



Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative

**TITLE:**

We promote environmental principles through Romanian ODA projects and programmes in beneficiary countries.

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## **1. Title**

We are promoting environmental principles through Romanian ODA projects and programmes in beneficiary countries.

## **2. Summary**

This article examines the critical role that Romania's ODA projects and programmes play in promoting environmental principles in recipient countries. A sustainable approach to development becomes imperative in the current context of increasing global concerns about climate change and environmental degradation. This study examines the strategies adopted by Romania in its ODA projects and their impact on promoting environmental principles in partner countries.

The article highlights how Romania's ODA projects integrate environmental aspects such as natural resource management and marine geology. It will also consider the importance of local communities' awareness and involvement in conserving natural resources and marine ecosystems. This approach will highlight a perspective on sustainable development, integrating both ecological and social aspects.

Through case studies, it analyses the results of projects carried out by Romania in various beneficiary countries.

The article also explores the challenges encountered in implementing these projects and offers suggestions for optimizing future strategies. The importance of international collaboration and sustainable partnerships in addressing global environmental issues is highlighted.

This analysis of the variable related to natural resource management and marine geology brings into question the significant contributions of Romania's ODA projects in building a sustainable and resilient future for recipient states, which are achievable in the context of preserving natural resources, conserving marine habitats, protecting vulnerable species and promoting sustainable development.

This study aims to contribute to understanding how ODA donors such as Romania can positively influence environmental policies and practices in partner countries, thereby strengthening the shared commitment to a more sustainable and equitable future.

**Keywords:**

Official development assistance; promoting environmental principles through official development assistance; ecology; international development cooperation; natural resource management;

## INTRODUCTION

Analyzing international relations, a complex and vast field that encompasses political, social, economic, environmental, and security issues, I have focused my present research mainly on environmental issues, more specifically, on the projects and programs that Romania promotes through official development assistance in recipient countries.

In the current global context, there are various unprecedented challenges related to the environment, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. These challenges pose a severe threat to human health and the survival of the ecosystems on which our societies are built. The latest studies in the field reflect the need for urgent and coordinated action at a global level to combat these environmental problems, highlighting the importance of international cooperation and sustainable development.

Pörtner et al. (2023) point out that limiting global warming to 1.5°C and effectively conserving and restoring functional ecosystems over 30-50% of terrestrial, freshwater and ocean areas is essential to address the interlinked climate and biodiversity crises (Pörtner et al., 2023). This approach would involve a combination of human health and ecosystems for a liveable and healthy future.

Bhatt (2023) highlights the essential role of forests in providing habitat, clean air and water, and mitigating climate change. However, the annual loss of 13 million hectares of forest contributes to the desertification of 3.6 billion hectares, highlighting the importance of sustainable ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation (Bhatt, 2023).

Soni and Ansari (2017) highlight the impact of climate change on biodiversity in India, showing how this, accelerated by anthropogenic activities, calls into question the sustainability of development (Soni & Ansari, 2017).

In this context of global challenges, I believe that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a very important tool for promoting sustainable development and integrating environmental concerns into these development projects. It is also a very important way for donor countries to support partner countries in their efforts to address environmental challenges through international cooperation to ensure a sustainable and equitable future.

The need for this coordinated action is driven by the urgent need to respond to the global climate and

biodiversity challenges we face. By supporting and implementing projects that address these interlinked issues, ODA can play an essential role in achieving global sustainable development goals.

**What is Romania's official development assistance projects' role in sustainable natural resource management in selected recipient countries? The role of official development assistance in promoting sustainability**

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a very important tool in promoting environmental sustainability on a global scale. It is representative because it plays a crucial role in promoting and facilitating sustainable development in developing countries. ODA is the total financial and technical resources that developed countries provide to developing countries to support projects and programmes aimed at improving the quality of life, reducing poverty, and promoting economic and social development.

The reasons why ODA is representative are driven by poverty and inequality reduction: ODA has the potential to reduce poverty and inequality by providing access to resources and opportunities for the poor and marginalized in developing countries, promoting sustainable development: ODA is directed towards initiatives and projects that promote sustainable development, taking into account issues such as environmental protection, sustainable use of resources and sustainable economic growth, strengthening infrastructure and essential services: ODA helps to strengthen infrastructure and provide essential services such as access to education, health care, clean water and food, thereby improving the quality of life for many people; Supporting human rights and social well-being: ODA can be directed towards projects that support human rights, gender equality, social inclusion and other critical aspects of human well-being; Capacity building and support for effective governance: ODA can help increase the capacity of governments and institutions in developing countries to manage their resources and deliver services in a more efficient and transparent way; ODA is a global commitment to support less developed countries and help reduce economic and social disparities worldwide. It is one of the key instruments to promote long-term development and stability worldwide.

In Romania, the use of funds through direct implementation is carried out through public procurement of goods, works and services necessary for the implementation of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities under the conditions set out in the public procurement legislation: donations, transfer of expertise to beneficiaries (mobility fund); scholarships for study and research

in the field of international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance for Romanian citizens.

