

RESEARCH

**REPORTS**

RECOMMENDATIONS

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# **ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLISH DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: WHAT HAS WORKED AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?**

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## Executive Summary

Polish non-governmental organisations have played an essential role in building the foundations of the national system of development assistance, acting in the capacity of implementing projects, monitoring effectiveness of government policies and introducing new themes into the expert and public debate. NGO contributions were crucial to its major success in 2011-2012, laying the legal and institutional framework for consultations with the officials responsible for planning and programming aid. This presents an opportunity to capitalise on NGOs' assets by extending institutional support to organisations with a proven record of competence in aid delivery, which is necessary to help smaller NGOs, in particular, retain qualified staff and maintain partnerships with international partners.

For this to happen, rethinking the format of relations between the state and social partners is necessary. On the one hand, non-governmental organisations look forward to officials' recognition that larger, more experienced NGOs are indeed key players in assistance, which could be demonstrated by establishing genuine multi-year funding. On the other hand, social partners would do well to apply less confrontational, informal ways of providing feedback to the government.

## Introduction

This policy brief was developed as part of the international project “Update of the current status of implementation of international/bilateral trade regimes with ODA recipients and the current role of civil society and private sectors as development actors in the new EU Member States”, financed by the European Union. It provides an overview of the strengths and challenges facing Polish non-governmental organisations active in development aid.

The following facets of NGOs’ activity are considered: relationship with the state, organisation of resources (financing, personnel), experience in implementation of projects abroad, influencing national development policy and contributing to the expert and public debate. The brief starts by analysing the internal assets and limitations of NGOs and then considers the extent to which the third sector has been able to apply their resources for influencing state policy and raising public awareness of global issues.

The conclusions were drawn on the basis of a variety of sources. First, annual monitoring reports produced by the Zagranica Group NGO platform were consulted in September-October 2012 and views of the authors and reactions of government officials were taken into account. This gave the author insight into the key issues of the agenda for NGO-state cooperation. Next, in October-November 2012 surveys were circulated among most members of the NGO platform helping to identify in a preliminary fashion the organisations’ internal strengths and problems as well as narrow down issues that would be tackled in in-depth interviews, which were carried out with 12 NGO respondents in February 2013. The conclusions were verified and elaborated at a discussion, held on 26 February 2013, attended by 9 NGO representatives.

## 1. Non-governmental organisations and the state: redefining relations

*Small group of veterans.* Polish NGOs have a decisive role in shaping the national development assistance efforts. Over the years their staff have managed to build a unique set of skills, which have become their primary asset. This was acknowledged both by the Polish MFA and by foreign donors, which continue to provide *continuous funding* for their project activities. The ability to secure project funding from year to year has enabled a relatively small number of experienced organisations to emerge as a stable set of NGO actors in Polish development assistance.

At the same time, lack of institutional funding and absence of multi-annual funding from the MFA puts a lot of pressure on the NGOs to seek grant funding and enter competitions throughout the year. Uncertainty of continued funding puts limits on the growth of permanent staff, and the necessity to handle paperwork related to project application and reporting forces organisations to allocate more time than they would desire to administrative duties rather than their core activities.

It is somewhat of a paradox that the MFA acknowledges non-governmental partners as the primary actors in the delivery of bilateral assistance yet fails to provide any institutional (core) support. This is particularly striking given the fact that a number of organisations are awarded project assistance from year to year, and in both the public forum and in direct communication ministry officials admit that they tend to reward those organisations that have shown to be capable of meeting the technical and formal criteria. Nonetheless, there is resistance to awarding non-project-related funds, with a representative of a large, established NGO pointing out the persistence of the “let the best one win” philosophy. In his view, this *laissez-faire* approach produced an unhealthy climate of “dog-eat-dog” competition, resulting in pressure to cut project costs, especially staff costs. As an independent expert noted, another obstacle to the launch of an institutional support scheme is the state officials’ tendency to avoid making distinctions between organisations, evident in grant competitions, in which the notion of “key players” is missing.

