# CONCEIVING A COMPOSITE EVALUATION FOR OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

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***Abstract:*** *After an extremely difficult year, with colossal losses of human lives, discussions, debates and articles about sustainable development seem frivolous. However, the quality of the environment and the social situation of the world's population would probably have made a different impact on the number of illnesses and deaths if it had been treated more responsibly in the past. Therefore, this article discusses the capacity of financing for sustainable development in key areas of the world, in the period 2000-2019, through an instrument - Official Development Assistance. The composite analysis carried out, through three derived indicators, materialized in elasticities, really reflects the mobilizing capacity of official development assistance on the economy, being needed even more sustained efforts in the future for achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.*

***Keywords:*** *Official Development Assistance (ODA), economic development, world level, foreign direct investment.*

***JEL Classification:*** *F35, F34, C43.*

## 1. Introduction

In the period before the COVID-19 crisis, there were many moments in which the aspects of sustainable development emerged as urgent and recognised as global problems of humanity. In this context, there are still discussions about how to adjust the concessional aid and especially the Official Development Assistance (ODA) tool. According to UNCTAD, ODA includes grants, concessional loans, soft loans (grants being at least 25 per cent of the total) and technical assistance support. Thus, despite shortcomings in ODA calculation (e.g. Severino and Ray, 2009) and data transparency, ODA can play an important role for supporting countries in increasing capacities of the structure of institutions and of economies, for increasing innovation process, for a proper use of technology and for preventing future crisis of medical, social and ecological nature.

In the allocation of ODA, an important aspect is played by the gross national income or even the evolution of the gross domestic product (see Figure no.1).

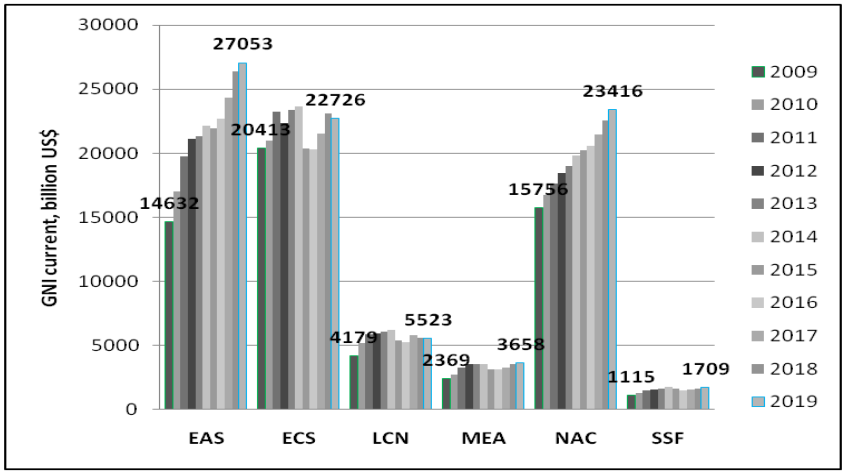


**Figure no. 1. Gross National Income in the most important regions of the world in the period 2009-2019**

*Source: Word Bank data; author's processing. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa.*

Using World Bank data, the available information is related to gross national income (GNI). According to World Bank data, world GNI has grown from almost 33685 billion US dollars in 2000 to no less than 60145 billion dollars in 2009 and to 87757 billion dollars in 2019. Data on groups of countries in various regions of the world during the period 2009-2019 shows the areas in which the evolution of GNI has dragged on and is located at almost irrelevant values on a global scale such as: Latin America & Caribbean (LCN); Middle East & North Africa (MEA) and especially Sub-Saharan Africa (SSF). As the Figure no.1 shows, the most dynamic areas for economic growth are East Asia & Pacific (EAS), North America (NAC) and Europe & Central Asia (ECS). Thus, they are and they should also be the best suppliers of ODA to the other less developed areas of the world.

Although in the analysis, in the graphical representation, we prefer for simplification the reporting of the indicators to GNI, still the reporting of the analyzed indicators to GNI can be misleading. For example, a funding influx (ODA, remittances and investments) at a high GNI reduces the share, while for some areas, the same funding may seem exorbitant at an extremely low GNI.