The use of funds through indirect implementation takes the form of grants, direct budget support, and voluntary contributions.

In the global context of increasing concern for environmental projects in recipient countries, ODA projects and programmes are increasingly prevalent in supporting and promoting environmental principles in recipient countries, reflecting the need for a broader understanding of sustainability.

A relevant example I would like to highlight is that of the United States of America, i.e. foreign assistance administered in principle by the United States Agency for International Development, also known as USAID, which tries to promote environmental sustainability projects, even though these projects have often been limited by certain political factors and the lack of a unified and coherent implementation framework (Klock, 2005). This underlines the importance of improving the efficiency and sustainability of ODA delivery (Klock, 2005).

Persson (2009) also discusses the challenges and opportunities of integrating environmental policy (EPI) into bilateral ODA development assistance. Although donor activities on EPI have been intense, many ODA projects have continued to have a direct negative impact on the environment. Persson suggests that the new governance framework for ODA, such as the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, offers challenges and opportunities for integrating climate change and adaptation into ODA (Persson, 2009).

Despite the challenges, international ODA funding for environmental projects and programmes in developing countries is estimated at \$21 billion annually, excluding climate change funding. However, the additional resources required are significantly higher, indicating a clear need for increased funding for environmental sustainability through ODA (Sander & Cranford, 2010). This highlights the crucial role that ODA can play in promoting environmental principles and achieving global sustainable development goals (Sander & Cranford, 2010).

Official development assistance, therefore, plays a unique and crucial role in supporting developing countries in their efforts to integrate environmental sustainability into development projects. Increasing recognition of the need to integrate environmental sustainability into ODA strategies at the global level is an essential and positive step towards promoting sustainable development

worldwide.

**To what extent does Romania contribute to the global sustainable development goals related to environmental protection?- Romania as an ODA and Humanitarian Assistance donor**

Romania's involvement in ODA and humanitarian assistance is closely linked to its international commitments and desire to contribute to global efforts to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. Romania does this through a solid legislative and institutional framework, coordinated at the national level by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and involving various other bodies such as the International Development Cooperation Agency (RoAid).

Law 213/2016 is the cornerstone of Romania's international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. It defines the general framework, principles and action directions in developing cooperation and humanitarian assistance. The law also establishes the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - MAE as the primary coordinator of these activities at the national level.

The next normative act is Government Decision No 1006/2016, regulating the organization and functioning of the International Development Cooperation Agency - RoAid. It provides the necessary organizational structure for implementing and managing international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance initiatives. Government Decision No 690/2017 approved the methodological rules for implementing international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities, providing detailed guidance for implementing these activities. As a result of Government Decision No 678/2017, the Advisory Committee on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance was established, a body that contributes to the development and coordination of policies and strategies in this field.

ODA and humanitarian assistance are integrated into Romania's broader foreign policy strategy, with a focus on eradicating extreme poverty, promoting gender equality, quality education and combating climate change, which is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In environmental sustainability, Romania has started to emphasise eco-innovation and service activities that promote the efficient use of natural resources and reduce environmental impact. A representative example of this is the involvement in activities that support the development of high-tech services, such as eco-tourism, waste management and R&D services leading to innovative and sustainable products and services (Rabonțu et al. Gabriela 2018). These initiatives reflect the

recognition of the importance of eco-innovation as a business opportunity and a significant contribution to environmental protection (Rabonțu et al. Gabriela, 2018).

Romania is a consistent and credible donor of development and humanitarian assistance, aiming through its external action in the field to contribute to international efforts to combat extreme poverty and increase security in the world by providing support to less developed countries, in line with the priorities and objectives set out in the Strategic Multiannual Programme on International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance for the period 2020-2023 (adopted by the Government of Romania in 2020) and 2024-2027<sup>1</sup> (adopted in 2023), respectively through implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted at the UN level.

"Romania's Multi-annual Strategic Programme for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance for the period 2024-2027" is a continuation of previous efforts to strengthen Romania's profile as a donor in this field, being the second strategic document for setting and planning Romania's general and specific objectives for international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in the medium and long term. Romania aims to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty, focusing on assistance to least-developed countries, low-income countries and middle-income countries. The aim is to ensure coherent and adequate financing, to reach specific targets for allocating the percentage of GNI (0.33%) for official development assistance by 2030. At the same time, Romania aims to contribute to the European Union's objective of providing, together with the Member States, 0.20% of GNI in the form of official development assistance to the least-developed countries by 2030.

The programme will focus on partner countries' institutional development, green transition, and human development of their populations, which are closely correlated with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Romania will direct its international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities towards regions such as the Black Sea, the Western Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East, with a particular focus on countries such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, Albania, Palestine, Mauritania, Tanzania, Senegal and Ethiopia. The main objective is the eradication of extreme poverty, with a focus on least-



developed, low and middle-income countries.

