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## SOCIAL INITIATIVES AS A FACTOR OF SOCIAL ECONOMY GROWTH

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### Abstract

The article explores the impact of social initiatives on the development of the social economy, using the example of the «IHelpBox» project aimed at supporting homeless animals in the city of Khmelnytskyi. The social economy plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable societal development, resource distribution, and fostering social responsibility among businesses and citizens. One of the key initiatives integrating both environmental and social aspects is the installation of automatic feeders for homeless animals, operating on the principle of recycling plastic bottles. The research methodology includes an analysis of modern approaches to addressing the issue of homeless animals, an assessment of the impact of innovative solutions on the social economy, and an exploration of opportunities to integrate such initiatives into urban management. The «IHelpBox» project contributes to reducing the number of homeless animals, improving the city's sanitary conditions, increasing the level of environmental responsibility among residents, and engaging the community in social initiatives. The article demonstrates that such social projects align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, and partnerships for goal achievement. The CANVAS model, used to structure the project, allows for an assessment of its effectiveness, key resources, stakeholders, and potential funding sources. The study highlights that social initiatives are an essential tool for developing the social economy, as they contribute to improving citizens' living conditions, fostering a culture of social responsibility, and maintaining ecological balance.

### Key words

social economy, social initiatives, homeless animals, automatic feeders, environmental responsibility, sustainable development, CANVAS model.

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## 1. Introduction

A social economy focused on ensuring sustainable development of society, balanced distribution of resources and social justice is becoming increasingly important in the context of globalization and economic transformations. One of the key elements of the successful functioning of the social economy is the development of social initiatives, which include projects and programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the population, fighting poverty, increasing social responsibility of business, supporting humanitarian and environmental goals.

We chose the issue of supporting homeless animals as part of our research because this problem is relevant for many countries and cities and has a complex impact on the social economy. Support projects for homeless animals not only contribute to the humanization of society, but also help to solve a number of related problems, such as preventing the spread of infections, reducing aggression among animals and creating a safe space for people to live. Thus, the study of projects to support homeless animals in the context of the social economy will reveal not only effective models and mechanisms of cooperation, but also the potential of social initiatives in solving important humanitarian problems, forming a culture of social responsibility and maintaining ecological balance.

## 2. Research methodology

The research methodology includes an analysis of modern approaches to addressing the issue of homeless animals, an assessment of the impact of innovative solutions on the social economy, and an exploration of opportunities to integrate such initiatives into urban management. The CANVAS model, used to structure the project, allows for an assessment of its effectiveness, key resources, stakeholders, and potential funding sources.

## 3. Social initiatives in Ukraine during the war

There are at least 140,000 homeless animals in Ukraine. Due to the full-scale war, the number of homeless animals in Ukraine has increased tenfold. Ukraine is among the top ten countries in terms of the number of homeless animals (There are...n.d.). In turn, the lack of access to food for animals is one of the main causes of poor health and aggressive behavior of

animals. This poses a potential threat to the residents of the city, because homeless dogs can be dangerous to people. The modern approach to helping homeless animals is not limited to the creation of shelters, but also includes innovative technologies, in particular automatic feeders that allow stable feeding of animals without the need for constant human presence. This idea is the basis of the social project "Saving homeless animals: automatic feeders", proposed for implementation in Khmelnytskyi. The automatic feeders project aims to facilitate the feeding of homeless animals by providing them with sustainable access to food without the need for constant human intervention. These feeders are called "IHelpBox". The effectiveness of such projects is confirmed by leading experience (Recycle a bottle... n.d.; Innovative Feeding .... n.d.).

The "IHelpBox" operates on the principle of exchanging plastic bottles for homeless animal feed, thus creating an innovative environmental initiative. People can put a plastic bottle in a special hole of the box, as soon as the bottle gets inside, 50 grams of cat and dog food mixed for both types of animals will automatically be dispensed.

This feed is fed into a bowl placed next to the machine. In order for the machine to work effectively, there are several requirements for plastic bottles: they should be crushed, and the caps should be removed so that they fit better in the box and the machine does not get stuck. It is also important that the bottles are clean from detergent residues, as the box may break if incorrect containers are found in it. Bottles with other waste should be left in special collection points so as not to disrupt the operation of the machine.

The purpose of the project is: providing homeless animals in Khmelnytskyi with regular access to food through the installation of street automatic feeders; improving the environmental and sanitary situation in the city, reducing the number of hungry animals; involving local governments and businesses in supporting the crowdfunding project and charitable initiative; raising awareness of residents about the humane treatment of animals. The main goals and objectives of the project are shown in Table 1.

