

Polish Development Assistance 2008. Independent Report of Non-governmental Organisations.

Summary

This report presents the outcomes of an independent analysis of Poland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2008, i.e. of the support given by the Polish government to developing countries. This is the third time that Polish NGOs, members of the Zagranica Group, have come together to produce this report as a supplement to and critical review of the information published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2009 Poland finds itself at a crossroads. The government and politicians need to take immediate action to provide assistance to thousands, or more accurately, millions of people in the developing world and thereby to confirm Poland's position amongst internationally recognised donors. Sadly, another scenario is still possible – ignoring the promises given to poor countries, shattering the hopes of the countries in transition and ruining Poland's prospects for a successful Presidency of the European Union, planned for 2011.

This year's report highlights the most important trends in both the quantity and quality of Poland's ODA, presenting in detail a number of key issues, some of them addressed for the first time.

In 2008 Polish ODA amounted to PLN 900mln, equivalent to 0.08% GNI. This is the first time since the country's accession to the European Union that the value of Polish aid has diminished. Moreover, we are in danger of missing the main target regarding the quantity of aid, agreed internationally and confirmed by the Council of Ministers. In 2008 Poland made no progress in ensuring a steady increase of aid funding, despite the fact that in 2010 Polish ODA is targeted to reach 0.17% GNI, increasing to 0.33% GNI in 2015. However, the target could still be met, provided there is strong political will, determination on the part of the government and parliamentary support.

A similar degree of commitment and political will are needed to adopt the Development Cooperation Act. So far, this piece of legislation has not even made it into parliament, despite the fact that its adoption was deemed necessary by the Polish government back in 2003. Adopting the Development Cooperation Act would facilitate support to developing countries and, through the Eastern Partnership, to our neighbours.

The report presents also key information on the quality of Polish aid, that is on how effectively public money is being spent. Considerable improvement is urgently needed in this regard, with the implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness due by 2010, as endorsed by the community of aid recipients and donors, including Poland.

This year we have decided to describe in greater detail the aid expenditures reported by the military, particularly in Afghanistan. According to NGOs, choosing the military as an implementing agent for aid activities undermines the effectiveness of development cooperation, which is heavily dependent on the approach, motivations and goals of those responsible for aid implementation. Placing the military in charge of aid activities does not contribute to the main goal of development cooperation, which is to support economic development and poverty reduction in poor countries.

Another problem is that Poland still does not direct enough aid to Africa, which – according to the EU Consensus on Development – should receive half of all additional expenditures related to the promised increase of aid budget to 0.17% GNI. As a result of this negligence, we owe Africa PLN 272.5mln (as of end 2008). By 2010, Poland should be giving PLN 668mln to African countries. NGOs have highlighted a number of problems that require immediate action. One of them is the de

facto reduction of aid expenditures, concealed by inflating aid statistics. Expenditures such as scholarships for foreign students are being reported as ODA, even though they do not fulfil OECD DAC criteria. Another pressing issue is so-called tied aid which is responsible for the fact that developing countries receive less genuine support that is presented in the official statistics.

The report presents the challenges that Poland currently faces, shaped by the global context. In order to ensure a successful EU Presidency, Poland has to strengthen its development cooperation system and build its capacity to lead the EU's work on development issues, already in 2010. The problem of climate change, responsible for humanitarian crises all over the world, requires us to act in an unprecedented way. Fighting climate change is an excellent example of how development policy should be coherent with all other activities of the government. However, it is still to be applied in practice. Greater attention should be given to gender aspects in development cooperation, as supporting women is a key factor in aid effectiveness.

Our publication examines also other important issues, amongst them the potential of fair trade, the Eastern Partnership and the experiences of the other countries of the Visegrad Group, which could serve as an inspiration for the Polish system. The authors of the report have positively evaluated the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the field of development education, where in recent years we have seen considerable progress.

The report contains a set of concrete recommendations, endorsed by Polish NGOs, as well as information on the implementation of the recommendations presented last year. Unfortunately, this overview makes it clear that the Polish government is consistently failing to harness the knowledge of NGOs, gained throughout more than a decade of working abroad, in planning its aid activities.