The programme includes bilateral assistance, multilateral assistance, cooperation with Romanian public institutions, civil society and academia, private sector and triangular cooperation. It will have specific budgetary resources allocated to support these initiatives. The 2020-2023 programming period has concluded that there is a need for flexibility in international development cooperation, especially given many overlapping crises with short, medium and long-term effects.

It was decided that close coordination between central and local public administration authorities participating in international development cooperation activities on the Romanian side is needed to ensure the coherence and predictability of the actions carried out.

For the new programming period, measures are included to ensure the visibility of cooperation actions and to monitor, report, and evaluate their effectiveness and impact. This is in response to the need to educate the public and ensure greater transparency of the efforts made. The strategic programme reflects Romania's commitment to be a responsible and influential actor in international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, with a vision oriented towards long-term sustainability and development.

Through its various funding mechanisms and sources, Romania plays an active role in providing Official Development Assistance (ODA) to other countries. An essential part of this assistance comes from the state budget through special budget allocations managed by various ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a member of the European Union, Romania can access and redirect European funds to international development projects.

A key instrument in this area is the Romanian Development Cooperation Programme (RoAid), which implements various international cooperation programmes and projects. These projects are funded directly from the programme budget. Partnerships with the private sector also open up significant opportunities, facilitating joint investments or sponsorships for ODA projects. Romania also contributes to multilateral funds, such as those managed by development banks or UN agencies, and establishes bilateral assistance agreements with other nations.

Collaborations with NGOs and international organizations are also essential, as they co-fund or manage projects in partnership with the Romanian authorities. Through all these efforts, Romania affirms its commitment to promoting sustainable development and supporting international

cooperation.

Regarding humanitarian assistance, Romania has various channels and mechanisms through which it can provide aid. Direct bilateral assistance is a way in which the Romanian government can provide financial support or in-kind resources, including funds, equipment and medical resources, directly to the governments of other countries needing humanitarian aid.

Multilateral assistance is the second way, with Romania's contributions going through international organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union to those in need. Through these channels, Romania supports global humanitarian efforts by contributing financially to the programmes and projects of these organizations. Collaborations with both Romanian and international NGOs allow Romania to participate in humanitarian assistance actively, funding specific projects or providing logistical support.

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a crucial role in developing and implementing humanitarian assistance and international development programmes, providing financial and technical support to partner countries. As a member of the European Union and NATO, Romania also contributes to humanitarian funds and initiatives organized under the aegis of these organizations.

Romania is ready to provide rapid and efficient assistance in natural disasters or emergencies, sending equipment, rescue teams, medical personnel and other necessary resources. Romania demonstrates its commitment to international humanitarian assistance through all these channels, contributing substantially to supporting needy countries.

Romania is part, represented by RoAID, of the Practitioners Network for European Development Cooperation Network, which is an open platform for exchange, coordination and harmonization between European development cooperation organizations. Members use the platform to share experiences and reflect on joint implementation efforts.

Romania is actively pursuing membership in the OECD and is focusing on optimizing its domestic legislation and practices to become a member as soon as possible. In parallel, Romania aims to start the process of accession to the OECD DAC, recognizing the significant progress made in recent years in the fields of international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

## 2. Literature review

In this chapter, I will present a chair of relevant theoretical frameworks and previous studies. This

section includes revealing references that support the research conducted.

Theoretical frameworks: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This paper elaborates on the need to integrate sustainable development goals into international development cooperation aspects of ODA projects; Environmental Policy Integration (EPI): Jordan, A., & Lenschow, A. (2010). Environmental Policy Integration: A State of the Art Review. Environmental Policy and Governance. EPI, which provides an essential theoretical framework that facilitates our understanding of how environmental principles are embedded in public policies and ODA programs/projects; Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT): Mol, A. P. J., Sonnenfeld, D. A., & Spaargaren, G. (2009) The Ecological Modernization Reader: Environmental Reform in Theory and Practice. EMT, in which the economic development and environmental protection aspects, which, in the author's view, must go hand in hand, are specified as having a significant impact on ODA projects aiming at sustainability.

Maurizio Carbone, Policy Coherence and EU Development Policy, London, Routledge Publishing, 2013.

Marc Williams, "Aid, sustainable development and the environmental crisis", International Journal of Peace Studies.

Amandine Orsini - Environmental Diplomacy - Universite Saint-Louis - Brussels, 2020;

### **Previous Studies**

Impact of ODA on Environmental Protection: Hicks, R. L., Parks, B. C., Roberts, J. T., & Tierney, M. J. (2008) Greening Aid? Understanding the Environmental Impact of Development Assistance - In this paper, we identified analyses of the pattern in which official development assistance has influenced environmental practices/public policy in recipient countries;

Assessing the Effectiveness of ODA in Biodiversity Conservation: Waldron, A., Miller, D. C., Redding, D., Mooers, A., Kuhn, T. S., Nibbelink, N., ... & Gittleman, J. L. (2013) Targeting global conservation funding to limit immediate biodiversity declines. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Understanding Environmental Policy Convergence - Duncan Liefferink Helge Jörgens - Andrea Lenschow. One theoretical perspective is presented in "Understanding Environmental Policy

Convergence," where the authors discuss environmental policy convergence across nations, emphasizing the significance of understanding policy shifts and their impact on environmental governance. This approach highlights the relevance of examining how countries align their environmental policies through ODA projects, potentially contributing to a more cohesive global environmental strategy.

