



The limits of the European Union's fisheries agreements as sustainable development instruments: The case of Cape Verde

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

European Union
Cape Verde
Fisheries
Sustainable development
Agreement

ABSTRACT

As an important instrument of the external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy, the European Union tends to promote the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) as doubly beneficial, since they grant access to foreign waters for its vessels, while also opening channels of technical, scientific, and administrative cooperation for the development of the fisheries sector in partner countries. However, the Republic of Cape Verde, which has signed fisheries agreements with the EU since 1990, has shown consistent deficiencies that these treaties were supposed to tackle, such as the monitoring of illegal activities by foreign vessels or enhancing the capacities of the local artisanal and semi-industrial fleets. By collecting and comparing data on the initiatives developed under the EU-Cape Verde SFPAs and the country's performance in fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goal 14, which aims to manage and protect marine life and ecosystems, this paper discusses Brussels's potential and limits as an international development actor for the fisheries sector and oceans governance, seeking to determine the level of efficiency of these treaties in promoting sustainable development in maritime spaces. An enhancement of financial and technical cooperation is observed between both parts of this specific SFPAs, but the transparency and sustainability of the actions undertaken are still viewed as flawed, compromising Cape Verde's national strategies to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

1. Introduction

Fisheries and aquaculture are vital activities for various communities. First, because of their economic relevance, providing direct and indirect employment to nearly 250 million people worldwide, which accounted for a "first sale" value of US\$401 billion in 2018, and other US \$164 billion in imports [1,2]. Second, considering their presence in local communities' diets, reduced costs of production at the artisanal level, and high nutrition value, investing in these activities is often a cheaper, healthier, and more sustainable alternative to secure the means of subsistence among various populations, especially in developing nations. Therefore, these sectors are also closely related to food security [2].

A good maritime governance has been a constant topic in the debate over an international sustainable development agenda. Not only to ensure the economic and nutritional gains provided through fishing activities, but also to tackle the vulnerabilities that limit the good functioning of this sector, such as overfishing, contamination, climate change, or illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In 1991, amid a growing relevance of the concept of sustainable development in

international forums, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) inaugurated the concept of "responsible fishing" and issued the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, outlining good catching and commercialization practices for the sector. This code represented an important milestone from which International Fisheries Law evolved, crystallizing concepts from previous binding and non-binding instruments [1]. Sustainable fishing, under this normative development, must follow three principles: sustainable stocks, with enough fish being left in the ocean to enable its renewal; a minimized environmental impact, so fishing activity does not harm other species and habitats; and an effective fisheries management, complying with existing legislation and adapting to changing environmental circumstances [3].

In September 2015, the UN took another important step by approving the 2030 Agenda for the International Development, composed by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 14 specifically addresses the preservation and sustainable use of the seas, oceans, and maritime resources, with three of its targets dedicated to the effective regulation of fishing exploitation, tackling IUU fishing, and calling for a greater access of marine resources and markets for artisanal

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fishers [4].

As seen, the maritime agenda is a relevant topic within the discussions for a more sustainable future. And the European Union (EU), as one of the world leaders in fisheries and aquaculture, accounting for 2.9% of the global catches and aquaculture in 2019, has the potential to lead the efforts to exploit and to preserve these resources [5].

The EU's first attempt to jointly manage fishing resources dates to 1962, when the European Economic Community (EEC) included fisheries as one of the competencies of the then newly adopted Common Agriculture Policy. Initially, member states had greater autonomy to determine their own practices. However, the greater commercial liberalization in the late 1960s, the accession negotiations of Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom in the 1970s, and the creation of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) through UNCLOS in 1982, pushed the member states towards a more ambitious transference of duties to the community level, aiming to ensure an equal and fair access to fishing resources inside and outside of its borders [6].

As a result, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was created by Council Regulation (EEC) n. 170/83, on January 25th, 1983. From an initial approach based on total allowable catches (TACs) and national quotas, the CFP has evolved to accommodate rising challenges in international fisheries management, especially with the expansion of the sustainable development agenda, as well as the inclusion of new member states, which led to an increase of the EU's EEZ and fleet [6]. Two major reforms of the CFP were conducted in 2002 and 2013, mainly to tackle persistent issues such as overfishing and the deterioration of ecosystems, but also to enhance transparency, multi-level participation in policymaking, and a shared governance between the EU and its member states [7–9].

Apart from the management of its inner waters, the CFP has also an external dimension, which addresses the access of the EU fleet to the maritime spaces of third countries. Bilateral and multilateral treaties are the main instrument through which the bloc develops its international fisheries relations. Currently, the EU maintains two types of bilateral fisheries agreements, the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) and the Reciprocity/Northern Agreements [10].

