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Article

Is Romania Factoring in Environmental Goals in its Official Development Assistance to Recipient Countries?

Abstract: *Official Development Assistance (ODA) refers to the provision of financial and technical resources by developed countries to support the economic, social, and environmental development of recipient nations, the undeveloped countries. This article explores Romania's efforts in promoting ODA, focusing particularly on how it integrates environmental sustainability into development programs for recipient countries.*

By analysing Romania's ODA strategies in areas such as natural resource management and marine geology, the study highlights the crucial relationship between donor countries like Romania and the environmental challenges faced by beneficiary nations. Through these efforts, Romania aims to contribute to the achievement of global sustainable development goals and improve environmental practices in recipient 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.

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Through qualitative research including case studies and content analysis, the article analyses the results of projects carried out by Romania in various recipient countries. The article also explores the challenges encountered in implementing these projects and proposes 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 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 prac-

tices in partner countries, thereby strengthening the shared commitment to a more sustainable and equitable future.

Keywords: *cooperation; ecology; environmental sustainability; international development; natural resource management; official development assistance*

1. Introduction

Analysing international relations, a complex and vast field that encompasses political, social, economic, environmental, and security issues, I focused my 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.

The key stakeholders in ODA include donor countries, which primarily consist of economically advanced nations; recipient countries, which are typically developing or least-developed nations in need of external assistance; and international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and OECD, which oversee and facilitate the implementation and coordination of ODA programs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and private sector actors also play a significant role in executing ODA projects and ensuring their sustainability on the ground.

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.

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.

Official Development Assistance 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.

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.

In this context of global challenges, Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a particularly 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.

Methods of Using ODA Funds in Direct and Indirect Project Implementation: Romania's Approaches

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is used in promoting environmental sustainability on a global scale. It is relevant because it plays a crucial role in promoting and facilitating sustainable development in developing countries. The objectives of ODA are poverty and inequality reduction.

ODA can potentially 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.

In Romania, the use of ODA funds for direct implementation is carried out through public procurement of goods 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 the beneficiary countries.

Indirect implementation of ODA funds refers to the method by which resources are managed and utilized through intermediaries rather than directly by the donor country or organization. In this approach, the funds are channelled through various mechanisms such as grants, direct budget support to recipient governments, and voluntary contributions to international organizations or NGOs. These intermediaries are responsible for executing the projects on the ground, allowing for greater flexibility and local adaptation of initiatives.

For instance, in the case of the United States, foreign assistance is primarily administered through the United States Agency for International Development. USAID promotes environmental sustainability projects in developing countries by providing grants and budgetary support to local governments, organizations, or multinational entities. However, despite the potential benefits of this approach, these projects often face challenges, such as political constraints in both the donor and recipient countries and the absence of a unified and coherent framework for implementation.

Despite the challenges, international ODA funding for environmental projects and programs in developing countries is estimated at \$21 billion annually (Sander and Cranford, 2010). However, this figure excludes climate change funding, which has become a contentious issue. According to CARE's 2023 "Seeing Double" report (CARE, 2023), wealthy countries promised at COP15 in 2009 to provide \$100 billion annually in "new and additional" climate finance to support developing countries in their climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Unfortunately, between 2011 and 2020, 93% of this climate finance was drawn directly from existing development aid, rather than being additional funds, undermining broader development goals such as health, education, and poverty alleviation. This means that ODA and climate finance are often double counted, with only 7% of reported climate finance being truly additional. This practice threatens the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it diverts essential development finance towards climate efforts without providing the necessary new resources for either.

However, the additional resources required are significantly higher, indicating a clear need for increased funding for environmental sustainability through ODA (Sander and Cranford,

2010). This highlights the crucial role that ODA can play in promoting environmental principles and achieving global sustainable development goals (Sander and 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.

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 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 no. 213/2016 (Romanian Government. Official Monitor, 2016a) 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 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024) as the primary coordinator of these activities at the national level.