Although there is extensive literature on ODA and environmental protection, gaps exist in our understanding of these projects' impact on environmental principles in recipient countries. Furthermore, we need detailed analyses of the mechanisms by which ODA programmes/projects can be streamlined and optimized to support sustainable development goals in the current global context.

### **3. Impact of projects implemented through Romania's Official Development Assistance in the field of sustainable development**

Romania's commitment to ODA projects has increasingly focused on projects promoting environmental sustainability. In this chapter, I will look at the strategic areas that Romania has prioritized in ODA, particularly in natural resource management and marine geology, as follows:

A. In 2023, between April and November, Romania, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Agency for International Development Cooperation, implemented a project no. 29 of the Annual Plan for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, approved by the Prime Minister of Romania in a Government meeting, which aimed at concluding a partnership with the partner country, the Republic of Suriname - Latin America and the Caribbean region, with an available budget of 350,000 lei;

Development issue addressed:

Major problems identified in the forestry sector in the Republic of Suriname:

- i) reduction of forest area mainly due to mining activities and difficulties in monitoring logging activities;
- ii) pressures on the biodiversity of forest habitats due to the way the forest resource is exploited;

The analysis identified the need to improve the regulatory and control framework for the forest concession system, the central system for exploiting timber resources in the Republic of Suriname. The development of a national forestry policy, the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and the

Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines are envisaged for the future. A non-exclusive list of specific training needs has also been identified that can be met through training and knowledge transfer activities.

**Expected results:**

**Vision:** Public forestry and biodiversity conservation institutions in the Republic of Suriname will have a technical endowment and increased capacity for forest monitoring.

**Specific objectives:**

Increase the capacity of government forestry and biodiversity conservation institutions to monitor forest resources.

**Results:**

- Training module on the use of mobile LIDAR devices in forest monitoring;
- Equipping government institutions in the forestry sector with IT server equipment for storing information;
- They are equipping government institutions in the forestry sector with mobile LIDAR devices. LIDAR provides the ability to recreate the 3D structure of vegetation with millimetre accuracy. LIDAR (Light et al.) technology is a method of measuring distance and elevation using a laser. This technology can measure the height and diameter of trees and crown density. The LIDAR sensor mounted on the mobile device emits laser pulses towards the forest surface to measure trees. These laser pulses are reflected to the sensor, allowing the distance between the sensor and the trees to be measured. This technology makes it possible to measure terrain topography and vegetation structure, including trees, with high accuracy. Data from these LIDAR measurements can then be processed to create 3D maps of the terrain and trees, including estimates of wood volume and other forest characteristics. This data can be used to monitor forest health and effectively manage forest resources.
- We are providing governmental institutions in the forestry sector with the necessary software to process information related to tree inventories -Arboreal Forest.

**Beneficiaries:**

**Direct institutional beneficiaries:** Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management.

**Indirect beneficiaries:** local communities benefiting from the forest.

**Project strategy:**

Based on a preliminary analysis and site visit in 2022, during discussions with relevant institutions in the forestry and biodiversity conservation sector and through monitoring visits, needs for equipment and training for forest monitoring using modern techniques were identified. The strategy is based on the implementation team's international experience in the economic, institutional, and social aspects of forest management on the one hand and the use of advanced technology for effective forest monitoring on the other.

**Project sustainability:**

The increased capacity (training modules and equipment) for forest monitoring with modern techniques ensures the project's sustainability. The project is a continuation of the projects "Assistance in forestry and biodiversity conservation" carried out in 2021 and 2022, highly appreciated by the final beneficiaries, aimed at increasing the operational capacity of the beneficiary in the use of remote sensing activities by providing the beneficiary with the necessary equipment in the remote sensing process and training the staff in the use of the provided equipment.

<b>INTERVENTION LOGIC</b>	
<b>Objective:</b> We are increasing the institutional capacity of public institutions in the forestry sector in the Republic of Suriname.	<b>Quantitative or qualitative vital indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trained human resource</li> <li>- Increased material base</li> </ul>
<b>Project purpose:</b> We are increasing the capacity of government forestry and biodiversity conservation institutions in monitoring forest resources through remote sensing.	<b>Quantitative key indicators:</b> Proposal for forest monitoring with modern techniques.
<b>Immediate results:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact made with the direct partner, if possible, in a pandemic or online context;</li> <li>- Training modules on forest monitoring;</li> <li>- Doratea with Server for storing information;</li> <li>- Equipping with mobile LIDAR devices</li> <li>- We are equipping with the necessary software for processing tree inventory information - Arboreal Forest.</li> </ul>	<b>Quantitative key indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Definitive contact persons and institutions for the implementation of the project;</li> <li>- Training module learned by the beneficiary - forest monitoring;</li> <li>- Server;</li> <li>- Mobile LIDAR devices;</li> <li>- Tree inventory information processing software -Arboreal Forest;</li> </ul>

Table 1 - Intervention Logic

**Risks and assumptions**

Pandemic situation in Romania and the Republic of Suriname; low beneficiary interest in training and equipment in the proposed areas; institutional changes at the beneficiary level; market changes that may influence equipment prices or travel costs; risks related to procurement procedures and equipment transport to final beneficiaries.