Signed with coastal and island states in Africa and Oceania, the SFPAs are trade and cooperation agreements that include local sectoral support to strengthen administrative and scientific capacity. They regulate the capture, within biological limits set by scientific bodies, of admissible fishing surpluses in a regulated environment (in general, the EEZ of the partner country) [10,11]. The SFPAs have a particular relevance for small island developing states, which have more limited and fragile resources, while often controlling maritime spaces much larger than their territorial dimensions, due to the 200 nautical miles limit determined by UNCLOS. Consequently, there is a sub-exploitation of maritime resources by these countries, since their availability surpasses their technical capacities, which imposes challenges to national development efforts [12].

Under these circumstances, the SFPAs are presented as an attractive solution for both parts. On the partner state side, they allow for an increase of technical, administrative, and scientific capacities in fisheries [13]. On the EU side, they open access routes to new fishing resources that may supply European markets. Additionally, the SFPAs include cooperative monitoring, control, and surveillance instruments, with the aim of preventing IUU fishing, benefiting both parties [11]. Nevertheless, these agreements have been frequently criticized for promoting less reforms than expected. Instead of improving the management of fishing stocks, they are accused of contributing to further fisheries' degradation, due to poor control of fishing intensity by foreign vessels. Moreover, the increased scarcity of desirable fish populations leads to a rise in prices above average consumers' means in developing markets, negatively affecting local populations [14].

In general, authors such as Johnson et al. (2021) observe a low progress towards sustainable, accountable, transparent, and fair fishing practices in external waters, raising questions about how aligned the

SFPAs and the SDGs are [15]. A similar diagnosis had been previously made by Bretherton and Vogler (2008), who perceived a lack of coherence between commitments and policies towards sustainable development, of which the CFP are an example [16]. Accordingly, Okafor-Yarwood and Belhabib (2019) point to a conflicted and opportunistic nature of the CFP, which was crafted to conserve marine resources at home, but paved the way for agreements with third countries which have limited surveillance capacities regarding the activities of foreign vessels, or that have been identified as enabling IUU fishing themselves. These limitations reinforce a tendency of EU countries to catch beyond capacity in nations that maintain a SFPA with the EU, which has been perceived in many West African countries [17].

Due to a historical lack of investments, the activities of the fisheries sector in the Republic of Cape Verde, an archipelagic state on the West coast of Africa, consist mostly of traditional, small-scale fishing. Since the country cannot rely on an operational distant water fleet, most catches are limited to the resources available in national waters, closer to the shore. However, Cape Verde has an EEZ of approximately 740,000 km², reaching one million km² with the extension of the continental shelf up to 350 nautical miles, opposed to an emerged area of 4033 km². There is, consequently, a high level of underexploited maritime resources. Cape Verde's National Institute for Fisheries Development has estimated the exploitation levels to be at 7500 to 10800 tons a year in 2011, against a total potential of 32500–41600 tons [18]. This not only sparked the interest of the EU, which seeks access to these resources for its fleet, but also provides a path for development through blue economy practices, which Cape Verdean authorities aim to convert into the channel for its economic growth, international insertion, and environmental protection [18–20].

Under these aspirations from both sides, the original fisheries agreement between the EU and Cape Verde was signed in 1990. It followed the framework of other treaties crafted with countries of the ACP group until the mid-1990s, where a financial compensation was offered to the partner state in exchange for access of the EU's fleet to its waters for fishing purposes. However, the EU Joint Assembly Resolution presented by the ACP group in October 1993 concluded that, although these agreements were positive from a financial perspective, they were harmful to artisanal fisheries, contributing to the impoverishment of the population. They were also criticized for not providing sufficient surveillance, with the European fleet frequently disrespecting the limits of allowable catches, or not providing enough data about the activities undertaken [21].

These problems were identified in Cape Verde until the end of the original agreement's final extension in 2005. Although EU vessels were not allowed to catch targeted species in the country's waters without a protocol in force, gaps in fishing contracts suggest the fleet remained close to follow the migration of species found in Cape Verdean waters, especially tuna, further North. This increased costs for vessel owners and raised the competition with other foreign fleets for bigger catches, putting extra pressure onto these resources [21].

In consonance with the 2002 reform of the CFP, the SFPA model was crafted to replace these fisheries agreements, seeking to tackle especially IUU fishing, and to keep catches within levels that did not endanger maritime resources and ecosystems. The SFPA with Cape Verde came into force in March 2007 and has been renewed ever since, always adopting five-year protocols [22]. The latest renewal took place in 2019. Brussels and Praia agreed on it in 2018, with a protocol covering the 2019–2024 period [23].