Therefore, taking into account these aspects, the article analyzes the ODA's ability to stimulate GNI, foreign direct investment and net exports, using elasticities that are then combined in a composite indicator. The results do reveal the mobilizing capacity of ODA at least in certain parts of the world.

## 2. Description of the problem

Economic performance, the level and pace of GDP growth and especially GDP per capita or GNI per capita are the basis for the allocation of funds through ODA, but this is not so close to improve reality. Thus, it is necessary to review the current ODA graduation criteria of OECD in order to include other multidimensional measures of well-being and sustainability beyond GNI (Vignolo, 2016). The existence of economic growth often does not mean the elimination of poverty poles, poor health or healthcare, underdevelopment, etc.

Thus, many countries with high, medium and upper-income still have persistent structural issues and vulnerabilities in translating the general level of development in real economic performance felt by citizens. Increasing fiscal space, improving trade, facilitating free movement, improving physical infrastructure, diversifying production, supporting immigrants, guaranteeing equal opportunities, reducing vulnerabilities to climate change, reducing the vulnerability of social groups constantly at risk of discrimination, and increasing decision-making efficiency, crisis prevention, the design of effective mechanisms for automatic stabilization and social protection are elements that still need attention and funding even in the richest and most progressive states of the world.

That is why economic growth often comes with many harmful aspects for both society and the environment. Often, private or public economic performance is unable to be future-oriented, to what sustainable development should mean: - good and responsible institutions, - ensuring an element of stabilization/balancing between the public and private system regarding the labor market, - jobs and nomenclature of jobs oriented towards the future, with modern attributions related to technology and environment, - economic and social resilience in front of the crisis etc.

Therefore, although conceived in the early 1970s by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC, an OECD body) as a government funding mechanism for development, ODA now has serious syncope in “leaving no one behind” in terms of funding for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)(e.g. UNCDP, 2018; Djurfeldt, Jirström & Deijl, 2017; Clay, 2018).

Thus, in Figure 2, we can see that although for the African region and Middle East (SSF and MEA) the percentage of ODA allocation is substantially above the average of other parts of the world and above the required percentage of at least 0.70% of GNI (for MEA, constantly only from 2016 until 2019), its tendency is to reduce. Also, the evolution of foreign direct investment is rather similar for the same region of the world analysed for ODA. Thus, we can see foreign direct investments (FDI, as a percentage of GNI) with a dramatic reduction from 3.29 % of GNI to 1.86 % of GNI, so a collapse of 1.76 times for the SSF region, and of 2.24 times for the MEA region for the period 2009-2019.