**Preventive/remedial measures:**

Online linking with relevant stakeholders; Training modules will be adapted for online delivery; Beneficiary representatives will be contacted at an early stage of the project; Permanent communication with the beneficiary Attractive training modules.

B. In 2023, between April and November, Romania, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Agency for International Development Cooperation, implemented a project no. 27 of the Annual Plan for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, approved by the Prime Minister of Romania, which aimed to conclude a partnership with the partner state, the Republic of Ecuador.

**Development issue addressed:**

In the Republic of Ecuador, problems related to the dynamics of the coastal zone (especially erosion), its unplanned development (lack of spatial planning plans, lack of know-how in integrated management based on modern principles, which include natural processes above the administrative-territorial ones) are challenging to solve without adequate training and equipment. As elsewhere in the world, integrated coastal zone management is all the more difficult in low-lying coastal areas, where the effects of extreme storms are immediately felt (and which also attract massive and often uncontrolled human settlement development). As a country with a vibrant biodiversity, any protection plan must take into account the potential negative consequences that traditional measures can have, and intelligent protection plans must be selected to prevent the effects of erosion without a significant negative impact on coastal biodiversity.

An important issue is also the need for integrated management of activities in the Guayas Estuary - a river in contact with the Pacific Ocean and which bears the cumulative anthropogenic pressures - in Guayaquil, as well as specific activities of navigation, transport, fishing, aquaculture and uncontrolled urban development.

Romania is coordinating the implementation of the pan-European Research Infrastructure project DANUBIUS-RI (the future International Centre for Advanced Studies on River-Sea Systems), a

distributed infrastructure that brings together scientific facilities from several European countries, which was accepted in 2016 on the ESFRI (European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures of Global Importance) Roadmap. Romania is coordinating with funding agencies from 12 other European countries to create the future DANUBIUS-ERIC, the international organization that will manage DANUBIUS-RI. DANUBIUS-RI will provide exceptional scientific services that will bring together experts in Earth and Life Sciences and the freshwater and marine communities to provide scientifically based solutions for sustainable integrated management of river-sea systems.

In addition to the integrated management of river-sea systems, coastal erosion and coastal zone management are critical global issues. Accelerated sea level rise, the effects of extreme storms, and development pressures on coastal areas are global issues - which also affect Ecuador. GeoEcoMar is the institution that has coordinated coastal sediment dynamics studies in Romania, as well as coastal dynamics management plans using scientific methods, which have underpinned the beach restoration methods included in the Master Plan for the Protection of the Romanian Coastline against Coastal Erosion.

**Development issue addressed:**

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The partners from ESPOL University requested GeoEcoMar's support in relation to the study of the above-mentioned issues and for the initiation and implementation of an ESRASMUS+ programme. They showed interest in getting involved with GeoEcoMar in international consortia to collaborate on project proposals and in getting closer to the future international DANUBIUS-RI infrastructure.

As a result of the activities carried out in 2022 within the framework of Project No 32 GeoEcoMar - RoAid, both the ESPOL University and GeoEcoMar teams identified the Galapagos Islands and the Danube Delta (defined as biosphere reserves by the UNESCO MAB programme) as critical points of common interest. The challenges are both in terms of research activities and the development of effective management plans for protection against natural and artificial disasters, and the support of traditional activities of local populations.

Also, the experience of colleagues at ESPOL University in studying the effects of global El Niño and La Niña phenomena on coastal water dynamics is significant. It can support the development of new lines of research in GeoEcoMar.

The project responds to development goals SDG 14: Conservation and sustainable use of oceans,

seas and marine resources for sustainable development and SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

**Expected results:**

- Strengthening expertise for two researchers or PhD students from ESPOL University in the field of integrated river-sea systems management - coastal erosion and coastal zone management
- Identification of beneficiary needs regarding coastal zone performance management, spatial planning and hazard management issues in the marine/coastal environment, etc.
- We are planning future short and medium-term cooperation activities between Romanian and Ecuadorian experts in the field.
- Following the transfer of expertise carried out by GeoEcoMar representatives, increase the expertise of a minimum of 30 students, Ph.D. students, and experts from ESPOL University.