This protocol allows 69 European vessels (Portuguese, Spanish, and French) to fish up to 8000 tons of tuna and related species a year, in exchange of a €750,000 yearly compensation to Cape Verde, of which €350,000 must be applied into a sustainable management of the local fisheries, with reinforcement of monitoring capacities and support for local fishing communities [23]. Furthermore, answering to demands by the Cape Verdean environmentalist community, this protocol included the creation of a scientific and environmentalist commission to monitor

fishing activities by vessels from EU countries, which were to operate with the presence of observers [24].

The EU-Cape Verde fisheries agreements have often been criticized for not providing sufficient control of the activities of foreign ships in local waters, as well as for discrepancies between the benefits obtained by the community fleets and the financial compensation provided by Brussels. This situation has not changed after the adoption of the SFPA model [25]. Therefore, this agreement still does not seem to meet all its goals in terms of sustainable management of fishing resources, which imposes limits to the efficacy of one of the EU's main instruments for international cooperation in the fisheries sector. Cape Verdean authorities, nevertheless, continue to renovate the agreement, joining Brussels in the claims that it still has a positive impact on the country. Therefore, how effective are the SFPAs in promoting a sustainable development of the partner country's fisheries sector?

To answer to this question, this article measures and discusses the results achieved by this model of fisheries agreement, through an analysis of the Cape Verde case. It considers the indicators set for the SDG 14 in the 2030 Agenda, the most recent statistics for the local fisheries sector, and the initiatives taken under the scope of cooperation with the EU, to determine which goals were met by the country and which are still pending. The observations made serve as the basis to draw conclusions on the efficacy of the SFPAs as a tool to achieve sustainable development in fisheries, based on what is observed in the proposed case.

2. Materials and methods

As previously stated, this article proposes a case study of the EU-Cape Verde SFPA, which is conducted with two specific objectives. The first is to collect data on Cape Verde's fisheries sector's performance regarding indicators adopted by the UN to measure the achievement of the SDG 14, from the original signing of the SFPA with the EU until its latest renewal. The second is to cross this information with the one provided by European and Cape Verdean authorities about initiatives adopted under this fisheries agreement, to discuss to what extent has the Praia-Brussels cooperation contributed to the current situation of the local fisheries sector and to the country's performance regarding the SDG 14.

For that, a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools is applied. The qualitative part is based on the work and conclusions from the authors mentioned in the introduction of this article, which agree that the sustainability promoted by these agreements is still limited. It consists of a more detailed analysis of the current situation of Cape Verdean fisheries and how the sector relates to the SFPAs. It seeks to understand if this model is in line with the principles it advocates, and what flaws still prevent it from becoming a more efficient sustainable development instrument. Sources include previous academic production about the evolution of fisheries agreements between the EU and Cape Verde, statistics about the Cape Verdean fisheries sector, and official reports about the country's progress in the 2030 Agenda.

For the quantitative part of the analysis, this paper takes into consideration the Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [26]. Data about indicators related to the achievement of the SDG 14 in Cape Verde, from the adoption of the SFPA model until its most recent renewal, are compiled and compared, to determine the level of the country's progress and how it relates to the agreement with Brussels.

The indicators to be considered are: index of coastal eutrophication and plastic debris density; average marine acidity (pH); proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels; coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas; degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP; proportion of total research budget allocated to research in the field of marine technology; degree of application of a legal, regulatory, policy, or institutional

framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries [26].

Provided that information about these indicators relies on what is included in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), this paper's analysis will use only the data made available by Cape Verdean authorities in these documents over the proposed time span, even if not all the indicators are addressed. Other primary sources include the UN SDGs database and the National Statistics Institute of Cape Verde (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística* – INE).

Through conclusions made from Cape Verde's case, this paper attempts to develop a more concrete picture of the progress made by this country through its cooperation in fisheries with the EU, discussing if the SFPAs are an efficient instrument to promote sustainable development, under the framework established by the 2030 Agenda and SDG 14.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The structure of Cape Verde's fisheries

Although artisanal and small-scale fisheries are predominant in Cape Verde, there are also industrial and semi-industrial vessels fishing in its territorial waters, both national and foreign. All three kinds contribute for the data in catches, landing, imports, and exports collected by the INE [27].

