

Rogelj, Janez; Bojnec, Štefan; Logožar, Klavdij

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A Model of International Development Cooperation: The Case of Slovenia

Janez Rogelj^a, Štefan Bojnec^b, Klavdij Logožar^{c*}

^aPhD student at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Razlagova 14, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia

^bUniversity of Primorska, Faculty of Management, Izolska vrata 2, 6000 Koper, Slovenia

^cUniversity of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Razlagova 14, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia

janez.rogelj@gmail.com, stefan.bojnec@fm-kp.si, klavdij.logozar@um.si

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Abstract

Development aid, one of the most important mechanisms for the redistribution of global wealth, represents financial flows with economic growth and social improvement as their primary objective. Recently, international development cooperation has been in the process of change that requires the involvement of new actors, the use of new instruments, and expanding the fields of work. In this article, the authors introduce the Slovenian model of international development cooperation, emphasising the criteria for deciding the direction of development cooperation. The criteria are clear interest of the beneficiary state, content priority fields, and geographical priority areas. The authors also discuss Slovenia's active collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in international development cooperation. Special attention is given to three successful development projects in Africa that Slovenia recently financed. All three selected projects are based on principles of sustainable development and were realized in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Introduction

Development aid, often also called Official Development Assistance (ODA), represents one of the most important mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth in the world. ODA is an instrument of international development cooperation for promoting human, sustainable, and gender-equitable development (Sachs, 2012; Ayers & Huq, 2009). One of the modalities of ODA and international cooperation in education for sustainable development is as an agent of change toward more environmentally conscious citizenship (Oikawa, 2016; Chung & Par, 2016). It is widely accepted that rich countries should help poor ones, and the most common way to do so is through development aid policies. The question of development aid and its impact on various economic and social indicators is one of the most debated topics in international and development economics. Although the main reason for aid is to generate growth and development, the leading global issues of less developed countries (LDC) still need to be solved. Much of the existing

*Corresponding author

research shows conflicting results, and the question about the efficiency of development aid and its impact on various fields of national economies remains in dispute (Gregl & Logožar, 2017). In recent years, there has been a trend of increasing criticism towards ODA and the optimization of ODA policies in a growing inequality between the Global North and Global South (Chica-Morales et al., 2021).

In recent decades, ODA has faced an intense debate on the effectiveness and coherence of policies, reflected in the low impact of resources used and the lack of adequacy of said resources (Dietrich, 2015; Sianes, 2017). In this respect, the correct planning of development interventions plays an essential role, as the future provision of objectives and resources will depend on this. Bilateral ODA agencies have traditionally used tools based on analysis, observation, and judgment for planning, with the logical framework approach and project cycle management being the prominent representatives, due to their greater ease of use. However, these tools generally need a methodological basis capable of anticipating the quantitative impact of policies (Landoni & Corti, 2011). Over the past 15 years, countries have made serious efforts to reform the development aid system. However, they still need to catch up to what is needed to face the development challenges of today's world because the international reality is changing more profoundly and rapidly than development aid has been able to change (Alonso, 2018).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development obliges the international community to move towards a radically new Financing for Development framework. Tentative estimates put the resources required for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at between one and four trillion dollars annually, a magnitude unattainable from current official flows (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2014). Per its ambition and complexity, the 2030 Agenda will require mobilizing resources and capabilities from highly distinct sources, public and private, and domestic and international (Alonso, 2018).

Slovenia is a small, open, export-oriented economy. Like other developed countries, it provides substantial resources in the form of funding for international development cooperation projects (IDCPs) and direct funding for humanitarian aid in the event of natural disasters (famine, drought, floods, outbreaks of severe infectious diseases, volcanoes, wars, and other similar events) to countries in need. All the IDCPs are carried out in partnership between the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other

organizations in the field of development cooperation and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, based on the Strategy for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia until 2030. The Strategy provides a framework for Slovenia's action at the multilateral level. It gives orientations of development cooperation and humanitarian aid on geographical and thematic priorities, as well as on the general criteria for government development cooperation.