The next normative act is Government Decision No 1006/2016 (Romanian Government. Official Monitor, 2016b), 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 (Romanian Government. Official Monitor, 2017a) 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 (Romanian Government. Official Monitor. 2017b) 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.

In environmental sustainability, Romania has started to emphasize 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 and Babucea, 2018). These initiatives demonstrate the recognition of eco-innovation as a business opportunity and a significant contribution to environmental protection (Rabonțu and Babucea, 2018).

Romania aims to be a consistent and credible donor of development and humanitarian assistance, contributing to international efforts to combat extreme poverty and enhance global security. Its external actions are guided by the priorities and objectives outlined in the Strategic Multiannual Programme on International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance for the periods 2020-2023 and 2024-2027. Through these efforts, Romania seeks to

support less developed countries, focusing on projects that promote sustainable development and strengthen institutional capacities.

The Strategic Multiannual Programme on International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance for the periods 2020-2023 and 2024-2027 focused and will continue to 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 is directing 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.

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.

In this paper, I employed qualitative research methods, primarily based on document analysis and case studies. The document analysis allowed for a comprehensive examination of relevant reports, policies, and academic literature to understand the context and strategies behind Romania's Official Development Assistance. This approach provided a detailed exploration of how Romania integrates environmental objectives into its ODA programs. Additionally, the use of case studies facilitated a deeper investigation of specific projects carried out by Romania in recipient countries, highlighting the practical challenges and successes in promoting environmental sustainability. These qualitative methods were chosen to offer nuanced insights into the dynamics of Romania's ODA efforts, with a particular focus on the environmental impact.

2. Literature Review

In this section, I will discuss key insights from existing research on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and how it can be aligned with environmental objectives, as well as the role of ODA in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Several scholars have examined the intersection between ODA and environmental goals. Maurizio Carbone (2013) emphasizes the need for policy coherence in the EU's development assistance, arguing that ODA can be an effective tool for helping recipient countries meet environmental objectives when properly aligned with sustainable development policies. He highlights the importance of integrating environmental protection into ODA projects to ensure long-term sustainability in the recipient countries. This perspective aligns with the broader goals of international development, where donor countries are expected to support not only economic growth but also environmental resilience.

Marc Williams (2014), in his work on aid, sustainable development, and environmental crises, explores how ODA can address both developmental and environmental challenges. He points out that ODA projects often face the risk of failing to achieve their full potential if they do not prioritize environmental sustainability from the outset. Williams suggests that environmental degradation is a significant barrier to sustainable development and that ODA must include mechanisms to address this issue.

Environmental policy integration (EPI), as discussed by Jordan and Lenschow (2010), provides an essential framework for understanding how environmental considerations can be systematically incorporated into public policies and ODA projects. EPI encourages a holistic approach where environmental goals are not treated as standalone objectives but are integrated into the broader development strategies of both donor and recipient countries. This framework has been crucial in shaping the way ODA is structured to include environmental sustainability in its scope.

Another important perspective is provided by the Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT), as outlined by Mol, Sonnenfeld, and Spaargaren (2009). EMT stresses that economic development and environmental protection can and should go hand in hand. It suggests that ODA projects aiming at economic development in recipient countries can simultaneously promote environmental reforms if the right policies and technologies are employed. This theory is particularly relevant for countries that receive ODA to implement green technologies and practices, thereby fostering both economic growth and environmental stewardship.

Regarding the relationship between ODA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the literature highlights the complementary role of ODA in achieving the SDGs. Carbone (2013) argues that well-targeted ODA can significantly contribute to meeting the SDGs, especially in areas such as poverty reduction, clean energy, and climate action. However, some scholars also point out challenges. For example, while the SDGs set ambitious global targets, the effectiveness of ODA in achieving these goals depends on how well the aid is aligned with both donor and recipient countries' priorities.