Regardless of the type, fishing activities in Cape Verdean waters generally focus on tuna, small pelagic, and demersal species. Maritime spaces up to three nautical miles are reserved exclusively for artisanal fisheries, which employed 5078 fishermen in 2016 (the most recent year when data about registered professionals was published), distributed along 73 communities and 1588 vessels, of which 224 were inactive. This fleet is mainly dedicated to hand-line fishing, aimed at demersal and large pelagic species. There are also diving units, aimed at demersal species, coastal lobsters, other crustaceans, and mollusks, such as whelk, octopus, and cuttlefish [27].

Landing of the catches is generally made in ports within or close to fishing communities, with 97 landing points distributed throughout the country [27]. Moreover, licenses for artisanal boats increased from 467 to 1082 in the 2016-2020 period, with an average yearly variation of 23.4%. This increase was influenced by payment exemptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, in an attempt to tackle the economic downturn caused by this crisis [28].

As for industrial fishing, 145 licenses were issued in 2020, 47.6% for national vessels, and 52.4% for foreign vessels. In this second group, the EU accounted for the biggest share (26.2%), followed by Japan and Senegal (approximately 8.9% each). Other contracts were not individually disclosed by the INE. Also in 2020, the nominal landings of semi-industrial and industrial vessels reached 5327,45 tons, with positive variations of 2.9% and 12.9%, respectively, compared to 2019. The artisanal landings accounted for 3594,7 tons, which represented a 5.7% decrease. In both cases, tuna species accounted for most of the recorded landings (30654,97 tons by industrial and semi-industrial vessels, 1505,20 tons by artisanal vessels) [28]. The latest available data on imports and exports of fish products is shown below, with their respective value in Cape Verdean escudos (CVE):

Table 1
Weight and value of the import and export of fish products in Cape Verde (2016–2019) [28].

Year	Weight of imports (tons)	Value of imports (millions of CVE)	Weight of exports (tons)	Value of exports (millions of CVE)
2016	821.05	469.96	17141.8	2280.01
2017	1079.14	567.7	7461.2	973.49
2018	981.75	641.57	11837.73	1275.83
2019	1039.15	697.53	10607.47	985.08

Although the numbers for 2020 were not fully disclosed by the time this article was written, the INE claims they reflect a decrease on the import of fish products compared to 2019, with negative variations of 62.7% in weight and 65.6% in value. Mollusks, with or without shell, alive, fresh, chilled, frozen, dried, and salted, where the main imported product, accounting for 102,94 tons and 56,55 million of CVE. As for exports, the negative trend also continued, with a 6.5% decrease in weight and a 13.3% decrease in value [28].

Despite of the most recent downturn faced by Cape Verde in its balance of trade, heavily influenced by the economic impact of the pandemic, fish products still accounted for approximately 17% of all Cape Verdean exports in 2020, maintaining this sector as one of the main income sources in the country [28].

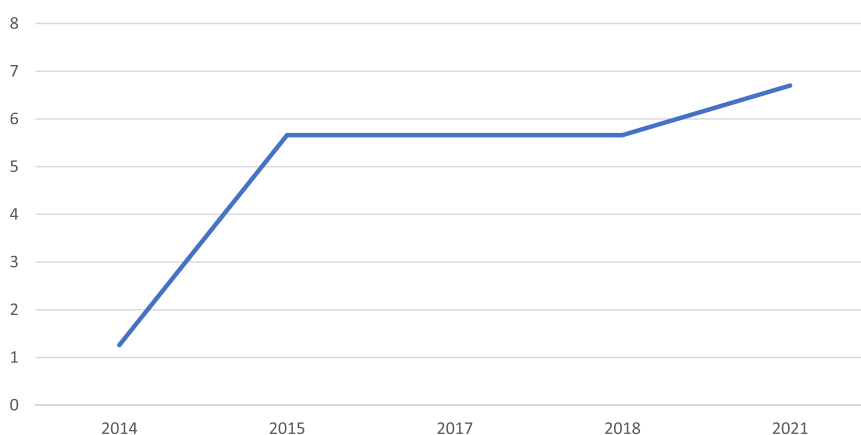
3.2. Cape Verde's progress within SDG 14

In the case of the SDGs, a similar approach to the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is adopted by each country to share information about their progress, with national data being presented through VNRs. This instrument provides a comfortable autonomy, but also presents limitations, since it is subject to the capacities and interests

and in unexpressive levels, being kept under control especially after the ceasing of the sewage discharge in the Mindelo Bay area. The control of pollution sources was extended to the entire country, with the organization of the coastline to minimize artificialization and pressure on protected areas. As a result, the average acidity of sea water remained stable at a pH between 8 and 8.3 [30].