International development cooperation (IDC) is an essential instrument through which developed countries seek economic, social, and political progress in partner countries. In doing so, they contribute to overall economic progress, poverty eradication, women's empowerment, and the reduction of inequalities between countries, enabling the international community to work together better. Slovenia's active participation in the field of IDC and humanitarian aid is one of the objectives of its foreign policy. The starting point for such activities is international agreements and standards in the field of IDC, sustainable development and humanitarian aid, the values and development orientations of Slovenian society and economy, and Slovenia's experience and comparative advantages to date (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

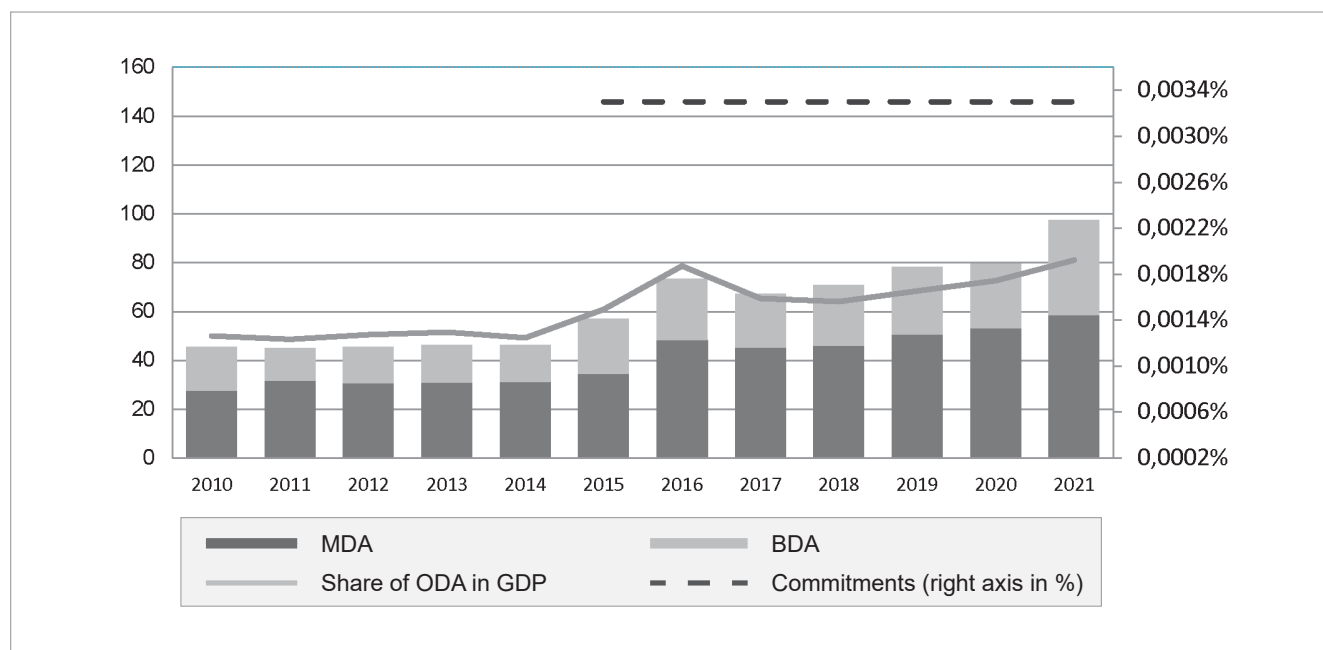
Within the IDC system, Slovenia has established itself as a credible and reliable partner, which it has been meeting by allocating a large share of its resources and other forms of development assistance, given its economic strength, since 2004 (accession to the EU). As an EU Member State, Slovenia committed itself in the context of the negotiations for the New Development Agenda in 2015 to work towards increasing ODA to 0.33% of GDP by 2030 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022).

