe says it's time for these foundations to step in from outside the boundaries and join the discussion.

"What's really striking to me is most funders are very invisible, in the sense that they're never on stage, they never speak up, they never share their vision for the future of the industry," said Aldin Hilbrands, part-time director for aquaculture at IDH, the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative. "While behind the scenes is their money, and their people, and with that comes a certain level of responsibility and accountability."

Hilbrands, who was a senior manager for Dutch retailer Royal Ahold for nearly nine years, joined IDH in February. In that time he's identified a need to talk about the big picture and a need for funding organizations to align their efforts.

“They need to get out there and show some vision as to what they’re doing with their funds, and why and how, so that people can have a better idea of these foundations and how they could potentially work with them, or maybe just have a discussion with them,” he added. “I’m not a guy who wants to be invisible; I want to be part of the conversation.”

“Just looking at the World Bank 2030 report predicting growth of the industry: The facts are that 10 or 20 million metric tons, at best, will come from fisheries. The rest will have to come from aquaculture. I look at that and can draw one conclusion: IDH will stay focused on aquaculture.”

Hilbrands (who is also technical director for Netherlands-based food-safety certification system [FSSC 22,000](http://www.fssc22000.com/documents/home.xml?lang=en) (<http://www.fssc22000.com/documents/home.xml?lang=en>)) describes IDH as a “co-funder of private sector investment,” an organization that works to accelerate sustainable trade by building multinational coalitions in commodity sectors such as coffee, soy, cotton, cocoa, palm oil and electronics, among others. One of the big differences between IDH and the foundations is where the money comes from: IDH funds come from Dutch, Danish and Swiss taxpayers.

Their similarities, however, are numerous, in that they support and fund convening activities and pre-competitive discussions on key sustainability concerns. Horizontal, crosscutting issues like working conditions and social compliance fit into what Hilbrands calls “landscape” programs by IDH that aim to transform certain areas of jurisdiction. An example would be [zone management](https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/aquaculture-certification-steers-to-zone-management/) (<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/aquaculture-certification-steers-to-zone-management/>), in aquaculture.

Hilbrands and IDH see aquaculture as a major growth industry that the world will depend on as the global population swells and food security becomes increasingly critical. The three major foundations, however, seem more concerned with global fisheries and often overlook the crucial link between fisheries and aquaculture, he added.

“Aquaculture in the U.S. has a negative perception in the public. It’s not very sexy to invest in aquaculture. Our fund focuses on support to aquaculture. Just looking at the World Bank 2030 report predicting growth of the industry: The facts are that 10 or 20 million metric tons, at best, will come from fisheries. The rest will have to come from aquaculture. I look at that and can draw one conclusion: IDH will stay focused on aquaculture.”

Hilbrands hopes to challenge the organizations when he delivers his “Role of Foundations in Aquaculture Improvement” presentation at the Global Aquaculture Alliance’s GOAL conference on Thursday, Oct. 29. [GOAL](https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/goal/) (<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/goal/>), will be held at The Four Seasons Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

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Author



JAMES WRIGHT

Editorial Manager
Global Aquaculture Alliance
Portsmouth, NH, USA

james.wright@gaalliance.org (<mailto:james.wright@gaalliance.org>).

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