## 4. Social initiatives in the context of sustainable development goals

It should be noted that the presented project meets several sustainable development goals defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) [What are... n.d.):

Tab. 1. Goals and objectives of the social project «Saving homeless animals: automatic feeders» «IHelpBox»

Project objectives	Tasks	Goal Achievement Indicators
1. Provide homeless animals in Khmelnytskyi with regular access to food.	1.1. Install 3 automatic feeders in places of the largest congestion of homeless animals. 1.2. Replenish feeders with feed every day (twice a day).	1.1.1. Feeders are 100% operational within 3 months of project launch. 1.2.1. Reduction in cases of aggressive animal behaviour compared to previous periods. 1.2.2. Reduce the number of homeless animals looking for food in garbage dumps in the areas where feeders are installed.
2. Increase the level of environmental responsibility and reduce pollution of the city.	2.1. Ensure the collection and disposal of plastic bottles through «IHelpBox». 2.2. Promote proper waste management by establishing additional instructions on feeders	2.1.1. Collect at least 2,000 plastic bottles during the first 3 months of the project. 2.1.2. Sending the collected plastic for recycling, reducing the amount of plastic on the city streets. 2.2.1. Conducting information sessions for city residents on the rules for sorting and reducing waste. 2.2.2. Introduction of a reward system (for example, discounts or bonuses) for those who are actively involved in plastic collection.
3. Involve the community in the social and environmental initiative and raise residents' awareness of humane treatment.	3.1. Organize an information campaign to support the project and attract volunteers. 3.2. Conduct educational activities among residents on the importance of supporting homeless animals.	3.1.1. Involvement of at least 10 volunteers to support feeders. 3.1.2. Coverage of the project in social networks to motivate residents to join. 3.2.1. Conducting a series of open lessons in local schools about humanity and animal care. 3.2.2. Holding charity events to raise funds for the project (fairs, auctions, flash mobs).

Source: Own study.

Goal 11 «Sustainable Cities and Communities». The project contributes to the creation of a cleaner, safer urban environment by reducing plastic pollution and involving the public in solving social and environmental problems. Homeless animal support activities also help make cities safer and more humane.

Goal 12 «Responsible consumption and production». The project promotes proper waste management and encourages recycling by promoting responsible resource consumption among the population. Instructions on feeders and information campaigns are aimed at raising environmental awareness.

Goal 13 «Climate action». The reduction of plastic waste and its proper disposal contribute to the reduction of environmental pollution, which reduces the negative impact on ecosystems and climate. It is also in line with Ukraine's commitment to reduce the amount of plastic entering the environment.

Goal 15 «Life on land». Supporting homeless animals, as well as reducing plastic pollution, contributes to the conservation of local ecosystems, reducing damage to the natural environment and wildlife.

Goal 17 «Partnerships for the goals». The project involves the cooperation of local authorities, NGOs, businesses and international partners, which is in line with UNDP goals in the field of partnership development and coordination to achieve sustainable development.

Thus, this project has a comprehensive impact and is consistent with a number of UNDP goals (Fig. 1) aimed at building a sustainable and just society. The innovative initiative «IHelpBox» not only contributes to solving local issues of stray animals but also establishes new standards of environmental responsibility and social interaction, which can be adapted for other cities and countries.

## 5. Expected results of the project implementation

Thus, the presented project combines social and environmental responsibility, because IHelpBox is also a transition to a new approach to plastic collection and disposal. After the plastic bottles get into the box, they are collected and transported to the Green Bird organization, which is engaged in sorting and recycling plastic. The plastic is then delivered to a special plant in Fastov, where it is processed into new materials, in particular, threads for synthetic fabrics, which are used for the manufacture of, for example, such things as synthetic padding jackets. For example, in Kyiv on 3 November 2020, after the installation of the box, more than 2,000 plastic bottles (approximately 54 kg of plastic) were collected during the first week of its operation, which allowed to provide 68 kg of animal feed.

Every day the machine is replenished with feed, twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. It is in this project «Support-E: automatic feeders for homeless animals in the city of Khmelnytskyi» that feed will be purchased for 3 months of work.