Figure 1 shows the resources and their share in GDP between 2010 and 2021 that Slovenia has committed to development aid. In 2020, Slovenia allocated €79.6 million to ODA, representing 0.17% of gross domestic product (GDP), while in 2021, it had already allocated €97.48 million, representing 0.19% of GDP.

The Republic of Slovenia conducts bilateral and multilateral development cooperation following international rules and standards and in line with the strategic documents on IDC adopted by the Republic of Slovenia. In 2020, multilateral development assistance (MDA) amounted to €53.12 million, or 67%, and was implemented mainly through the EU, the UN system, and the World Bank Group; €26.49 million, or 33%, was bilateral development assistance (BDA) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Figure 1

Official Development Assistance (ODA) volume between 2010 and 2020 as share of gross domestic product (GDP) and international commitments of the Republic of Slovenia (in millions of euros, current prices)



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022.

Republic of Slovenia, 2022). In 2021, however, it amounted to €58.52 million, or 60 percent, and €38.96 million, or 40%, was bilateral assistance.

The article's main objective is to review the Slovenian model of international development cooperation with emphasis on two priority criteria for deciding the direction of development cooperation. The two criteria are geographical priority areas (e.g., Africa) and content priority fields (e.g., achieving the SDGs). In accordance with the paper's main objective, the article's structure is as follows. First, the formal structure of Slovenia's IDC is reviewed; second, Slovenia's active cooperation with UNIDO is presented; and finally, three development projects in Africa are described as case studies of the successful implementation of SDGs in development projects.

Slovenian Model on International Development Cooperation

The presented model of international development cooperation is based on dialogue between the recipient countries of development cooperation, UNIDO, and Slovenia, and is based on the transfer of technology and knowledge that Slovenia, as an open economy, offers to countries and regions in need. According to mandatory and strategic criteria, the IDCs mainly focus on priority content areas and geographic

areas where official Slovenian development assistance can be effective. Aid is geared towards supporting the development efforts of partner countries. Sustainable development strategies are crucial for long-term improvements of "human wellbeing, social equity and environmental integrity, and the particular system qualities that can sustain these" (Leach, Stirling & Scoones, 2010).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia is responsible for IDC and humanitarian aid in the Republic of Slovenia. IDC may be implemented by ministries, bodies attached to ministries, or government departments participating in bilateral technical assistance programmes in the field of IDC. Accordingly, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia (MEDT) has complete competence for implementing IDC projects in the economic field. The IDC is based on strategic documents adopted by the Republic of Slovenia: Law on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia (IDCHA of RS), the Regulation on the Implementation of International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia and the Strategy for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia (Strategy on IDCHA of RS) until 2030.

The objectives of IDC and humanitarian aid are set out in the law on IDCHA of RS, namely:

- The objective of IDC is to contribute to the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequalities, and the promotion of sustainable development in partner countries.
- Humanitarian aid aims to save lives. The IDCs mainly focus on alleviating suffering, preserving human dignity, reducing vulnerability and risk to crises, acting preventively, and building resilience and capacity to respond to crises.

In the context of bilateral cooperation, the MEDT manages the economic policy of the IDC. It is a financier or co-financier of IDC projects or other development activities in the partner country where the development projects are being implemented. The Ministry has a specific budget line in the budget of the Republic of Slovenia for this type of financing, from which funds earmarked for development activities (earmarked funds) are drawn.

Development cooperation is guided by several criteria, among which the following three are the most important:

- A clear expression of interest by the country wishing to benefit from the IDC (i.e., the recipient/beneficiary country),
- the implementation of development projects in the context of thematic priority areas where Slovenia has economic and other advantages that enable Slovenia to contribute to the development and other benefits of partner countries,
- countries falling within the geographical priority areas can receive development assistance (exceptions are possible).