*Relationship with the state.* Introduction of some form of core support would require a change of attitude on the part of many organisations, as the community of development NGOs is divided on the larger question of the extent to which the organisations are willing to subscribe to government objectives and strategy. Two marked positions were voiced. On the one hand, a group of NGOs that is interested in introducing certain aspects of the global agenda (e.g. Busan Partnership, environmental protection, gender issues or democratisation) affirms the need to maintain a distance and asserts its “autonomy”. From their point of view, the clear delineation of roles with NGOs involved not only in implementing aid but also in monitoring the government’s compliance with its commitments—is necessary for ensuring

the effectiveness of assistance. This group of organisations has resisted tying themselves down to Polish state aid, as this could relegate them to the position of mere subcontractors. Moreover, these NGOs are anxious that Polish assistance does not become too closely tied to the country's foreign policies.

On the other hand, some organisations put stress on the visibility and impact that could be achieved if development aid became an even higher priority for Polish diplomacy, and if the MFA recognised among the assets of the national development cooperation the competencies and international position of some of the NGOs that are “past the infancy stage”. Representatives of some larger organisations, capable of running infrastructural projects, noted that contrary to the opinion widespread in the public debate, Poland has already developed significant “implementation capital” that sets it apart from many other new EU member states. A head of a large organisation pointed to another gap in the MFA's activities—while the ministry acknowledges the need to build Poland's image as an emerging donor (e.g. by launching dedicated grant competitions for activities promoting the country's visibility), a strategic plan is missing for linking various aid activities, carried out by non-state and state actors, in a way as to maximise their visibility.

Analysis of statements made by both officials and non-governmental representatives reveal a general consensus. Both sides are interested in ensuring that assistance benefits Poland's image abroad and that Polish aid is implemented “under a national umbrella”. However, non-governmental organisations point to the limited understanding of the term “visibility” as it is often realised within projects. Some respondents see the need to go beyond mere inclusion of logos and notes on the source of funding, suggesting that activities serving to consolidate visibility of actions should be given a greater share of project budgets. Other areas of need named in this context were: giving preference to the use of Polish products and technologies in the implementation of projects and creating opportunities for co-financing the involvement of Polish NGOs in international multi-year projects.

## 2. Staff and volunteers: dealing with the crisis

*Lean organisations with horizontal structure.* In view of their precarious funding base, none of the organisations is able to maintain large bureaucratic structures. This is turned to their advantage as compared to foreign counterparts, as at times Polish organisations advertise themselves as small dedicated teams of versatile professionals, who often take on the entire scope of project management, starting from conceiving the idea through submitting the application to work in the field and reporting to the donor. This model, which is characteristic of small organisations, has the advantage of letting the personnel “own” the project, allowing them to commit to it, while at the same time ensuring coherence between planned, executed and reported actions. The clear disadvantage is the high workload per person, and possible frustration over inability to focus and develop certain specific skills. In turn, reliance on a small number of staff members for the entire range of activities may result in their “burnout”, especially at times of higher workload (e.g. at the end of the financial year). Unclear division of responsibilities, low pay levels and high workload may eventually lead to departure, and high staff turnover could disrupt the workflow and diminish the organisation’s credibility as a beneficiary.

Organisations have adopted some effective strategies to counter potential staff attrition. Three principles, which could be observed, are: the use of such incentives that would match the specific characteristics of the staff, the clear distinction between permanent staff and collaborators being made, and the tendency to maintain a horizontal pay scheme with elements of insurance against temporary loss of financing. Such a scheme requires that all employees are engaged in revenue generation: this is often ensured by involving all the staff in conceiving project ideas and submitting proposals, which are then peer-reviewed. This horizontal setup ensures balancing the workload as well as makes the employees’ welfare directly tied to the performance of the entire organisation.

Regardless of the size or turnover of the organisation, the respondents stressed that the staff remuneration schemes were adopted voluntarily in such a way as to best match the specific needs of the team members. Moreover, the establishment of such a scheme was cited as the top reason for staying with the organisation. Two long-standing organisations have been able to retain staff of circa 10 persons each by guaranteeing all its employees permanent work contracts with a flat basic salary at a decent rate (above the market average) following a short trial period. Both organisations recognised the paramount need for financial stability for its staff, composed mainly of persons at the age of 30 and above with families. For that reason, they introduced some mechanisms on their own which would ensure the financial sustainability of their organisations while providing protection for employees in downtime.