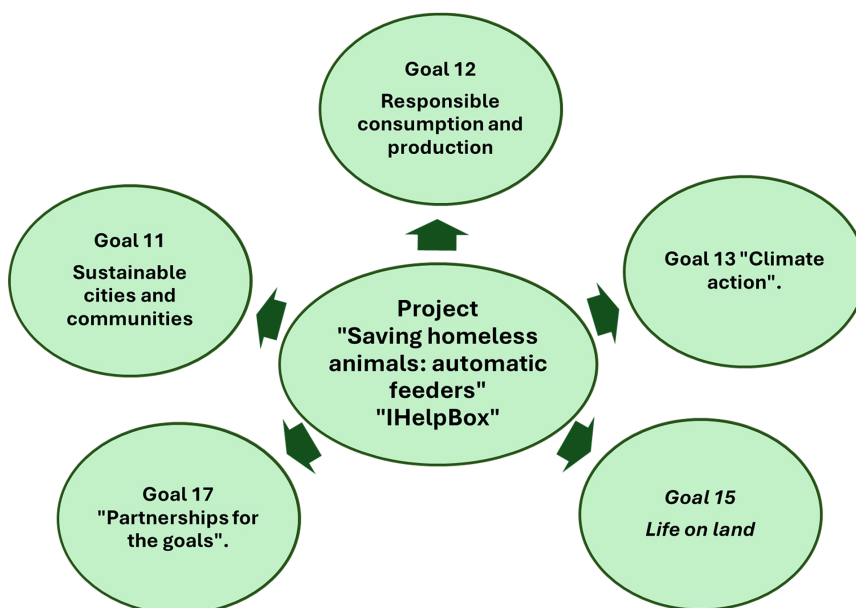


Fig. 1. Compliance of the social project «Saving homeless animals: automatic feeders» «IHelpBox» with the goals of sustainable development.

Source: Own study.

After this period, it will be purchased with funds collected through the “Bonuses of Kindness” platform, where users can accumulate bonuses for purchases in partner stores. In the future, the organizers plan to set up a system that will automatically cover the cost of feed and maintenance of vending machines using the proceeds from recycled bottles. However, so far, such a system does not yet provide full self-financing of the project.

«IHelpBox» has compact dimensions (205x100x100 cm) and can be installed both indoors and outdoors. It can withstand temperatures from  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+45^{\circ}\text{C}$  and can be made of composite or metal materials for different conditions of use. It also maintains all safety standards.

The project provides for the placement of automatic feeders in places of the largest concentration of animals in Khmelnytskyi, in particular in parks, squares, on streets with a high concentration of homeless animals. The feeders will be based on solar panels, which will make them energy efficient and reduce maintenance costs.

The project will be implemented in several stages.

1st - procurement ( 2 weeks). Procurement of 3 automatic feeders and conclusion of contracts with the supplier.

2nd - installation and adjustment (2 weeks). Installation and testing of feeders in designated areas of the city.

3rd - start-up and maintenance (1 month). Start of operation of feeders and organization of regular maintenance.

4th - monitoring and reporting (3 months). Collection of data, preparation of analytical reports

on the condition and use of feeders.

It is planned to transfer all three feeders to the balance sheet of the municipal office «Smart Environment. Khmelnytskyi.» This office implements new standards in waste management. Together with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the office is also implementing the project «Modernization of municipal solid waste infrastructure in Khmelnytskyi». Keeping the feeders in the office’s possession will ensure that they are properly maintained in the future.

It is also planned to cooperate with the Animal Treatment Center, which was established as a structural unit of the Khmelnytskyi municipal enterprise «Spetskomuntrans». It includes a shelter for homeless animals. The purpose of the Center is to regulate the number of homeless animals by humane methods, support epizootic and epidemic safety, promote responsible keeping of pets and introduce an ethical attitude towards them. The main tasks of the Center include monitoring compliance with animal protection legislation, registration and identification of pets, catching and temporary isolation of homeless animals, cooperation with institutions, educational initiatives and promotion of humane treatment of animals in the city. The project’s effectiveness will be assessed by several criteria:

1. Reducing the number of homeless animals: measure the dynamics of the number of homeless animals in areas where feeders are installed, which may indicate a decrease in their migration in search of food.

2. Improvement of animal health and behavior: assessment of animal health status (fewer cases of

aggression and disease), which can be measured through reports of veterinary services and surveys of volunteers.

3. Reducing environmental pollution: monitoring the amount of plastic collected and improving sanitation in feeder areas. For example, reducing the number of torn garbage bags.

4. Public Engagement: An assessment of the level of participation of residents through the number of bottles donated to «IHelpBox», the number of volunteers involved, and the amount of funding received through crowdfunding and philanthropy.

5. Outreach results: the level of awareness of residents about humanity and environmental responsibility, for example, through surveys of residents.