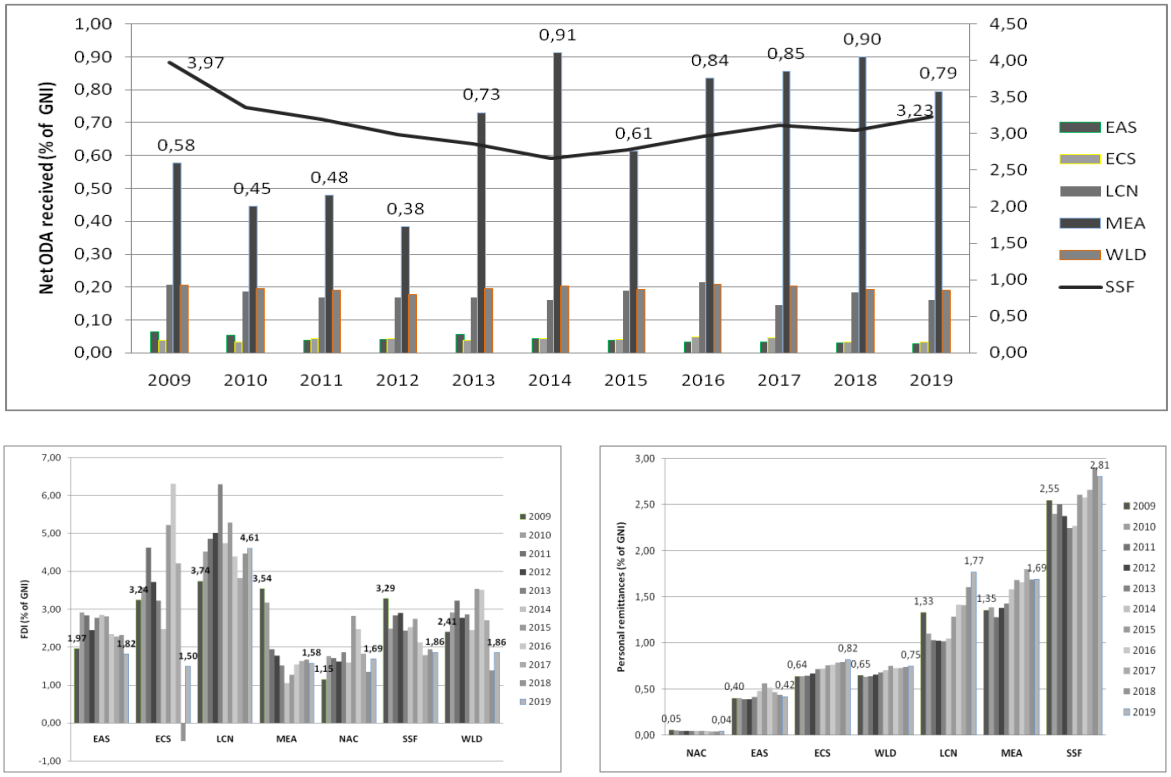


**Figure no. 2. Net ODA, FDI and Personal Remittances as % of GNI in the most important regions of the world in the period 2009-2019**

*Source: Word Bank data; author's processing. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD - World.*

Figure 2, by the situation of personal remittances as a percentage of GNI, shows another limited capacity of all forms of financing, domestic and international, to finance world economies, by the fact that personal remittances are more substantial and usually increase where public funding and private - banking and business - are set aside. Thus, following the evolution of remittances, we can conclude that the three areas that require the most consistent assistance are: Latin America and Caribbean, the Middle East, and especially Africa.

### 3. Literature review

With a relatively young history, under a century, the concept of aid for development is dating since the end of World War II, on the late 1940s, when the world financial system did not have an adequate capital base to finance the world's poorest or neediest countries. This aspect marked, masked or openly, a power struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States, contributing to the export of their models but also to the democratization of

the world by assisting developing countries in order to expand their regional sphere of political, economic and cultural influences. Therefore, financing for development and especially through ODA played a role until the end of the 1990s, when there was a decrease in these funds and a growing contribution of private capital, exactly 12 times higher than those in the form of ODA and OOF (OECD, 1998; Takahashi, 2002).

The decrease in funds over time ODA is investigated in numerous studies. For example, Takahashi (2002) states that the causes of these unfavorable trends in the evolution of ODA are due to the unfavorable evolution of the Gini coefficient in donor countries (e.g. Germany and Japan in the early 2000s), the intentions of political leaders, fiscal realities, strategic considerations and the evolution of the balance of payments. At the same time, although it states that, as economic performance improves, new donors appear on the international stage of ODA financing, the long-term performance of funds for development is also linked to a review of these instruments.

Substantial analysis of ODA funding in Africa is performed by Olaniyan (2002). He states that the unfavorable evolution of ODA financing for African countries is due to unfavorable circumstances of the world economy, to the emergence of new countries that need ODA financing, to the need to reduce budget deficits in donor countries, to corruption and political instability in some receivers countries from Africa, but also to the poor performance in the use of these funds on this continent.

In a relatively recent document of UNCTAD (2019), it is mentioned also the decline in ODA and the fact that ODA and blended finance (e.g. technical assistance, structured finance, grants for investments, loan guarantees and equity investment) are insufficient to provide the finance needed to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ODA remaining at less than half of the DAC commitment for ODA (e.g. 0.7 % of their annual GNI in developing countries and 0.15-0.20 % of their GNI in the least developed countries). UNCTAD also states that the ODA structure has changed in favor of concessional loans and less of grants, for example, concessional loans increasing in 2017 to 23% of ODA. This can be explained by the fact that, in general, the money invested in funds like ODA, in order to help other countries, has a reduced multiplier effect and an extended period of multiplication and boosting those economies.

In addition to studies that address ODA trends, numerous studies address the effectiveness of ODA and other external aid funds in their ability to sustain growth. Some mentioning the positive effects of foreign aid (e.g. Burnside and Dollar, 2004; Ali and Isse, 2005, Gang and Khan, 1990, Nyoni, 1997 etc. ), others rather the negative one (Friedman, 1958; Boone,1995; Whitaker, 2006; Alabi, 2014 etc.).