**Existing ongoing initiatives:**

During the working visits in 2022, the needs of the local partner to increase management capacity in the field were discussed and analyzed: training/transfer of expertise, equipment, integration into international research teams, etc., but also specific issues related to coastal zone management, such as artificial replenishment of dune areas, development of artificial reefs versus traditional coastal protection methods (with the placement of groins and breakwaters, which entail much higher costs and numerous adverse side effects on the coastal environment). The strengths of the Ecuadorian research team were also identified, with outstanding results in developing "green" solutions for erosion and flood protection using mangrove fields and other Nature-Based Solutions. These concepts are of great interest today in the European Union and Romania due to their low costs and outstanding effects (involving the application of the concept of environmental resilience on a much larger scale compared to traditional methods of protection against natural disasters). These activities developed by colleagues in Ecuador constitute a significant added value for GeoEcoMar research staff, recently involved in projects with similar themes (Nature Based Solutions for flood prevention).

The GeoEcoMar research team presented GeoEcoMar's expertise on scientific aspects of coastal zone management, spatial planning and hazard management issues in the marine/coastal

environment, and possibilities for coastal erosion mitigation and prevention.

GeoEcoMar and coordinator of the pan-European research infrastructure DANUBIUS RI presented the opportunity for Ecuador to become a member state in the future DANUBIUS ERIC (European et al.).

Through direct discussions, GeoEcoMar and ESPOL representatives developed, finalized, and signed a cooperation protocol between the two institutions.

**Project strategy:**

The actions proposed by the project were based on direct discussions with ESPOL representatives and the signing of a framework agreement for bilateral collaboration, including short and medium-term needs (training, equipment, integration into bilateral and international research teams).

The directions of collaboration between the two institutions have been identified as follows:

- To carry out study and research internships at GeoEcoMar offices (Bucharest and Constanta) for two young researchers or PhD students from EPSOL - in 2023 ;
- Working together to submit proposals for ERASMUS+ type institutional collaboration from 2024 (at the earliest, given the procedures for developing such agreements);
- Inclusion of ESPOL in GeoEcoMar's traditional partnerships in research projects under European research funding programmes (Horizon Europe Framework Programme).
- Attract ESPOL to the DANUBIUS-RI consortium and start discussions on the possible accession of Ecuador to DANUBIUS-ERIC, the only international ERIC-type research institution to be based in Romania (DANUBIUS ERIC should be operational by the end of 2023).

**Project sustainability:**

During the project, ways of medium-term collaboration between the project partners in areas of shared competence will be identified. These will aim to maintain the continuity of the activities started by the present project, both through the transfer of experience and through the identification of the needs for specialized equipment that Romania can meet. The actions will be the subject of subsequent project proposals for inclusion in the Annual Plan.

The project's sustainability will be ensured through cooperation activities between RoAid, GeoEcoMar and the *Republic of Ecuador* in their shared areas of competence, i.e. by continuing

to support capacity building for river-sea systems management and integrated coastal hazard management.

INTERVENTION LOGIC	
<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>We are increasing capacity for sustainable management of river-sea systems and natural hazard management in Ecuador.</p>	<p><b>Quantitative or qualitative vital indicators:</b></p> <p>National/institutional reports from the beneficiary state highlight quality improvement in the sustainable management of river-sea systems and natural hazard management.</p>
<p><b>Project purpose:</b></p> <p>Provide scientific expertise and assistance to Ecuador's local partners in river-sea systems management and integrated coastal zone hazard management in the partner state, the <i>Republic of Ecuador</i>.</p>	<p><b>Quantitative key indicators:</b></p> <p>GeoEcoMar / RoAid cooperation with research organizations in partner countries.</p> <p>Number of experts from partner institutions/organizations who have increased their level of knowledge in terms of scientific expertise in coastal and river-sea systems studies;</p> <p>Development needs and proposed support modalities for Romania identified at the local partner level.</p>
<p><b>Immediate results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased expertise at ESPOL University in Ecuador, based on the transfer of expertise from GeoEcoMar in the field of coastal sedimentology and support to multidisciplinary research in river - delta/lagoon - coastal zone - sea systems</li> <li>• Identify local support needs and how Romania can respond to them (training/transfer of expertise, equipment, integration into international research teams);</li> <li>• A medium- and long-term framework for collaboration with partners in the countries concerned has been agreed upon.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quantitative key indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Two young researchers, master's and PhD students from ESPOL University in Guayaquil, Ecuador, have completed a training period of 60 days in Romania within GeoEcoMar;</li> <li>✚ At least two experts from ESPOL University in Guayaquil, Ecuador, conducted a working visit of 7 days in Romania;</li> <li>✚ At least two experts from GeoEcoMar carried out a working visit for the transfer of expertise for a total of 7 days in Ecuador;</li> <li>✚ at least 30 students, PhD students and experts from ESPOL University participated in the actions of the Romanian delegation's visit.</li> </ul>

Table 2 - Intervention logic

### **Risks and assumptions:**

The risks associated with the project are based on assumptions determined by the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The following Risks and prevention/management measures have been identified:

Risks associated with carrying out the research internship of the 2 ESPOL University researchers/doctoral students in Romania: delays in the selection of the two researchers/doctoral students; failure to carry out the internship properly; inability to travel within the agreed period; Risks associated with carrying out the travel of ESPOL University experts in Romania and GeoEcoMar experts in Ecuador: inability to travel within the agreed period.