Recommendations

Polish aid – towards effectiveness and accountability

- Poland should take immediate action to increase ODA spending, in order to fulfil the commitment to reach 0.17% GNI for ODA by 2010 and 0.33% by 2015. The Polish government should plan for an appropriate increase in ODA spending when planning the budget for 2010, and honour the commitment to reach 0.17% GNI
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should coordinate Polish bilateral aid, and the share of funds managed by the MFA should steadily increase in relation to the funds managed by other institutions. Moreover, MFA should as soon as possible start applying programme-based approaches, such as direct budget support and sector-wide support, and – as required by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness – engage in joint programming and needs assessment.
- Poverty reduction and MDG achievement should be recognised as the overarching goals of Polish aid. In order to achieve this, MFA should add at least one more country of sub-Saharan Africa to the list of priority countries and determine sectoral aid priorities in direct response to the priorities of partner countries (beneficiaries of Polish aid)
- MFA should develop, as soon as possible, country strategy papers for all Polish aid priority countries, including sub-Saharan Africa. The strategies should be developed in close cooperation with governments and civil society actors in those countries, as well as in consultation with other donors active on the country level
- MFA should stop financing projects implemented by the military from ODA funds. These funds would better contribute to poverty reduction and human development in Afghanistan (where the Polish military is currently implementing aid projects), if channelled via local and national Afghan administration to implement existing development strategies on the local and national levels.

- The Polish military in Afghanistan should strictly adhere to its mandate of safeguarding development, as planned and implemented by the Afghans themselves, thereby avoiding the mistakes and abuses committed by other countries. At the same time, the military should have a clear plan for terminating its activities, as soon as the area becomes safe, as well as the methodology to assess the situation

International commitments – to be taken seriously

- The Polish government should honour its commitments regarding aid to Africa, as confirmed at the EU level. MFA should present a concrete plan for increasing aid to Africa, based on appropriate transfer channels
- Poland should apply for membership of OECD DAC by the end of 2010, as has been previously planned, and fulfil its aid quality criteria
- Poland should take immediate action to untie its aid to the least developed countries, according to OECD DAC guidelines. The Polish government should also adopt a strategy for untying all Polish aid, based on the experience of other donors, e.g. Ireland, which has already untied all of its aid
- Following new trends and challenges in development assistance, MFA should cease to include refugee costs in ODA statistics
- In order to comply with OECD DAC guidelines, MFA should establish scholarship programmes, reflecting a strategic approach to poverty reduction in beneficiary countries. MFA should also take appropriate measures in order to prevent so-called “brain drain”, namely supporting the reintegration of returning students in their home countries

Polish aid on the public agenda – the role of development education

- Working together with NGOs, MFA and the Ministry of Education (ME) should develop a National Strategy on Development Education that would set priorities, determine financing and coordinate the involvement and tasks of the respective ministries (education, foreign affairs and environment). The strategy should be developed and adopted in parallel to the currently developed National Strategy on Development Cooperation
- MFA, ME and other ministries should increase development education funding to 3% of total ODA, as recommended by the EU and UNDP. MFA should allow for advocacy activities to be financed from MFA development education funds, as those activities directly contribute to the goal of development education
- MFA, ME and other ministries should create new opportunities for financing development education activities, e.g. through including them as eligible in the OP Civic Initiatives Fund and using funds managed by MFA to co-finance development education projects that Polish NGOs have successfully submitted to Europe Aid and other European calls for proposals
- All actors involved should promote adherence to established quality criteria, evaluation and impact assessment of developed education projects, e.g. according to guidelines developed by the

North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

○ Public institutions should support capacity building, both in terms of organisation and knowledge, of institutions and organisations involved in development education. MFA should support awareness-raising on development issues among other actors who could be in charge of implementing development cooperation projects, such as central and local government and academic institutions

○ MFA, other ministries and other public institutions, as well as NGOs, should strengthen their cooperation with the media in the field of development education and raising awareness on development issues, e.g. through involving journalists in development projects

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