The *priority content areas* are:

- a. Promoting the competitiveness of economies through productive employment and quality education. In this area, Slovenia can offer partner countries the opportunity to build inclusive, sustainable, and economically competitive industries based on equal opportunities for all, including the most vulnerable groups. This can be achieved by building capacity and promoting decent jobs through knowledge and technology transfer, sharing best practices, and supporting quality education programmes, including vocational training and lifelong learning.
- b. Fostering innovation and digital transformation through technology development and transfer. In this respect, while exploiting the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and taking advantage of the industry transition, Slovenia can offer the development

of research and high-tech support programmes and contribute to the advancement and application of new technologies and digital solutions in industry (Industry 4.0, Industry 5.0, and Society 5.0).

- c. Promoting circular economy activities and environmental protection in the industry. From a development perspective, it is of the utmost importance for Slovenia to improve resource efficiency and waste management by applying circular economy principles and achieving the SDGs on climate change, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, including water resources and other environmental resources.
- d. Promoting economic activities in the field of clean energy and energy efficiency. Slovenia has an active policy on energy efficiency and clean technologies and can offer such development services to partner countries. It has a good track record in promoting knowledge and the use of technologies to harness access to clean energy, reduce industry-related emissions and promote energy security.

The *geographical priority areas* are:

In the area of IDC, Slovenia has identified the following three priority regions where it is ready to pursue development projects actively, based on the emerging needs in the global development environment: The Western Balkans, the European Neighbourhood, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

While joint development support from UNIDO and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia can be provided at both country and regional levels, particular emphasis is given to the least developed countries.

Cooperation Between Slovenia and UNIDO

The cooperation between MEDT and UNIDO is based on the Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and UNIDO. Most of the development projects implemented so far have been financed and implemented by Slovenia through UNIDO. According to UNIDO, Slovenia is one of the most active members and a role model of the IDC for small open economy countries. Among UNIDO Member States, Slovenia ranks as the leading donor (largest per capita donor) of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) projects in terms of per capita voluntary contributions - between 2012 and 2018, Slovenia ranked in sixth place among more than 170 Member States in terms of per capita development assistance indicator.

This way, support for the development efforts of partner countries is ensured. At the same time, for Slovenia, the IDC also represents one of the general and systemic measures to improve internationalisation through the involvement of the public and private sectors in development cooperation.

Between 2005 and 2022, the Republic of Slovenia allocated €7.134.839 to UNIDO for IDC projects and €3.541.113 between 2012 and 2022 (see Figure 2). Since 2011, we have jointly prepared 20 international projects with UNIDO, mostly involving Slovenian institutions, universities, individual researchers and experts, private companies, and other legal entities, in cooperation with experts from UNIDO and the partner countries.

Case Studies of Development Projects Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development

In the following sections, we present three selected development projects financed by the Republic of Slovenia in the last six years in cooperation with several organizations

and companies. All projects are based on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development principles and, in particular, the Sustainable Development Goal on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure for Global Progress (SDG 9) of the United Nations system to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