One method is the introduction of a “solidarity bag”, a fund to which all contribute so that they may be paid their basic salary in the event they fail to win any projects in a given year. The establishment of such a fund is a necessary compensatory mechanism in the system in which salaries are directly tied to project revenue. The other scheme consists of a uniform salary rate for all employees, which is adjusted by 20 per cent for staff who temporarily take on more or fewer commitments. This solution again underscores the link between organisational performance and personal welfare, while allowing for reduced personal cost in times when a given team member has not been able to secure project funding.

All the respondents stressed that shared values, personal commitment to the organisational objectives were a determining factor for the staff to remain on board. This is particularly evident in cases of those NGOs that are composed of part-time volunteers who are unremunerated. It is striking that nearly all the organisations were developed by persons who decided to continue aid activities that they had previously done as employees of international organisations (UN), interns or volunteers on foreign missions (e.g. with the church) or as workers of larger NGOs. This *focus on aid activity* regardless of the institutional umbrella is a characteristic of many respondents who cited it as the primary drive for establishing and sustaining the organisation.

*Power of attraction.* The fact that many organisations persevere in seeking opportunities for aid out of the inner drive found among their members is first of all a symptom of general *health* of the sector. This conclusion is also borne out by observation of the factors at play when organisations seek funding for their activities. When asked whether donor priorities (e.g. of the Polish MFA) played a decisive role in spurring the organisation to apply for support for specific activities, the respondents denied this, pointing primarily to their own assessment of needs on the ground as well as to the demand expressed by local partners in the target country. They chose not to apply when seeing that the priorities of their choice were not listed in a given year.

The genuine commitment to helping those in need is also the biggest draw for potential Polish *volunteers* as they are as a rule not compensated. The primary forms of recruitment are direct informal contacts, public events and advertisements placed on their own websites. One respondent stressed that openness to volunteers was as much motivated by the need to share the responsibilities (10 volunteers doing one-third of the total workload on top of the permanent staff of 10) as by the organisational mission. He noted that attracting volunteers along with collecting contributions and generating support for advocacy efforts testified to the “civil” character of the organisation, which draws its legitimacy from support expressed by members of the community.

Respondents were not satisfied with the supply of volunteers, noting that while they continue to receive many inquiries from persons vaguely interested in cooperation, the interest in undertaking serious commitment is

scarce. Another barrier to the greater involvement of volunteers is a general lack of dedicated funding for expenses related to dispatching volunteers to target countries. Some organisations pointed out that in the absence of continued funding for activities in a given country, they cannot afford to establish permanent arrangements for sending their own employees there, let alone volunteers, outside of project-related activities.

Dissatisfaction was expressed with the inflexible policies of MFA aid competitions, regarding the acceptable forms of employment in the funded projects. The requirement to conclude service or volunteer contracts was seen as an additional burden and a symptom of growing red tape. The cap placed on administrative costs (15%) was criticised, especially in conjunction with growing expectations from state donors (such as the dedicated Solidarity Fund, established recently for pro-democracy actions) as to the quality of personnel. Some respondents concluded that the cuts in administrative costs, regularly applied by MFA officials, did not take into account the realistic assessment of market conditions, limiting the pool of available experts and specialists.

### 3. Implementation of projects: NGOs' comparative advantages

*Models of delivering assistance abroad.* Another paradox in the relations between the MFA and Polish development NGOs is the apparent misunderstanding of the comparative advantage that Polish organisations have relative to larger foreign organisations. In both the post-Soviet space and in Africa, the two key regions to which Polish assistance is directed, the challenge is low visibility and limited impact which is characteristic of the low volume of aid.

The *modus operandi* of Polish NGOs varies by size of the organisation and type of operations. In the CIS, assistance often takes the form of transfer of experience and is on the whole carried out by relatively small organisations, which must ensure that they independently *locate, manage and verify partners in the country of origin* and thus *gauge local needs*, thanks to close engagement with the partner and own staff presence on the ground. In view of this, rapport with the local partners was named as the success factor, enabling Polish NGOs to correctly name the current priorities, adapt to changing circumstances and as a result continue to operate long-term in these countries. This “staying power” was cited by many organisations operating in either of the regions.