## 6. Presentation of the project using the CANVAS methodology

It should be noted that social initiatives are supported by both international and domestic organizations that provide financial and methodological support, which allows to implement the best world practices and adapt them to local conditions. As a result, social projects related to helping homeless animals can receive grants, technical support and expert advice, which increases their effectiveness and sustainability. At the same time, domestic organizations and foundations, in particular local charitable foundations, environmental associations, municipal initiatives and business structures, are actively involved in social projects in support of homeless animals, forming a sustainable ecosystem of assistance. Cooperation between the state, public organizations and business allows to attract the general public, organize a volunteer movement and form a positive public opinion about the importance of humane treatment of animals.

For an effective presentation of a social project, it is advisable to use the CANVAS model, which allows you to structure all key aspects of the project on one page (Kharechko...). This model allows you to clearly define target groups, channels of interaction with the community, sources of funding, as well as the main resources and partners needed to achieve the project goals. CANVAS helps to visualize the implementation strategy, identify potential risks and opportunities for improvement. In the context of social initiatives focused on supporting homeless animals, the CANVAS model can also reflect how the project will contribute to achieving social and environmental goals, raising public awareness and attracting volunteers and sponsors (Osterwalder, 2010; Sparviero, 2019).

There are two main considerations in selecting the business model canvas for social enterprise, which are the characteristics of business model canvas and social enterprise themselves. The definition of Business Model Canvas is a shared language and a useful tool for stakeholders to talk about business model that allows business model to be simple, relevant and intuitively understandable, while not oversimplifying the complexities of how enterprises function

Osterwalder and Pigneur stood out among the others as they did not only offer business model definition and components, but also a visualization of business model. Business Model Canvas allows business model to be simple, relevant and intuitively understandable, while not oversimplifying the complexities of how enterprises function (Osterwalder, 2010). The Canvas becomes a shared language and a useful tool for stakeholders to talk about business mode.

The nine building blocks of the Business Model Canvas (Qastharin, 2018):

1. Customer Segments. The different groups of people or organizations an enterprise aims to reach and serve.

2. Value Proposition. The bundle of products and services that create value for a specific Customer Segment. Value may be quantitative (e.g. price, speed of service) or qualitative (e.g. design, customer experience).

3. Channels. How a company communicates with and reaches its Customer Segments to deliver a Value Proposition. Communication, distribution and sales Channels comprise a company's interface with customers. Channels can be direct or indirect, owned or partner channels.

4. Customer Relationships. The types of relationships a company establishes with specific Customer Segments.

5. Revenue Streams. The cash a company generates from each Customer Segment.

6. Key Resources. The most important assets required to make business model work. These resources allow an enterprise to create and offer a Value Proposition, reach markets, maintain relationships with Customer Segments, and earn revenues. Key resources can be physical, financial, intellectual, or human. They can be owned or leased by the enterprise or acquired from key partners.

7. Key Activities. The most important things a company must do to make its business model work. They are the actions that are required to create and offer a Value Proposition, reach markets, maintain Customer Relationships and earn revenues.



8. Key Partnerships. The network of suppliers and partners that make the business model work.

9. Cost Structure. All costs incurred to operate a business model.

For social enterprise, which Osterwalder & Pigneur consider as “beyond-profit business models”, they adjust the Canvas accordingly to fit the requirement of a social enterprise to define and further innovate its business model. In third-party funded enterprise model, the product or service recipient is not the payer. The payer is a third party, which might be a donor. The third party pays the organization to fulfil a mission, which may be a social, ecological, or public service nature. Examples are philanthropy, charities and government (Qastharin, 2018; Stenn, 2017). The Canvas is similar to multi-sided platform for for-profit business models and requires no significant change in comparison to the original Canvas.

The Model Canvas provides a clear and visual overview of the entire business model. This allows social entrepreneurs to identify potential gaps, synergies, and areas for improvement; pitch a projects in convincing and authoritative manner to customers, investors, and other potential partners. Understanding models CANVAS and their potential in terms of designing social projects could help us to

avoid some of the pitfalls and increase the likelihood that more social enterprises become viable and sustainable both financially and in terms of their social impact.

The Social Business Model Canvas provides a framework for organizations to design and visualize their business models with a focus on social impact. It prompts users to consider critical aspects such as profit investment, resource requirements, expenditure areas, revenue sources, social impact measurement, customer needs, and essential partnerships. By addressing these elements, organizations can formulate strategies that align their operations with the goal of creating social value.