Research suggests that while ODA is crucial for supporting the SDGs, there are also limitations. In many cases, ODA has been criticized for being insufficient in volume and not always properly aligned with the recipient countries' long-term sustainable development strategies. For instance, Orsini (2020) highlights that although ODA has helped many countries address environmental challenges, the lack of consistent implementation and monitoring has often hindered its full potential in supporting sustainable development.

In summary, the literature indicates that ODA plays a critical role in promoting environmental sustainability and contributing to the SDGs, but its success depends on strategic alignment, policy coherence, and the integration of environmental objectives into development assistance programs.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research focuses on a qualitative approach, relying on document analysis and case studies to explore Romania's Official Development Assistance (ODA) and its alignment with environmental objectives. The study is designed to assess the impact of ODA-funded projects on environmental sustainability in recipient countries, particularly in the areas of natural resource management and marine geology.

This research is based on the following hypotheses:

1. Romania's ODA projects incorporate environmental sustainability as a core objective, contributing positively to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in beneficiary countries.
2. The integration of modern technologies, such as LIDAR systems, enhances the effectiveness of ODA projects in areas like forest management and biodiversity conservation.

3. Romania's institutional capacity-building efforts through ODA contribute to long-term environmental sustainability in recipient countries.

3.1. Research Steps

a. Literature review: A comprehensive review of existing research on ODA and its role in promoting environmental sustainability. This included analysing academic papers, policy documents, and official reports on ODA projects.

b. Document analysis: Key documents, such as Romania's Strategic Multiannual Programme on International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance, were analysed to identify the goals and priorities of Romanian ODA. The document analysis also included international agreements, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which influence the strategic implementation of ODA.

c. Case study analysis: Two case studies were selected – Suriname and Ecuador – to provide an in-depth understanding of Romania's ODA in practice. These case studies allowed for a detailed examination of project implementation, the use of modern technologies, and the impact on environmental sustainability in specific regions.

d. Evaluation of outcomes: The research also considered the outcomes of the projects, such as improvements in local institutional capacities and the sustainability of the results after project completion.

3.2. Case Selection

The Republic of Suriname and the Republic of Ecuador were chosen as case studies because they represent key areas where Romania has implemented ODA projects focused on environmental sustainability. Both countries face significant environmental challenges, such as deforestation in Suriname and coastal erosion in Ecuador, making them relevant for examining the effectiveness of Romania's ODA efforts.

3.3. Time Frame of Analysis

The analysis focuses on ODA projects implemented between 2020 and 2023, as outlined in Romania's Strategic Multiannual Programme for International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Assistance for the period 2020-2023. The selected case studies fall within this time frame, ensuring the relevance of the data analysed.

3.4. Character of Data and Information Used

This research relies on qualitative data obtained from official reports, academic articles, and policy documents. Data on the specific projects implemented in Suriname and Ecuador were gathered from government publications, reports from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and international development organizations involved in the projects. The qualitative nature of the data provided insights into the processes and strategies employed in these projects.

3.5. Research Methods

a. **Document analysis:** This method allowed for a comprehensive review of policy documents, project reports, and scholarly literature. Document analysis provided context for understanding the broader strategies behind Romania's ODA, particularly its focus on environmental sustainability.

b. **Case study method:** Case studies were used to analyse two specific ODA projects, one in Suriname and the other in Ecuador. This method provided detailed insights into the project goals, implementation strategies, and outcomes, offering a practical perspective on how Romania's ODA is applied in different contexts.

c. **Comparative analysis:** The two case studies were compared to identify common challenges and successes in the implementation of ODA projects focused on environmental sustainability. This comparative analysis helped to highlight best practices and areas for improvement.

3.6. Justification for Methodology

The combination of document analysis and case study methods was chosen because it provides a holistic understanding of Romania's ODA strategies and their real-world impact. Document analysis offers an overview of policies and frameworks, while case studies provide in-depth, contextual insights into specific projects. This mixed-method approach allows for a comprehensive evaluation of Romania's ODA efforts, with a particular focus on environmental sustainability.