This approach of “working from a distance” is of limited use when applied in Africa, as was noted by a representative of a larger organisation with extensive experience in several countries on the continent. In his view, carrying out projects by coordinators located for the bulk of the time in the Polish office who merely oversee the progress of work, carried out by local partners, does not provide sufficient visibility to Polish aid, nor does it allow for demonstrating the value added by the involvement of the Polish organisation. This is particularly relevant for humanitarian aid or “classic development” projects, which require significant investment in own facilities (setting up own base, organising a convoy) on the one hand, and delegation of own staff for the duration of the project in the field on the other. However, only a few organisations possess either the required financial and organisational capacities (Polish Humanitarian Action, Polish Center for International Assistance) or staff that can be delegated to the target country (Foundation for Somalia).

This unique knowledge of local conditions and the ability to assess unique needs as well as foresee opportunities makes Polish NGOs essential to ensuring aid effectiveness, as it helps address fundamental problems facing Polish assistance in the two target regions. Among the problems facing donors in the post-Soviet space are the difficulties in extending funding to informal initiatives that are out of favour with the authorities and in recognising the government-sponsored organisations which lack genuine social legitimacy. Here, step in Polish organisations that have a long experience of working in the complex environment of Belarus and Central Asia, making them a credible partner to genuine local initiatives enabling

Polish NGOs to take a natural lead in the project. As representatives of an organisation with a record of two decades of pro-democracy activities throughout the CIS stressed, the hands-on knowledge of local realities enables them to independently assess whether the activities proposed by the local partner are justified. In the event the Polish partner believes the local proposal is missing the mark, it is able and willing to propose an alternative. This expertise is particularly valuable given the fact that even though the Polish consular network is among the most extensive in the CIS, few among the embassies and consulates are staffed with persons who deal with development issues in their everyday work.

This issue is even more acute in Sub-Saharan Africa where Poland has only five embassies (Abuja, Addis Ababa, Luanda, Nairobi and Pretoria), making it the continent with the lowest density of Polish diplomatic missions. It is particularly telling that another five embassies were closed in 2008 as part of the reorganisation of the diplomatic network: Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Harare, Kinshasa and Lagos. Respondents from the Polish organisations active in this region revealed that they did not receive assistance (logistical, information) from the embassies even in those countries where the posts were located. One expert noted that the fundamental problem is very severe understaffing of the embassies, suggesting that to ensure good knowledge of local conditions, two dedicated posts would need to be set up *per country*.

*Polish NGOs and official assistance priorities.* The relationship between the MFA and Polish NGOs in delivery of assistance varies by region, reflecting tensions between development assistance and foreign policy priorities. NGOs working in Africa appear to be in the “driver’s seat”, often initiating engagement in certain locations, as traditionally Poland has limited the number of priority countries in Africa to only one. Their strategies for drawing attention to local needs vary: from combining activities of a similar type in Poland and Africa (Foundation “Hear Africa”) through study visits for Polish business leaders and the use of public figures in campaigns (Foundation for Somalia), to information campaigns and professional-grade publications, featuring the results of humanitarian and infrastructural projects (Polish Centre for International Aid, Polish Humanitarian Action).

In turn, in the CIS where Poland pursues active policies of neighbourhood and pro-democratisation, the strategies and activities of Polish government bodies and non-governmental organisations may come into conflict. The organisations complain of being treated as “subcontractors” of assistance while they seek to influence the priorities of Polish development and democratisation actions. Moreover, uncoordinated or sloppy actions by some officials may in fact jeopardise the security and welfare of local partners, exposing them to the risk of persecution. In the most famous case, the Polish Foreign Minister offered an apology following the arrest of Belarusian human rights activist Ales Bialiatski in 2011, upon the release by Poland of financial records leading to his indictment.

#### 4. Influencing state policy: what has worked?

*Building partnership through independent monitoring.* The years 2011 and 2012 marked a turning point for Polish non-governmental organisations' efforts to monitor and offer recommendations for government development efforts. Representatives of NGOs stated during the discussion, held in late February 2013, that in the previous two years, the NGO platform had concentrated on contributing to the shape and contents of the legal and strategic documents prepared by the MFA. The entry into force of the Act on Development Cooperation, the elaboration of a multi-year plan on development activities and the establishment of permanent consultation mechanisms, were all important landmarks for non-governmental organisations' access to the system of planning development aid. NGOs managed to secure a strong presence in the process of laying systemic foundations through structured dialogue with key government departments responsible for planning and programming aid, which had the form of regular monitoring of progress towards meeting Poland's international commitments and ensuring greater aid effectiveness.