As for fisheries, the 2021 VNR mentioned an increase of the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), aiming mainly to maintain catches by foreign vessels under biologically sustainable levels. The participation in international accords, cooperation, and dialogue were also mentioned as the main instruments to tackle IUU fishing. Furthermore, besides investing in research and maritime technologies, Cape Verde announced the implementation of the "Ocean Campus", based in three principles: higher education, research, and technical-professional training. This initiative aims to educate professionals to work in the country's blue economy goals, as well as to continue raising popular awareness about the maritime sector's relevance [30].

By looking at data from the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs regarding the SDG 14's indicators in Cape Verde, along with the information shared by the local government in the VNRs, we may see more clearly the quantitative impact of these initiatives.



Graph 1. Percentage of the coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas in Cape Verde (2014–2021) [19,31,32].

of national governments to collect and share data, which rarely results in complete information about all the indicators involved. In Cape Verde's case, two VNRs have been published since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, in 2018 and in 2021 [29].

Regarding the SDG 14, the 2018 review addressed the actions taken over the first years after the approval of the 2030 Agenda. Cape Verde mentioned as the main initiative for this period the implementation of the National Investment Plan for Blue Economy through the Ministry of Maritime Economy. This meant setting the tools to successfully implement the SDG 14, such as the promotion of awareness of the natural and cultural relevance of the ocean, with education and professional training; the establishment of plans and the organization of seafarers to tackle marine pollution; the creation of legislation to ban wastewater leakage and plastic deposits in the ocean; and the relocation of resources to scientific research, innovation, and observation [19].

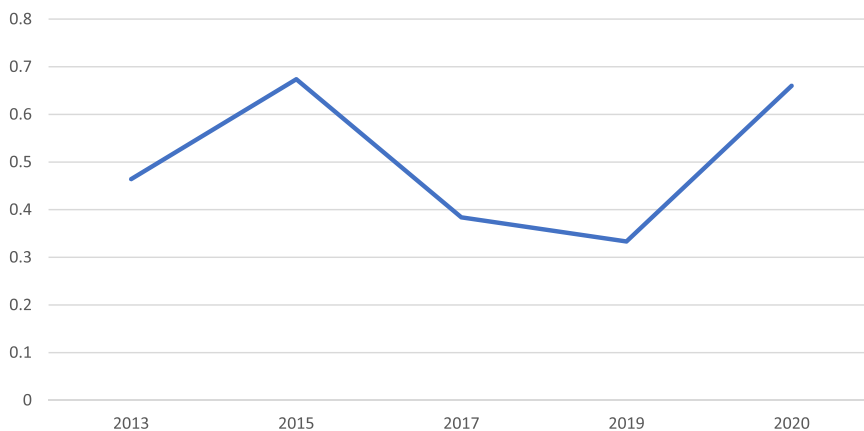
For the 2021 VNR, Cape Verde provided more concrete examples of the results achieved by its approach towards seas and oceans. Eutrophication of its waters, for example, was classified as highly localized

First, in the 1–5 scale applied by the UN to measure the degree of application of a legal framework to recognize and protect access rights to small-scale fisheries, Cape Verde gained the highest score in 2018, and kept the same result in 2020, the last year when data about this indicator was shared [31,32].

As for the coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas, its levels have varied as seen below:

We can see on [Graph 1](#) that there was a noticeable rise between 2014 and 2015, during the transition between the end of the MDGs and the adoption of the SDGs, when the coverage of protected areas went from 1.26% to 5.66%. This percentage remained stable until 2021, when the Cape Verdean government reported on their second VNR another increase, leading it to 6.7% [31,32].

Other indicators, however, were less favorable. The weight of fishing in the GDP is an example, presenting the following behavior since the adoption of the SFFPA model:



Graph 2. Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of the GDP of Cape Verde (2013–2020) [19,32].

Although presenting a significant increase between 2019 and 2020, the weight of sustainable fishing in the country’s GDP stood at 0.66% in the most recent reporting, which is still slightly lower than the 2015 peak. This was mainly attributed to overfishing and the impact of climate change, which affected the number of catches by Cape Verdean fishermen and vessels. A longer-term impact on the implementation of the proposed initiatives to achieve the SDG 14 and the goals of the Cape Verdean blue economy strategy is, therefore, still possible [19,32].