4. 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:

Case Study 1: The Republic of Suriname

Between April and November 2023, Romania, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Agency for International Development Cooperation, implemented Project No. 29 (ROAID, 2023a) from the Annual Plan for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance. Approved by the Prime Minister, the project aimed at forming a partnership with the Republic of Suriname, located in the Latin America and Caribbean region, with a budget allocation of 350,000 RON.

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 through LIDAR system (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, n.d.). LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) devices use laser pulses to measure distances and create precise, 3D maps of environments. They are commonly used in forestry to assess vegetation structure, measure tree heights, and monitor forest density with high accuracy. 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 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.

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.

Table no. 1 – Romanian State funding through ODA projects related to 2023, granted to civil society

INTERVENTION LOGIC	
<p>Objective: Increasing the institutional capacity of public institutions in the forestry sector in the Republic of Suriname.</p>	<p>Quantitative or qualitative vital indicators: – Trained human resource – Increased material base</p>
<p>Project purpose: Increasing the capacity of government forestry and biodiversity conservation institutions in monitoring forest resources through remote sensing.</p>	<p>Quantitative key indicators: Proposal for forest monitoring with modern techniques.</p>
<p>Immediate results: – Contact made with the direct partner, if possible, in a pandemic or online context; – Training modules on forest monitoring; – Doratea with Server for storing information; – Equipping with mobile LIDAR devices – We are equipping with the necessary software for processing tree inventory information – Arboreal Forest.</p>	<p>Quantitative key indicators: – Definitive contact persons and institutions for the implementation of the project; – Training module learned by the beneficiary – forest monitoring; – Server; – Mobile LIDAR devices; – Tree inventory information processing software -Arboreal Forest.</p>

Adapted from: Activity Report of ROAID, 2023 (ROAID, 2023b)

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.

Case Study 2: The Republic of Ecuador

During the same period, between April and November 2023, Romania implemented another significant project No. 27 (ROAID, 2023a) aimed at addressing coastal zone management issues in the Republic of Ecuador. This project, also part of Romania's Annual Plan for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, was developed in response to critical environmental challenges faced by 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 cumulative anthropogenic pressures – in Guayaquil, as well as specific activities of navigation, transport, fishing, aquaculture, and uncontrolled urban development.

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.
- Planned 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 analysed: 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.

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.

Table no. 2 – Romanian State funding through ODA projects related to 2023, granted to civil society

INTERVENTION LOGIC	
<p>Objective Increasing capacity for sustainable management of river-sea systems and natural hazard management in Ecuador.</p>	<p>Quantitative or qualitative vital indicators: National/institutional reports from the beneficiary state highlight quality improvement in the sustainable management of river-sea systems and natural hazard management.</p>
<p>Project purpose 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>Quantitative key indicators – GeoEcoMar / RoAid cooperation with research organizations in partner countries; – 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; – Development needs and proposed support modalities for Romania identified at the local partner level.</p>
<p>Immediate results – 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; – Identify local support needs and how Romania can respond to them (training/transfer of expertise, equipment, integration into international research teams); – A medium- and long-term framework for collaboration with partners in the countries.</p>	<p>Quantitative key indicators – 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; – At least two experts from ESPOL University in Guayaquil, Ecuador, conducted a working visit of 7 days in Romania; – At least two experts from GeoEcoMar carried out a working visit for the transfer of expertise for a total of 7 days in Ecuador; – At least 30 students, PhD students and experts from ESPOL University participated in the actions of the Romanian delegation's visit.</p>

Adapted from: Activity Report of ROAID, 2023 (RoAid, 2023b)

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.

The two case studies reveal several risks and assumptions inherent in Romania's ODA projects. In both the Suriname and Ecuador initiatives, the success of the projects depends heavily on the effective implementation of modern technologies, such as LIDAR devices, and the active engagement of local institutions. Key risks include potential delays in training, technical challenges in deploying new equipment, and possible shifts in local government priorities or institutional changes that could affect project continuity. Additionally, unforeseen environ-

mental or political changes, such as natural disasters or shifts in policy, may also pose risks to project outcomes. Assumptions made include the continued cooperation of local stakeholders, adequate financial and logistical resources, and a stable political environment that supports the implementation of these sustainability initiatives.