GeoEcoMar will initiate the selection procedure for the two researchers/doctoral fellows as soon as possible (after approval of the Annual Plan). It will communicate to the beneficiary - ESPOL University of Ecuador, a deadline for communicating the names of the two researchers;

The mentor appointed by GeoEcoMar to supervise the research internship for the two researchers/doctoral students will set interim deadlines in the work plan for the evaluation of the research activity (weekly or 2-weekly reports during the 60 days of the internship).

ESPOL University will select PhD students and include two persons on the reserve list (in case one or both of the selected persons are unable to travel). The implementing institution will take this risk into account in the procurement procedure for the air tickets (it will include the possibility of changing travel dates, if necessary).

### **4. The efforts and importance of civil society in official development assistance projects**

In the current global context, civil society efforts play a crucial role in protecting the environment, including through involvement in ODA projects. Initiatives that highlight the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups and other civil society actors to contribute to achieving essential and sustainable changes in the management and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity. This involvement of civil society in humanitarian development

assistance projects and programmes brings a new perspective to sustainable development efforts, accelerating strategic partnerships, innovation and community participation;

### **The role and importance of civil society in protecting the environment**

Civil society, through its diversity and dynamics, provides a unique framework for promoting and implementing environmental protection solutions. Non-governmental organizations and other civil society interest groups involved in environmental protection can mobilize resources, facilitate collaborations between stakeholders, local communities or governments and advocate. Civil society plays a crucial role in raising public awareness, promoting public policies, including environmental legislation, and implementing humanitarian development assistance projects geared towards conservation and sustainable use of resources.

### **NGO contribution to official development assistance projects**

The Romanian legislation has established a specific legislative framework for non-governmental organizations that want to access and implement official development assistance projects, i.e. to access funds to implement projects in certain beneficiary countries; the normative act that regulates the access to these funds for implementation is Decision 690/2017 for the approval of the Methodological Norms on the implementation of international cooperation activities for development and humanitarian assistance. Within this decision in Art. 23, lit. a)<sup>2</sup> and 29<sup>3</sup> We can observe the ways in which non-governmental organizations can access funds and further contribute to the achievement of the assumed object by obtaining funding from the Romanian state through the Agency for International Development Cooperation, an institution that is subordinated and coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Non-governmental organizations significantly contribute to ODA projects through their technical expertise and deep understanding of local contexts. To achieve objectives, they enter into

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<sup>2</sup> Art. 23: Direct award

The Agency may award grants by direct award to non-profit legal entities and international organizations based on the following well-founded justifications:

(a) as a means of action in a humanitarian crisis, based on a request made either directly by the government of the affected State or by international organizations or non-governmental organizations with proven experience in providing humanitarian assistance, a sound knowledge of local conditions and a proven capacity for rapid, practical action in emergencies;

<sup>3</sup> Art. 29: Beneficiaries of grants through contributions to the general budget of public or private law bodies

Beneficiaries of grants through contributions to the general budget of public or private law bodies may be non-governmental organizations, international organizations or other States or bodies designated by them.

partnership agreements with various countries or interest groups.

In 2024, Romania will provide funding for NGOs to implement various projects<sup>4</sup>, as follows:

Country	Project name	Project description	Beneficiary	Method of implementation	Budget
<b>Thematic objective: Institutional development</b>					
<b>Republic of North Macedonia</b>	Voluntary contribution affected	Voluntary contribution to UNODC earmarked for the implementation of the "Roadmap in the field of combating corruption and illegal financing in the Republic of North Macedonia" in support of national anti-corruption activities	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	Indirect	75.000 RON

<sup>4</sup> [https://roaid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/240116\\_plan-anual-2024\\_aprobat-guvern\\_Redacted.pdf](https://roaid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/240116_plan-anual-2024_aprobat-guvern_Redacted.pdf)

		coordinated by relevant institutions			
<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	Corruption assistance	Capacity building of YUKOM to support justice reform, prevention, and fight against corruption and integrity in the public sector in the Republic of Serbia	YUKOM (Lawyer Committee for Human Rights) Belgrade, Republic of Serbia	Direct and indirect	50.000 RON
<b>State of Palestine</b>	Voluntary contribution in affected	Voluntary contribution to an international organization affected by humanitarian action in the Gaza Strip	International organizations active in supporting the population of the Gaza Strip	Indirect	100.000 RON
<b>Thematic objective: Human development</b>					
<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	Education assistance	Strengthening the technical capacity of an educational	Concordia Organization, Kosovo Province, Republic of	Direct	80.000 RON



		centre in Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Serbia		
<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	Education assistance	Development of learning conditions for children and young people from disadvantaged groups in Sombor, Republic of Serbia	Sombor Educational Centre, Republic of Serbia	Direct	70.000 RON
<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	Education assistance	IT professional development of young people in Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Centre for the Development of Local Communities in Mitrovica (CRLS) Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Direct	65.000 RON
<b>Montenegro</b>	Education assistance	Strengthening the institutional capacity of the "Educational	Educational Centre - European French School - Podgorica	Direct	105.000 RON