Between 2006 and 2011, six annual reports monitoring the official Polish development aid were released by a dedicated monitoring subgroup, established within the Zagranica Group, a platform of 61 NGOs carrying out assistance, humanitarian aid, democracy support and global education. The initiative to monitor Polish aid was informally launched in 2004 by several major NGOs, which had been government partners in the implementation of projects, as well as in consultations on the organisation of state development aid.

The rationale for independent monitoring of state assistance was laid out in the first report, covering 2005 and 2006. While the volume of Polish assistance to developing countries grew, the existing evaluations, carried out by foreign institutions and a few domestic experts, relied on the MFA official reports alone. Non-governmental reports aimed to fill the gap, viewing the quality of aid from the perspective of beneficiaries, which was to pinpoint weaknesses and strengths in the organisation of assistance and thus help build a positive image of Polish aid in the target countries. From the outset, the reports aimed not only to evaluate assistance at the level of projects, but also help set objectives and priorities of the national aid system as a whole.

Published annually, the reports are developed by a team of experts who investigate particular areas of aid through analysis of official reports, as well as exchange letters and meetings with officials at the key ministries involved in planning and/or organisation of assistance: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior. Undoubtedly, the reports have been useful tools for tracking Poland's progress in meeting its own commitments as to the volume of aid and in building the necessary legal and strategic framework. Consecutive reports

propose specific recommendations, taking notice of the extent to which last year's proposals were carried out.

The reports' strengths lie in their standard organisation—featuring annual quantitative analysis of actual outlays in bilateral aid to priority countries, clear presentation of strengths and weaknesses of government proposals, as well as in-depth treatment of specific aspects of assistance from year to year. Another asset is the fact that the reports are products of a relatively stable team of authors whose names are public and who represent organisations with a proven track record of implementing assistance, and in some cases national networks, interested in highlighting certain aspects of aid (gender, environment, global education and democratisation).

*Assessing effectiveness of monitoring.* The annual publication and presentation of independent reports for six years ushered in a process that justifies the question as to the extent to which the monitoring efforts were effective. The answer is not simple. From the outset, NGO reports identified some structural problems in the aid system: low overall volume, insufficient concentration of aid on declared priorities, and a small share of aid disbursed by the MFA as the coordinating body.

Recognising a lack of progress toward these broad objectives by 2007, reports in the following years included some concrete indicators of success, suggesting specific measures to be taken by a specified date. Thus, regarding the ODA volume it was recommended in 2008 that the Polish government fulfil its declaration made at the EU forum in 2005 of raising the volume to 0.17% of GDP by 2010, and the recommendation was reiterated in 2010 with the commitment of reaching ODA levels of 0.33% of GDP by 2015. However, these items as well as other specific recommendations mirroring those found in the 2010 DAC report were not realised. As of early 2013, Poland is still not a member of the DAC (another recommendation of the Group, repeatedly voiced since 2008), and DAC suggestions on untying aid and concentrating bilateral assistance on a smaller number of thematic and geographic priorities were brought up in successive reports of the Group, which concluded that the progress toward these objectives was slow.

The barriers to achieving overall progress toward DAC objectives on aid effectiveness were recognised early on by Polish NGOs. In the report covering Polish aid in 2009, the organisations acknowledged limits to raising the volume and undertaking actions towards greater effectiveness of aid. In their view:

The greatest barrier consists of the lack of common understanding of global challenges among decision-makers (...). Redefining our country's global role requires that members of parliament and government officials

demonstrate much higher awareness, and Polish NGOs are engaged in dialogue with decision-makers and in educational activities.<sup>1</sup>

It was concluded, however, that “strong support from the minister of foreign affairs” who is in charge of coordinating state development activities and initiating strategic changes in the organisation of aid is a preeminent condition of jump-starting the process of making the assistance system more effective. Thus, the report published in 2010 treated the question of aid effectiveness in greater depth, dedicating a separate section, in which detailed recommendations were drawn up and allocated to specific government bodies, most notably to two departments of the MFA, responsible for planning and programming aid—the Department of Development Cooperation and the Department of Implementation of Development Programmes. It is worth noting that the recommendations were assessed as to their potential impact on overall effectiveness and the ministry’s capacity for initiating change in given areas.