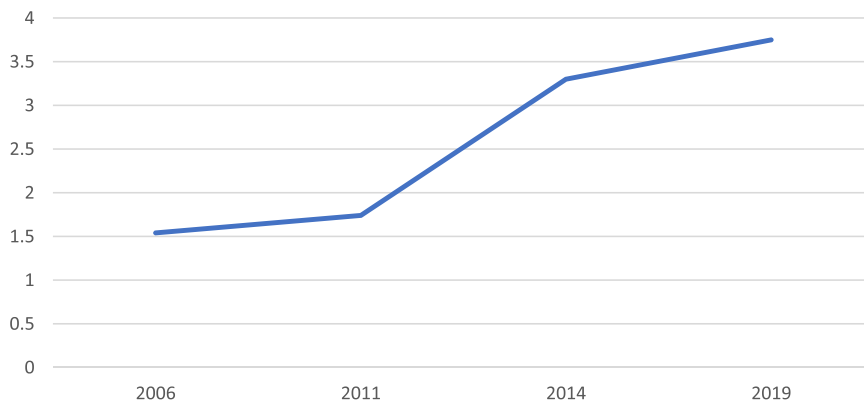
As we can see, Cape Verde has made progress in anchoring the 2030 Agenda to its own sustainable development aspirations. But there are some persistent deficiencies, which we may attribute to local technical, legal, and natural limitations, but also to exogenous factors, such as illegal fishing activities from foreign vessels, as well as climate change. The following section aims to discuss how the SFPAs relate to these issues.

3.3. Recent SFPA performance and its impact on Cape Verde’s path to achieve the SDG 14

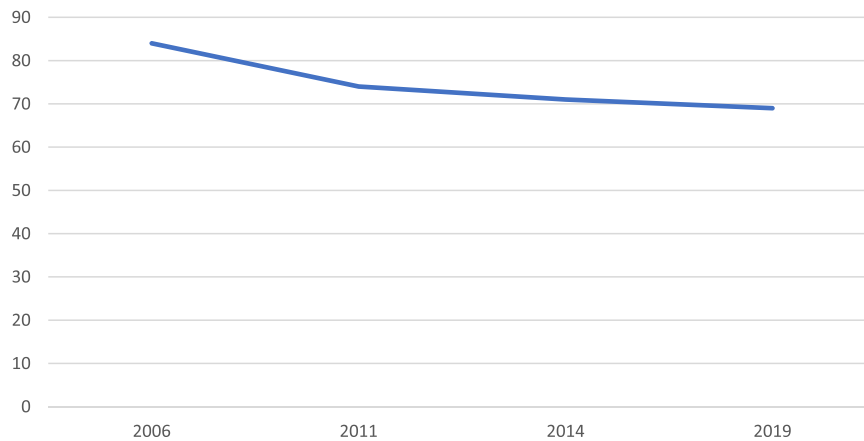
In 2018, ahead of the EU-Cape Verde SFPA’s most recent renovation, the European Commission concluded that the latest protocol applied had

been efficient in strengthening the governance of Cape Verde’s waters, protecting the interests of the EU fleet, providing employment to the local workforce, and enhancing the country’s capacity to process raw material on shore. However, it was less effective in contributing to the development of the Cape Verdean fishing sector, with persistent deficiencies in its semi-industrial fleet [33].

The current protocol, which entered into force in 2019 and is expected to be applied until 2024, offers fishing opportunities for tuna and tuna-like species to 69 EU vessels from Spain, Portugal, and France. In return, the EU has committed to pay Cabo Verde an annual financial contribution of €550,000 in the first two years of application of the protocol, and of €500,000 in the last two years. Half of this contribution must be used to promote the sustainable management of fisheries in the country, including reinforcement of control and surveillance capacities, and to support the local fishing communities [23]. These basic features have been maintained in the various protocols of this SFPA over its different renewals, with increases in the financial compensation to Cape Verde and decreases on the number of vessels granted fishing opportunities. The following graphs provide a general idea of how these indicators have behaved:



Graph 3. EU’s financial compensation in each protocol of the SFPA with Cape Verde, in millions of euros [34–38].



Graph 4. Total number of EU vessels granted fishing opportunities by the Cape Verde SFPAs protocols [34–38].

Besides fishing opportunities, this channel of cooperation with the EU has provided funds for Cape Verde to extend and modernize the infrastructure of its ports, specifically Maio and Palmeira. It has also opened new employment and training opportunities for Cape Verdean professionals, which are brought in to work in EU vessels [39]. Moreover, the sectorial support of the 2019–2024 protocol has included the following topics and measures:

- Surveillance: updating the 2015–2018 National Action Plan to Combat IUU Fishing, patrolling the EEZ, and acquiring new equipment for inspectors;
- Scientific knowledge about fisheries resources: defining national research priorities, improving management resources, and updating fishing potential studies;
- Support of coastal communities: updating the fisheries census; studying the quantitative contribution of fisheries for the local economy; building infrastructure for the repairing of boats and nets, as well as for the landing and conservation of catches; training fish sellers in municipal markets in good fish handling and conservation practices; and improving safety conditions at sea;
- International cooperation: assessing the impact of the SFPAs, and encouraging Cape Verde’s participation in international forums;
- Blue economy and aquaculture development: strengthening entrepreneurship; preparing a legal framework for aquaculture; and promoting marine protection activities [39].