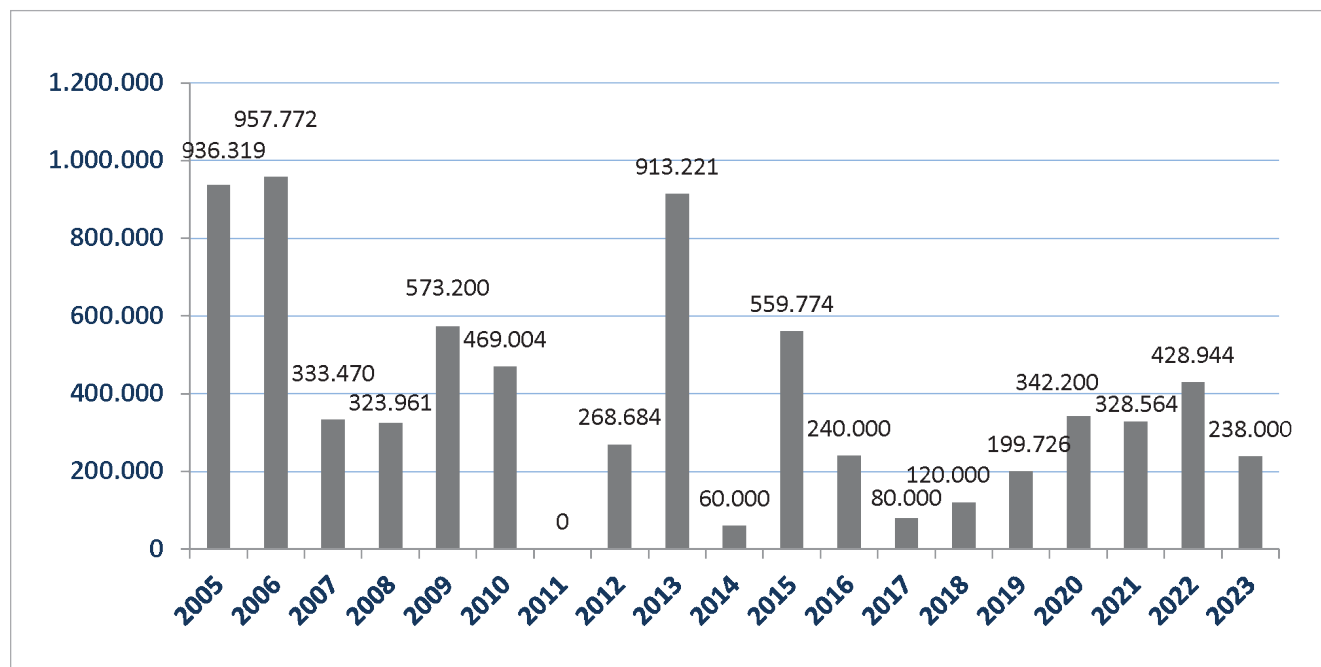
Demonstration and transfer of environmentally sound technology for water treatment in Kenya

Despite sub-Saharan Africa's economic openness and ongoing economic relationships with international players, the region has yet to develop sustainably and substantially reduce poverty. Aspiring development is challenging in sub-Saharan Africa due to a sluggish pace of growth, a consistent record of failed states, conflicts, famines, and disasters, and, therefore, high numbers of inter-regional refugees (Killick, 2005).

Kenya experiences similar development challenges despite sustained economic growth and clear improvements across human development indices (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Kenya is one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa and is

Figure 2

Volume of funding for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) projects of the Republic of Slovenia with UNIDO between 2005 and 2023 (in euros, current prices)



Source: MEDT, own calculations.

Note: For 2023, the foreseen volume of funds is indicated

engaged in significant political, structural, and economic reforms to tackle its vital development challenges (Trading Economics, 2020; World Bank, 2022a).

The development project financed by the Republic of Slovenia aimed to find and distribute water in a rural part of Kenya (southern Kenya, south of Mombasa) using the latest technology. The project consisted of two parts. In the first part (2014-2016), a Slovenian company, selected through a public tender, delivered and commissioned a water treatment plant with a hybrid power supply (solar system and solar power plant). Before the project was completed and the infrastructure system was handed over to the local community, the company carried out the servicing of the plant and additional training of the maintenance staff from the local community.

With the help of UNIDO experts and a Slovenian company, the local community in Kenya proposed the construction of additional infrastructure: digging an additional well and connecting it to the newly built water treatment plant. So that the drinking water could be used not only for the local community but also sold to the nearby tourist centres (private-public partnership). The local community also proposed that the purified water from the filtration plant could be connected via a water pipe to the local hospital, which needed a permanent and safe source of drinking water. With additional funding, this objective was also achieved.

The objectives of the project included:

- To find a better water source near the installed water filtration plant and to connect it to the local hospital.
- Install a new larger plant in the existing container or reconstruct the existing plant, which had to be able to desalinate up to 10.000 mg/l of dissolved salts.
- As the salinity and biological contamination of the water varies according to the seasons, it was also necessary to supply portable pH/rx and conductivity meters as part of the next phase of the project so that the water source and the quality of the drinking water could be regularly monitored, even after the final handover of the infrastructure to the local community.