## 4. Methodology and data source

In order to realize if the ODA has a stimulating capacity, a composite index is elaborated respecting the steps: - selection of the indicators, - normalization (by calculating the elasticities) and calculating the final composite indicator. For the selection of indicators, I do not propose to perform a consistency analysis by eliminating factors (so no Cronbach coefficient alpha is performed), the study not focusing on a purely statistical analysis but a logical one. This approach also takes into account the fact that the data source is the one provided by the World Bank whose abundance of information is relatively scarce (we cannot select too many indicators for comparisons, and therefore we do not allow to eliminate some of them!), especially since large geographical areas are targeted: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD - World. The conjugate graph treats the period 2009-2019, while the

coefficients of elasticity and implicitly the composite indicator refer to a much longer period: 2000/2001-2019.

To see if net ODA has mobilizing capacity on the world's economies, it has been selected three indicators: the evolution of gross national income, the evolution of foreign direct investment, and the evolution of exports, in current US dollars. We put the condition that for the elasticity between zero and 1 in the module to note with zero, and if it is 1 in the module or it is over 1 in the module to note by 1. The condition emphasizes whether net ODA has mobilizing capacity for the pursued elements. Then it is calculated how many times the criterion imposed on the average elasticity coefficient for the period 2001-2019 is met, including the degree of fulfillment in percentages. The score is between zero and three as follows: - between [0; 4] - unsatisfactory marked with 0, between [5; 9] - satisfactory marked with 1, between [10; 14] - well rated with 2, over 15 - very good, rated with 3.

The composite indicator used considers equal the weights of the three criteria, practically signifying a summation of the notations of the coefficients of the three types of elasticities. The rating of the composite indicator is as follows: interval [0;3] - a low capacity of ODA to sustain the economy, interval [4;6] - an average capacity of net ODA to sustain the economy, interval [7;9] - a high capacity of net ODA to stimulate the economy by boosting gross national income(GNI), foreign direct investment (FDI) and net exports.

**5. Results**

Calculating the coefficient of elasticity of the gross national income to the evolution of Official Development Assistance we notice that there is a great variability of the transition from elasticity to inelasticity of the evolutions for all the analyzed areas but we notice mainly that indeed the economic growth of Latin America and Caribbean (LCN) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSF) responds better to the evolution of net ODA (see Table no.1).

**Table no. 1. The coefficient of GNI elasticity in relation to net ODA**

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EAS | 0.49 | -1.29 | -3.51 | -8.50 | 0.17 | -0.35 | 1.16 | 12.17 | 0.22 | -25.66 | -0.76 | 0.40 | 0.03 | -0.18 | 0.06 | -0.36 | 0.78 | -4.57 | -0.25 |
| ECS | -0.58 | 0.22 | -0.79 | 3.67 | 2.31 | 0.32 | -4.07 | 0.42 | -1.42 | -0.37 | 0.25 | 0.86 | -0.44 | 0.09 | 0.79 | -0.02 | 13.33 | -0.34 | 0.68 |
| LCN | -0.12 | 0.85 | 0.10 | 1.08 | -6.82 | 1.90 | -3.79 | 0.48 | 1.60 | 2.03 | 4.33 | 1.15 | 1.04 | -0.65 | -8.11 | -0.25 | -0.46 | -0.17 | 0.11 |
| MEA | 0.40 | -0.01 | 0.17 | 0.61 | 0.13 | -0.46 | 3.98 | 0.71 | 0.26 | -1.58 | 0.68 | -0.74 | -0.01 | 0.03 | 0.29 | 0.01 | 0.61 | 0.60 | -0.26 |
| SSF | -0.48 | 0.27 | 0.82 | 3.77 | 0.77 | 0.80 | -1.23 | 1.23 | -0.35 | 150.80 | 1.81 | -4.97 | 3.26 | -1.78 | 2.07 | 7.12 | 0.51 | 2.36 | 0.32 |
| WLD | -0.12 | 0.19 | 0.78 | 1.05 | 0.23 | -6.08 | 11.08 | 0.55 | 29.18 | 3.06 | 1.32 | -0.61 | 0.20 | 0.46 | 0.59 | 0.16 | 1.66 | 7.08 | 1.79 |