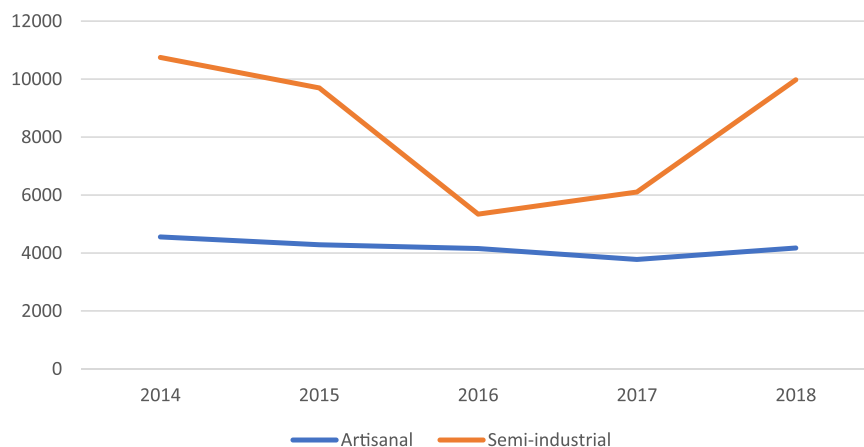
Making the supposed benefits of this SFPAs visible for the artisanal sector, which dominates local fishing activities, has been a persistent struggle for European and Cape Verdean authorities. Mundt (2012) states that, in an interview with 30 fishermen, 24 (80% of the sample) had no knowledge of a fisheries agreement with the EU, while the other six did, but had no idea of its content. Data collected by the same author has also

shown that, even though artisanal tuna catches (one of the most sought species) have decreased since 2008, when the first SFPAs protocol came into force, there were no signs of changes or halts in fishing operations by the EU fleet [21].

On the technical side, some important omissions were pointed out by the European Commission. Cape Verde’s lack of compatibility with the EU’s VMS system, as well as contractual delays in upgrading it, limited the local authorities’ capacity to monitor the activities of European vessels in Cape Verdean waters. Although Brussels claims the annual use of fishing opportunities has not surpassed 68% during most of the 2014–2018 protocol, a lack of harmonized monitoring still raises risks of overfishing and IUU fishing, posing a threat to the local environment and to the endurance of the local fisheries sector, which does not count with the means to face a fierce competition for stocks [23].

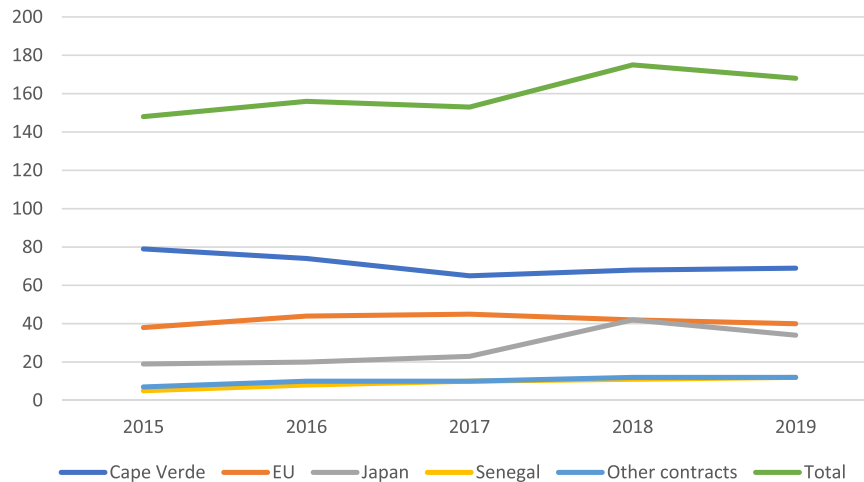
Moreover, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized the Cape Verdean government for the lack of proposals to tackle accidental fishing and for not imposing limits on catches by its vessels, choosing to simply charge for overfishing instead. The inclusion of observers in vessels fishing under the 2019–2024 protocol was mainly a response to such criticism [40]. Local businessmen have also reported irregular practices by the EU fleet, despite of the decrease on the number of licensed vessels in more recent protocols, claiming it follows fish populations to catch them in international waters, where they are not subject to bilateral agreements. This interrupts the routes of migratory species, which arrive to traditional artisanal fishing areas of Cape Verde in a much smaller number [41].