As a result, the mortality rate of infants and children under five years of age has been significantly reduced with the significantly improved quality of the water source. The project's estimated value was €131.000, of which Slovenia contributed €103.183, and UNIDO financed the rest. This project has established an improved water extraction and purification system that will benefit the local community

in the long term. The surplus purified water will be used to maintain the facilities (purchase appropriate filters for water purification). At the same time, the local hospital, which previously depended on purchased water or water boiling, has a permanent and clean water source.

Earth observation services for improving water supply management in Uganda

In the last decade, access to drinking water and sanitation have been acknowledged as human rights by the international community; they have also been recognized as a crucial goal for achieving sustainable development for all in the framework of the 2030 Agenda (Colina Martín, 2020). Ensuring access to high-quality drinking water is crucial to the quality of life of every community. In the specific context of the work of international cooperation in the fields of water and sanitation, SDG 6 is devoted explicitly to ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all and includes six targets, referred to universal access to safe and affordable drinking water; equitable access to adequate sanitation and hygiene (Mara & Evans, 2018); the end of open defecation (Mara, 2017), paying particular attention to the needs of women and girls (Saleem et al., 2019) and those in vulnerable situations; improve water quality by reducing pollution (Ezbakhe, 2018), eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally (Tortajada, 2020).

The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country in eastern Central Africa. It is situated on Lake Victoria, the largest freshwater lake in Africa. Although it has enough fresh water to meet its population's daily needs, some 44% of its population, or 20 million people, face limited access to quality drinking water (World Health Organization & United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2021). About 19% or 8 million people in the Republic of Uganda get their water from unprotected dug wells, springs, or untested surface water points (rivers, dams, ponds, streams, canals).

A Slovenian high-tech company in the field of satellite data for scanning the surface of areas on the ground was selected in the call for tender. Between 2016 and 2017, the company developed and deployed a Utility Performance Monitoring and Information System (UPMIS) application for capturing and analysing water resources data using data from the European Space Agency's (ESA) Copernicus programme. The UPMIS application is an operational tool for collecting real-time data on rural water sources'

functionality, management, and financial situation. It also collects basic information on the installations and technical characteristics of the water system itself.

The estimated value of the two-year project (2022-2023) is € 229,900, of which Slovenia contributed € 121,000, Slovenian companies contributed € 28,900 (public-private partnership), and the ESA financed the rest. The result of the project, also co-funded by ESA and the Republic of Slovenia, is a system capable of determining the boundaries of rural settlements and population density from 2015 onwards, based on satellite data. At the same time, the system can calculate changes in areas and population density independently every month. In addition to integrating the satellite data and further developing the analytical application, the project also includes training local experts to ensure the system's sustainable, long-term and reliable operation.

Establishment of cross-border interoperable infrastructure node in Tanzania

Over the past decade, despite rapid population growth, Tanzania has achieved relatively strong economic growth and declining poverty rates. The country remains a lower middle-income country despite the global pandemic-induced contraction of GDP per capita in 2020. Much of the country's development success over the decade was predicated on its strategic maritime location, rich and diverse natural resources, socio-political stability, and rapidly growing tourism. Economic activity in Tanzania is recovering, with the 2022 real GDP growth rate projected to reach 4-5% (2021 at 4.3%, up from 2% in 2020). The accommodation and restaurants, mining, ICT, transport, and electricity sectors are driving the recovery (World Bank, 2022b).

Blockchain technology is one of the most promising technologies in the 4IR era as it addresses several elements such as transactions, verification, and security. The Slovenian National Blockchain Infrastructure Association will partner with the Institute of Information Technology at the University of Dar es Salaam to set up a national knowledge hub to deliver training programmes to enable Tanzania to access blockchain technology. The project's main objective is to ensure the transfer of high-tech knowledge to enable the use of new technologies and the so-called 4IR technologies in Tanzania in the transport sector. The project proposal will also enable Tanzania to access new markets through an improved environment enabling verification, interoperability, and reliability.