Between 2010 and 2012, consultations between the MFA and the Zagranica Group intensified as the government proceeded to submit several strategic documents for review; a move that was long awaited. In line with the framework Strategy of Polish Cooperation for Development released in 2003, the government vowed to adopt the sectoral law, which would set the principles, forms, methods of implementation and basis of financing of development activities. A major step towards this objective was making public in 2010 of the draft principles of the Act, which were positively assessed as reflecting “the general consensus worked out between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-governmental organisations” in the course of consultations on successive drafts of the Act itself. In the report published in 2010, the Group offered specific suggestions as to the issues that the final version of the Act should tackle, and a year later, in September 2011, it welcomed the adoption of the Act as realisation of one of its recurring and long-standing recommendations. Nonetheless, it continued to press for improvements, highlighting apart from undeniable achievements a number of shortcomings of the law, which called for amendments to the Act.

*Current framework for consultations.* In late September 2012 the sixth monitoring report of the Group was publicly presented, and the rank of the event was marked by the fact that the launch coincided with the presentation of the official MFA report. The public presentation was followed by comments by the undersecretary of state for development assistance at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the report continued to include the quantitative analysis of the volume and composition of Polish ODA, its analytical part was greatly expanded. This was officially welcomed by the MFA, which reasserted the role of the Group as “a partner for discussion”. However, despite efforts by the presenters to balance the positive

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<sup>1</sup> Grupa Zagranica, *Polska pomoc zagraniczna 2009*, p. 31.

developments (such as the adoption of multi-year aid programming, the establishment of the dedicated agency in charge of democratisation efforts and the entry into force of the Act), the ministry failed to acknowledge many of the specific criticisms of the new legal and institutional arrangements. The Group's postulates aired in 2012 were largely built on those included in earlier reports, but this edition was much more explicit in describing the blocks to progress and the dynamics of the consultation process.

Many of the respondents stressed that the new legal framework (the Act) provided a permanent basis for policy consultations, consolidating the long experience of cooperation between the Zagranica Group and the MFA. The Act established the Programme Council for Development Assistance, on which apart from representatives of ministries, parliamentary clubs and academia, four representatives of non-governmental organisations (including two from the board of the Zagranica Group) were guaranteed membership. According to a representative of the Group, no discussion has been held within the NGO platform on the effectiveness of this format.

In addition to this formal body, which holds sessions twice a year, approving annual government plans and other strategic documents, the MFA at the initiative of under secretary Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz has proposed a code of good practice for consultations with social partners. The principles of cooperation were placed online, covering (1) the procedure for consulting drafts of legal amendments to the Act and other pertinent legal acts, a multi-annual programme of development assistance and official positions on EU documents, (2) consultation meetings with the under secretary and (3) expert consultations. Both types of meetings are potentially open to representatives of non-governmental organisations, and expert consultations may be convened *ad hoc* at the request of one or several social partners.

At the same time, the experience of consultations and monitoring state development aid revealed some limits to the process. During interviews, several respondents questioned whether the transparent and public formula of the annual review had not proved to be too "confrontational" for the officials when it went beyond outlining principles and directions of change to detailed evaluation of the adopted solutions. At the same time, a representative of a key member organisation of the Group admitted that the opposition had more to do with the context, and that adapting the tone of the assessment to take note of the target audience's expectations could help make recommendations more palatable. A good example is the critique of Poland's EU Presidency, which prior to inclusion in the report had been communicated successfully in a direct way by one of the Group's members. Many NGO respondents raised the point that in future efforts at raising certain sensitive points, attention must be paid to the setting and context of these actions so as to minimise the damage to the MFA's image as a leader of the change process.

The quality of consultations has been attributed by the NGO respondents to the level of officials' knowledge of the topic. It is therefore recommended that the ministry would do best by assigning personnel specialised in a pertinent aspect of aid to consultations of documents and initiatives, as well as to reviewing NGOs' substantial policy proposals . The utility of such an approach was demonstrated by the case of consultations on the inclusion of gender issues into the multi-year plan of development activities. According to a representative of a coalition of organisations working towards empowering women in development, while not all the coalition's proposals were included in the plan, the process was still a success thanks to structured quarterly meetings as well as individual talks with the knowledgeable ministry representative. Delegating an official specialised in issues under discussion for talks with NGOs on a permanent basis was seen as essential for achieving progress in consultations.