As for stocks management, according to the INE, this is how the number of catches behaved between 2014 and 2018, during the application of the SFPAs’s latest completed protocol:



Graph 5. Nominal artisanal and semi-industrial catches in Cape Verde (2014–2018), in tons [27,28].

Between 2015 and 2019, this is the amount of fishing licenses issued by Cape Verdean authorities, with the respective nationalities of the vessels:



Graph 6. Number of fishing licenses issued to national and foreign vessels in Cape Verde (2015–2019) [28].

As shown in Graph 5, both artisanal and semi-industrial catches have decreased since 2014, when they reached 4553 tons and 10746 tons respectively. The semi-industrial type recovered from 2016, going from 5338,57 tons in that year to 9973,46 tons in 2018. Artisanal catches, on the other hand, did not revert its decreasing tendency until 2017, reaching 4173,81 tons in 2018 [27,28].

Comparing Graphs 5 and 6, we see that the decrease in the number of fishing licenses in 2017 coincides with the slight recovery of artisanal catches [28]. It is a correlation that makes sense, since a smaller number of authorized vessels leaves more stocks available for local fishermen. However, as previously stated, less fishing licenses do not prevent foreign vessels from seeking stocks in international waters. These same graphs indicate the impact of this situation in Cape Verde, since the level of catches in its territory has not been as high as in the period immediately before the approval of the 2030 Agenda, which has environmental and economic consequences. Examples of this impact include losses in jobs and revenue, affecting other spheres of its society and public administration, which also helps to explain the decrease of public expenditures in investigation and maritime technologies mentioned in the 2021 VNR [30].

When addressing the SDG 14 indicators, Paulo Veiga, Cape Verde's former Sea Minister, has acknowledged a positive economic influence of the SFPA, since the financial and technological support of the EU has aided the country in improving its maritime infrastructure, storage, and processing capacities for catches by local and foreign vessels [42,43]. However, when it comes to the increase of protected areas and the degree of application of a legal framework to recognize and protect access rights to small-scale fisheries, the best results coincide not with the SFPA renewals, but with the approval of the Blue Economy Policy Charter by the Council of Ministers of Cape Verde, in December 2020. Moreover, monitoring remains an important issue in the EU-Cape Verde SFPA, since it affects the efficiency of control on the exploitation of fishing resources. This impacts on stocks availability and on the revenues of the sector, limiting the country's capacity to successfully implement its blue economy strategy [44].

The information presented in both Cape Verde's VNRs is still limited, not clearly addressing all the SDG 14 indicators clearly. Nevertheless, persisting issues connected to the activities of foreign vessels, many coming from EU countries, are perceived in these reports, echoing

previous criticism on the SFPA protocols. Examples of these issues include the previously mentioned reduction of the weight of sustainable fisheries in the Cape Verdean GDP, the smaller number of catches and

consequent revenues from this sector in the country, and risks for the availability of financial resources for investigation, maritime technologies, and environmental protection [30].

4. Conclusions

The SFPA model has played its part in injecting sustainability in the Cape Verdean fisheries sector, but not all its ideals have been properly translated into practice. Insufficient data on the activities of EU vessels, a decrease of the available stocks for local fishermen, and the lack of perceptions of positive changes by artisanal and semi-industrial fisheries professionals demonstrate that Brussels is failing to deliver the transparency and sustainable management of resources that were promised originally [33]. Moreover, overfishing and IUU fishing are persistent problems both in Cape Verde's waters and in surrounding areas [30]. In the future, these may become obstacles for Cape Verde's achievement of the SDG 14, since there are risks for the preservation of its maritime spaces and the economic endurance of a still predominantly artisanal and semi-industrial fisheries sector.

Considering this case, an improvement in subsequent practices, especially regarding monitoring and the technical local capacities, as well as a higher compromise to the agreed protocol, are necessary. Otherwise, the SFPAs will continue to be regarded as an instrument to prioritize EU interests in waters outside its jurisdiction, and not as the sustainable development facilitators they were conceived to be.

In conclusion, the EU's fisheries agreements have evolved and are an important instrument for the bloc's international fisheries relations. However, they are still not capable of fully translating generous propositions into actions and results at the same level. The efficacy of these treaties as sustainable development actors is, therefore, limited.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Mateus Lopes Aquino: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Visualization, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Declarations of interest

None.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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