The purpose of a business model is to help stakeholders understand and clearly articulate how a business is configured so that it creates, delivers and capture value. Social projects attempt to create and legitimize new institutional forms by combining market and social values/ We used the CANVAS model to visualize the social project «Saving homeless animals: automatic feeders» «IHelpBox» (Table2).

The CANVAS model for the project «Saving Homeless Animals: Automatic Feeders» «IHelpBox» covers several key aspects that ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. The value of the «IHelpBox» project lies in combining a humane attitude towards homeless

Tab. 2. CANVAS model for the presentation of the social project «Saving homeless animals: automatic feeders» «IHelpBox»

Key partners:	Key actions	The main idea, value	Consumer interaction	Consumer segments
“Smart Environment. Khmelnytskyi» for maintenance of feeders; «Green Bird»organization for plastic recycling; «Bonuses of Kindness» platform for fundraising; Local media and influencers for project coverage and public awareness; Local animal protection organizations and volunteers; Local veterinary clinics to provide medical care to homeless animals in case of need.	Procurement and installation of feeders; Conducting educational and informational events; Involving sponsors, partners and volunteers; Monitoring the condition of feeders; Conducting periodic reports to the community on the results of work (amount of plastic collected, animal feeding, involvement of volunteers)	«IHelpBox» is an eco-friendly and innovative automatic feeder that supports responsible consumption, allows you to recycle plastic, feed homeless animals and make charitable contributions in support of important social initiatives	Online and offline campaigns to engage Khmelnytsky residents; Official opening of feeders; Cooperation with local authorities and animal protection organizations, joint events; Educational events and actions in educational institutions (schools, universities)	Residents of Khmelnytskyi who support humane initiatives; Volunteer and animal protection organizations; Local self-government bodies and public activists
	Key resources: Automatic feeders «IHelpBox»; Stock of animal feed for 3 months; Human resources for maintenance of feeders; Platform for fundraising and support.		Channels: Social networks to disseminate information, involve volunteers and inform the community about the progress of the project Local media to disseminate information about events related to the project Platform “Bonuses of Kindness” for fundraising.	
Cost structure			Receiving funds(sponsorship)	
Costs for the purchase and maintenance of feeders; Costs for feed; Expenses for the creation and promotion of information materials Maintenance costs of an interactive online platform			Grants Charitable contributions from businesses and other organizations Charitable contributions of residents Sale of souvenirs with project symbols to raise additional funds	

Source: Own study.

animals with environmental responsibility. The project promotes the development of social responsibility and civic engagement, helping to create a sustainable ecosystem of animal assistance. The target audience is residents of Khmelnytskyi (people who care about homeless animals and support humane initiatives); volunteer and animal protection organizations; local governments and public activists. Interaction with consumers includes online and offline campaigns to attract residents of Khmelnytskyi, the official opening of feeders, cooperation with local authorities, animal protection organizations, as well as holding events in educational institutions to raise awareness. Communication channels include social media, local media, and the fundraising the "Bonuses of Kindness" platform. Key actions focus on the procurement and installation of feeders, conducting outreach activities, attracting sponsors and volunteers, and monitoring the condition of feeders for their effective operation. The cost structure covers the costs of procurement and maintenance of feeders, animal feed, promotion of information materials and support of the online platform. Funds are received through grants, charitable contributions from businesses and organizations, as well as the sale of souvenirs with the project symbols (Stenn, 2017).

Thus, the CANVAS model is a useful tool for the development and implementation of public projects, as it allows you to clearly structure their key elements on one page. Thanks to CANVAS, NGOs can identify target groups, the main needs of project participants, ways to attract partners and donors, as well as sources of funding (Lee, Nowell, 2015). CANVAS

allows all project participants to have a holistic view of its strategy and communicate effectively during implementation.

## 7. Summary

The experience of countries that have achieved a high level of economic development and social standards shows that one of the main conditions for the functioning of the social economy is the creation of mechanisms of social responsibility in society (Bila, Shevchenko, 2020). The successful implementation of social initiatives contributes to the formation of a sustainable economic environment and improves the welfare of citizens. In particular, the implementation of social initiatives to help homeless animals is an important tool for developing recommendations for supporting and expanding such projects, promoting socially responsible practices and developing a social economy based on the principles of welfare and environmental awareness. The social project 'Saving Homeless Animals: Automatic Feeders' "IHelpBox". The CANVAS model used to structure the project helps to systematise all stages and resources, contributing to the achievement of long-term results and the involvement of the general public. Thanks to the support of international and domestic partners, the project has the potential to become a successful model for other cities, demonstrating how social initiatives can address social problems and promote environmental balance.

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