		Centre - French European School" in Podgorica, Montenegro	Montenegro		
<b>Ukraine</b>	Education assistance	Strengthening the educational capacity of educational institutions in Ukraine	Foundations/Civil Society Organisations	Direct	115.000 RON

Table no. 3 - Romanian State funding through ODA projects related to 2024, granted to civil society;

As we can see, Romania allocates a funding of 660,000 RON, equivalent to 132,000 Euro, in 2024 for civil society to implement various projects in the beneficiary countries.

At the same time, we can see that Romania will not allocate funds to civil society in 2024 for sustainable development. This can be interpreted in several ways, depending on the context and government priorities. This decision may be reflected in a reassessment of some funding strategies or a reallocation of funding to other initiatives or sectors considered a priority. Furthermore, there is also a possibility of signalling the strengthening of mechanisms for international cooperation and collaboration between the public and private sectors, encouraging private-public partnerships as an alternative to direct funding of NGOs and sustainable development projects.

On the other hand, the lack of direct funding for civil society in the field of sustainable development could be a call to strengthen the internal capacity of NGOs to generate and access funds through other means, such as European funds, private funding, or international grants. Thus, this would stimulate the efficiency and innovation of NGOs and encourage them to develop financially sustainable projects and initiatives.

It is also essential to consider other ways the Romanian state can support sustainable development, even if not by allocating funds to civil society. This could include establishing public policies,

facilitating a favourable legislative framework, facilitating international funding and supporting collaborative partnerships between different sectors.

Moreover, the Romanian state needs to support the critical role of civil society in promoting sustainable development and achieving national and international sustainability goals. This can be achieved through open and transparent communication between the Romanian state institutions with responsibilities in the field, civil society and other stakeholders, as understanding certain aspects and motivations behind the allocation of funds is essential for long-term collaboration.

Civil society efforts to protect the environment through official development assistance programmes and projects are an essential component of global sustainable development efforts, which can be achieved by promoting and entering into strategic partnerships, contributing to the conservation of natural resources, and achieving environmental goals.

## 5. Conclusions

This article aims to highlight some of the serious threats to human health and to the survival of the ecosystems on which our societies are built, as well as the role and importance of civil society in protecting the environment.

It is limited by investigating the current literature on the situations identified. In this regard, we have highlighted certain aspects, such as the relevance and impact of ODA initiatives – whereby the results of the article highlight a positive impact of ODA projects in promoting environmental sustainability. The project we have exemplified in this research, namely the one with the Republic of Suriname, illustrates Romania's commitment to using ODA as a strategic tool to improve the management of natural resources and marine geology.

Regarding the prioritization of strategic areas, this analysis shows that Romania has identified and prioritized certain vital areas, such as marine geology and natural resource management. These are reflected in the development of public policies for international cooperation, focusing on projects that not only support economic development but also promote responsible environmental management.

From the point of view of sustainability and international cooperation, we can say that a sustainable approach is needed in all ODA projects. Romania's collaborations with the Republic of Suriname and the Republic of Ecuador have demonstrated the potential of international partnerships to bring about major changes in environmental practices, thus contributing to the achievement of global sustainable development goals.

Another aspect that should be considered is the implication for Romanian policy, i.e., Romania must continue to integrate these environmental principles into ODA projects, ensuring that this contributes to long-term environmental protection.

Moreover, the impact of environmental projects clearly illustrates Romania's commitment to environmental sustainability and the effective implementation of ODA programmes/projects. These projects, which promote certain international partnerships and sustainable management of natural resources, reflect a clear and dedicated strategic orientation of Romania towards environmental principles.

In the context of the research carried out on the environmental projects of the ODA granted by Romania on the environmental component, the projects' implications were closely related to public policy, the development of professional expertise, publications, academic recognition and personal impact.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the international cooperation in the framework of ODA projects that Romania carries out in the beneficiary countries facilitates the adoption and effective implementation of environmental policies in the beneficiary countries, thus contributing to the a improvement of natural resources management and the achievement of sustainable development objectives. This assumption implies that these international development cooperation projects/programmes transfer financial and technological resources and create a valuable exchange of knowledge and best practices, which can be transformed into environmentally sound and sustainable reforms in ODA recipient countries. Validation of this hypothesis would require collecting and analysing some data on environmental policy implementation, some case studies, monitoring and feedback from ODA recipient countries, both before and after the implementation of projects. This article also suggests directions for future research, for example, assessing the long-term impact of ODA projects on the environmental component or exploring new ways to maximize some of these initiatives' environmental and social benefits.

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