*Source: Word Bank data; author's calculation. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD - World.*

Although considered as alternatives, as sources of financing for sustainable development or for the economy in general, the ODA-FDI relationship is not only a compensatory relationship, but, often, each of them comes to stimulate and potentiate the other. Thus, if we analyze the elasticity of FDI to the evolution of net ODA (see Table no.2) we notice that ODA has a higher capacity to boost investments than the increase of gross national income in general. Also, we can notice that the area that feels best this

impact is Europe and Central Asia (ECS). The areas LCN, EAS and SSF also feel the full impetus given by ODA to investments, but the area with a more limited response of investments to ODA is MEA.

**Table no. 2. The coefficient of FDI elasticity in relation to net ODA**

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EAS | 1.94 | 9.46 | -4.22 | -39.33 | -0.13 | -2.84 | 3.62 | -1.73 | -2.06 | -113.21 | -0.62 | -0.43 | 0.40 | -0.33 | 0.21 | 1.43 | 0.43 | -5.45 | 1.80 |
| ECS | 30.15 | -0.22 | 0.22 | 2.95 | 45.70 | 1.02 | -11.71 | -1.54 | -5.84 | -1.87 | 1.00 | 5.25 | 0.97 | -1.44 | -4.63 | 1.47 | -64.42 | 5.20 | 178.33 |
| LCN | -0.99 | 1.41 | -0.54 | 5.42 | 6.17 | 4.42 | -14.07 | 0.39 | 7.66 | 4.23 | 6.95 | 4.80 | 10.91 | 7.14 | -2.43 | -1.84 | 0.13 | 0.60 | -0.10 |
| MEA | -3.79 | 2.66 | 1.40 | 2.18 | 0.76 | -1.25 | 3.32 | -0.29 | 0.60 | -0.43 | -1.03 | -0.01 | -0.17 | -1.18 | -0.18 | 0.61 | 1.54 | 0.77 | 0.33 |
| SSF | 13.20 | -0.89 | 0.88 | -1.32 | 2.30 | -0.64 | -6.34 | 2.93 | -0.55 | -83.68 | 4.15 | -6.95 | -5.31 | -3.38 | -0.04 | 27.96 | -0.88 | 7.28 | -0.12 |
| WLD | -9.67 | -0.80 | -0.16 | 3.06 | 1.51 | -28.50 | 38.51 | -1.24 | 241.59 | 10.40 | 2.69 | 2.80 | 0.46 | -1.73 | -4.05 | 0.06 | -4.59 | -52.97 | 39.25 |

*Source: Word Bank data; author's calculation. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD - World.*

Regarding the third elasticity considered, of the net exports taking into account the evolution of the net ODA, we can see that the exports react even better than the investments to the evolution of the net ODA for the most important parts of the world. Thus, the areas that really prevail in terms of this elasticity are LCN and SSF and less EAS. Note that MEA data is missing. Overall, on the whole period 2001-2019, worldwide (WLD), the elasticity of net exports to the change in net ODA is similar to that of foreign direct investment to the change in net ODA as number of compliance with the condition of having a more then 1 elasticity, in module.

**Table no. 3. The coefficient of elasticity of Net Exports in relation to net ODA**

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EAS | 1.96 | -18.37 | -10.18 | -19.98 | 0.26 | -2.42 | 3.50 | -6.81 | -1.31 | -21.93 | 1.73 | -0.44 | -0.39 | -2.25 | -4.84 | 0.34 | -0.38 | 22.04 | -4.65 |
| ECS | -39.37 | 0.70 | -0.92 | 12.08 | 0.66 | -0.16 | 8.53 | -2.49 | 32.76 | -2.46 | 0.47 | -7.27 | -0.97 | 0.45 | 0.37 | -0.56 | 20.74 | -0.90 | 4.72 |
| LCN | 0.80 | 3.58 | -2.25 | -2.42 | 11.16 | -7.54 | -322.29 | 2.85 | 3.79 | 7.84 | 2.39 | 21.29 | 4.85 | -2.36 | -2.72 | -2.75 | -0.08 | 1.43 | 1.35 |
| SSF | 133.89 | 0.05 | 0.28 | -8.63 | -6.15 | -7.37 | -84.28 | 5.45 | 6.27 | -223.72 | 3.02 | -23.14 | 8.13 | -13.36 | -6.43 | 30.76 | -1.11 | 8.67 | 3.64 |
| WLD | 32.43 | -3.70 | -39.13 | 17.13 | 0.11 | -38.33 | 32.32 | -1.56 | -245.77 | 5.00 | -0.44 | -3.22 | 0.37 | 0.32 | 2.63 | 1.65 | 5.84 | -22.01 | 15.97 |