The proposed project would introduce the use of improved sustainable production and management processes and

the adoption of higher levels of technology and innovative product designs, supported by a strengthened investment ecosystem and improved productivity and quality management. By fostering an enabling technological environment and implementing support programmes for SMEs, the proposed project will also help to identify additional areas for technology transfer and diffusion based on locally available resources and upgraded capacity and incentives for industrial development.

The project is linked to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (UN SDGs 2030), which will be achieved through the different phases of project implementation, as the project implementation will contribute to the priorities of the SDGs 2030 and will specifically address vulnerable groups of people.

The estimated value of the two-year project (2022-2023) is € 174,000, which will be fully funded by the Republic of Slovenia and implemented in cooperation with UNIDO and local organisations in Tanzania. The expected benefits for Tanzania will be that the launch of the blockchain infrastructure will contribute to increasing efficiency in delivering public services to citizens and businesses and improving the skills base in Tanzania.

Conclusion

In the last 40 years, much has been done, but more must be done to understand the effects of development aid on various economic and social indicators in LDC. The primary reason for giving aid is to generate development to reduce poverty (Doucouliagos & Paldam, 2008). Slovenia, like all other developed countries, allocates significant resources to countries in need in the form of funding for international development cooperation projects and direct funding for humanitarian aid in the event of natural disasters. This paper presents Slovenia's development cooperation model based on three criteria: a clearly expressed interest of the recipient country, implementation of development projects within the framework of thematic priority areas, and targeting of geographic priority areas.

According to UNIDO, Slovenia is one of the most active members and a model of IDC of small Member States. It ranks among the largest per capita donors of IDC projects implemented by UNIDO in terms of voluntary contributions per capita. As a member of UNIDO, Slovenia participates in the formulation of UNIDO's policies and strategic programmes through active participation in the organisation's bodies, the pursuit of common development objectives, and the implementation of joint development projects.

This article also presents three development projects funded by the Republic of Slovenia in Africa over the last six years in cooperation with several organisations and companies. All three projects are based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development principles and, in particular, the Sustainable Development Goal on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure for Global Progress (SDG 9) of the United Nations system to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

The first project aimed to find and distribute water in rural Kenya using the latest technology. This project established an improved water extraction and purification system that will benefit the local community in the long term. The

second project focused on improving access to drinking water in Uganda. The result of the project is a system that can determine rural settlement boundaries and population densities from satellite data. The third project will establish a national knowledge hub that will deliver training programmes to enable Tanzania to access blockchain technology in the transport sector. The project's main objective is to ensure the transfer of high-tech knowledge to enable the use of 4IR technologies.

The main limitation of the article is its descriptive nature regarding the presented case studies. Further research should be conducted focusing on measuring the realization of SDGs in Slovenia-financed development projects in Africa.

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Model mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja: primer Slovenije

Izvleček

Razvojna pomoč, eden najpomembnejših mehanizmov za prerazporeditev svetovnega bogastva, predstavlja finančne tokove, katerih glavni cilj je gospodarska rast in izboljšanje socialnih razmer. V zadnjem času je mednarodno razvojno sodelovanje v procesu sprememb, ki zahtevajo vključevanje novih akterjev, uporabo novih instrumentov in širitev področij delovanja. V avtorji predstavljajo slovenski model mednarodnega razvojnega sodelovanja, pri čemer poudarjajo merila za odločanje o usmeritvi razvojnega sodelovanja. Merila so jasen interes države upravičenke, vsebinska prednostna področja in geografska prednostna območja. Avtorji obravnavajo tudi aktivno sodelovanje Slovenije pri mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju z Organizacijo Združenih narodov za industrijski razvoj. Posebna pozornost je namenjena trem uspešnim razvojnim projektom v Afriki, ki jih je v zadnjem času financirala Republika Slovenija. Vsi trije izbrani projekti temeljijo na načelih trajnostnega razvoja in so bili izvedeni v Keniji, Tanzaniji in Ugandi.

Ključne besede: mednarodno razvojno sodelovanje, humanitarna pomoč, dvostransko razvojno sodelovanje, večstransko razvojno sodelovanje