5. 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 NGOs 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 (Romanian Government. Official Monitor, 2017a) for the approval of the Methodological Norms on the implementation of international cooperation activities for development and humanitarian assistance. It can be observed the way in which NGOs 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.

NGOs significantly contribute to ODA projects through their technical expertise and deep understanding of local contexts. To achieve objectives, they enter into partnership agreements with various countries or interest groups. In 2024, Romania will provide funding for NGOs to implement various projects, as follows:

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

Country	Project Name	Project Description	Beneficiary	Implementation Method	Budget
Thematic Objective: Institutional development					
Republic of North Macedonia	Voluntary contribution affected	Voluntary contribution to UNODC earmarked for the implementation of the "Roadmap in fight against corruption and illicit financing in the Republic of North Macedonia in support of national anti-corruption activities coordinated by relevant institutions	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	Indirect	RON 75.000
Republic of Serbia	Corruption assistance	Developing YUKOM's capacity to support justice reform, preventing and combating corruption and integrity in the public sector in the Republic of Serbia	YUKOM	Direct and indirect	RON 50.000
State of Palestine	Voluntary contribution affected	Voluntary contribution to an international organization affected by humanitarian action in the Gaza Strip	International organization, active in supporting the population of the Gaza Strip	Indirect	RON 100.000
Thematic objective: Human development					
Republic of Serbia	Education assistance	Strengthening the technical capacity of an educational center in Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Concordia Organization Province of Kosovo, Republic of Serbia	Direct	RON 80.000
Republic of Serbia	Education assistance	IT professional development of young people in Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Center for the Development of Local Communities in Mitrovica (CRLS) Kosovo province, Republic of Serbia	Direct	RON 70.000
Montenegro	Education assistance	Strengthening the institutional capacity of the "Educational Centre – French European School" in Podgorica Montenegro	Educational Center European French School – Podgorica Montenegro	Direct	RON 105.000
Ukraine	Education assistance	Strengthening the institutional capacity of educational institutions in Ukraine	Foundations/Civil Society Organizations	Direct	RON 115.000

Source: Annual cooperation plan for development and humanitarian assistance, 2024 (ROAID, 2024)

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, 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 sig-

nalling 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.

5. Conclusions

This article aims to highlight the way Romania is deploying ODA to reach environmental objectives in some beneficiary countries, as well as the role and importance of civil society in protecting the environment.

The literature included in this article highlights aspects such as the relevance and impact of ODA initiatives – whereby ODA plays a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability and supporting the development efforts of beneficiary countries. It has been demonstrated that well-targeted ODA projects, when aligned with environmental objectives, contribute significantly to the conservation of natural resources, improvement of local institutional capacities, and the achievement of sustainable development goals. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that ODA is effectively integrated into national policies and that recipient countries have the capacity to sustain these projects in the long term. The case studies discussed illustrate the potential of ODA to create lasting positive impacts when the necessary support structures and collaborations are in place.

The case studies included in this article exemplified Romania's commitment to supporting sustainable development through targeted ODA initiatives. Especially the one regarding the ODA to the Republic of Suriname illustrates Romania's efforts to strengthen institutional capacity in forest management by providing modern technology and training, such as the use of LIDAR devices for forest monitoring. This case demonstrates how Romania's ODA focuses on promoting environmental sustainability, addressing local challenges, and building the long-term resilience of beneficiary countries.

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.

A next natural step in this research would involve gathering and analysing feedback from ODA recipient countries to further validate the findings. Collecting data on environmental policy implementation, case studies, and monitoring both before and after project implementation would provide a clearer understanding of the long-term impact of Romania's ODA initiatives on sustainability in the beneficiary countries. 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.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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