*Source: Word Bank data; author's calculation. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD - World.*

Table no. 4 highlights the fulfillment of the criterion regarding the superunit elasticity in the module for the three analyzed elasticities (GNI, FDI and net export in report of net ODA) but also the composite indicator regarding the net ODA efficiency expressed in percentages and its notation. We note that the composite index reveals that SSF and LCN are on an equal footing, followed by the global media (WLD), EAS and ECS. So the general conclusion may be that net ODA has the capacity to mobilize resources for sustainable development and to sustain economic growth in the most

disadvantaged areas of the planet but that efforts must be made also for all geographical areas that seem at first glance less affected by syncope and developmental delays, but they still lag behind.

**Table no. 4. Compliance with the criteria for elasticities and their grading as well as the final composite indicator and its grading**

| | $E_{GNINODA}$ | | $E_{FDINODA}$ | | $E_{NEXPNODA}$ | | $I_{compefNODA}$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Resp. crit. average (2001-2019) | Not.(0-3) | Resp. crit. average (2001-2019) | Not.(0-3) | Resp. crit. average (2001-2019) | Not.(0-3) | Resp.crit. (%) | Not.(0-9) |
| EAS | 7 | 1 | 12 | 2 | 14 | 2 | 57.9 | 5 |
| ECS | 5 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 50.9 | 5 |
| LCN | 10 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 17 | 3 | 70.2 | 7 |
| MEA | 2 | 0 | 9 | 1 | | | 19.3 | 1 |
| SSF | 11 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 17 | 3 | 70.2 | 7 |
| WLD | 9 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 15 | 3 | 68.4 | 7 |

*Source: Word Bank data; author's calculation. Notations: EAS - East Asia & Pacific; ECS - Europe & Central Asia; LCN - Latin America & Caribbean; MEA - Middle East & North Africa; NAC - North America; SSF - Sub-Saharan Africa, WLD – World;$E_{GNINODA}$ - GNI elasticity in relation to net ODA change, $E_{FDINODA}$ - FDI elasticity in relation to net ODA change, $E_{NEXPNODA}$ - net export elasticity in relation to net ODA change, $I_{compefNODA}$ - composite index on ODA efficiency in relation to selected indicators.*

Because there is a lack of data on MEA, we cannot make too many statements, but we can suspect that, if it were that information, the result could be in the vicinity of the situation of sub-Saharan Africa. For the time being, according to the exposed methodology, MEA is on the last position regarding the ODA capacity to finance this area. Another aspect is that covering a part of the Arab and Muslim world, the methods of financing development in the MEA area can differ substantially from ODA as well as the fact that it could actually be more effective than ODA based on other criteria of financing than the classic ones (e.g. the Muslim financing model which assumes the absence of interest). At the same time, besides ODA, other funds may be less statistically identifiable and sometimes less significant such as other official flows (OOF) (including IBRD loans and IMF loans, export insurance and export credits etc.) and private finace. However, they can be good explinations for the flows of this part of the world, and not only.

**6. Conclusions**

In order to truly meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a review of the ODA and other financial support instruments of countries with more limited capacity to mobilize and allocate resources effectively needs to be considered.

Although the literature is divided between the positive and negative effects of ODA in the economy, this study, which analyzes the ability to influence economies in some parts of the world through ODA in the period 2000-2019, notes that through a composite indicator, the ODA influences on the world's economies should be taken into account. It should be noted that the composite indicator of ODA efficiency reflects the result of the elasticities of gross national income, foreign direct investment and net exports in relation to net ODA flows.

Subsequent studies can contribute, by selecting a larger number of significant indicators or other indicators, to refining the methodology and implicitly the results of the composite indicator.

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