## 5. Best practices in advocacy and global education

As W. Tworkowski noted in his study of development and democracy in the activities of Polish NGOs, there is a gap between the level of engagement in global education efforts between the organisations involved in classic development, and those focused on democratisation activities. He suggests that the latter should “learn” from the former “how to promote their activities in society” and that they should give up on the belief that “since Poles believe in democracy, they necessarily support democratisation actions, for instance in Ukraine”.<sup>2</sup> This research indeed corroborates this general finding, noting that the organisations working in areas such as humanitarian aid, poverty reduction, the environment or women’s rights, indeed place significant emphasis on informing the public of the needs of target countries, stirring up interest of greater activity and support for development in society and working with key groups such as politicians, officials, businesspeople, academics and students.

Large NGOs implementing assistance have developed their own arrangements for advocacy that would match their target groups and work specificity. One instance is the Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH), which has been undertaking dedicated advocacy efforts for six years; and helping them organise a position of *advocacy officer* was set up. Educational activities aimed at Polish society in particular were enumerated in the organisation’s strategy for 2010-2014, listing the following priority target groups: politicians and officials (securing compliance with Poland’s commitments and improving state policies), mass media (nationwide campaigns raising awareness and stimulating activism), children and youth (mainstreaming humanitarian and global education in the school system), and academia (featuring development in curricula). The strategy is disaggregated into annual plans for advocacy activities, breaking general goals into detailed objectives, which are then the basis for the advocacy officer to report to the Board of the Foundation and modify plans for the following year.

In addition, the PAH continues to produce publications tailored to various groups, such as experts and policy-makers. In particular, policy briefs developed in collaboration with international partners such as Oxfam, People in Need, Globopolis and ECDPM, as well as with Polish development NGOs, covering aspects of development such as democracy, combating hunger, sustainable development, gender equality and transparency of aid. The Polish Presidency of the EU, which took place in the second half of 2011, was an opportunity to highlight the role that the country could play in shaping the EU’s policy, as well as in familiarising Polish politicians with the EU development policy framework. For this reason, PAH and Oxfam released a

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<sup>2</sup> M. Fijałkowska, W. Tworkowski, *Demokracja i rozwój w perspektywie polskich organizacji pozarządowych. Raport z badań*, Grupa Zagranica: Warszawa 2012, p. 27.

list of recommendations for the Presidency, while members of the Polish Parliament and interested officials received a comprehensive book publication. The 222-page guide outlines the basic norms and institutional foundations of the EU development policy, provides in-depth treatment of current issues facing the EU, and includes recommendations for the Polish government. It is notable that PAH also produced a bulletin presenting all its advocacy activities in 2011, the year of the Presidency, ranging from efforts to influence the law and government strategy, through public events to publications.

The NGO platform and key civil society actors are increasingly aware of the potential that generating and transferring specialist knowledge holds for reaching out to officials and other stakeholders. Hence their interest in producing materials that systematise the understanding of development, provoke expert discussions and offer lessons from international experience. Such materials are often produced in series so as to address current issues and to feature contributions from various circles. One such initiative is the series of the Zagranica Group *Opinions, Debates, Analyses* policy briefs, developed as part of the project “Raising the competence of the Group members in advocacy activities targeting public administration”. Eight briefs have been published so far, providing not only expert analyses of the current government initiatives (adoption of the Act, establishment of the pro-democratisation Solidarity Fund), but also introducing a discussion of international experience in such issues as the relationship between development and democracy support and economic development.

Another instance is the publication by the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM) of the *Pomoc rozwojowa* (Development Aid) quarterly that targets officials, NGO activists and academics interested in the expert discussion of issues of global development, as well as in the presentation of practical experience from projects implemented abroad. For instance, the issues in 2012 featured an extensive discussion of the challenge of the Arab Spring transformation for the delivery of humanitarian aid, aspects of providing medical aid in Africa, crisis management in emergencies and the scourge of drought and famine.

Organisations concentrating on specific issues have pointed to the importance of joining transnational initiatives, which serve to strengthen their efforts at raising public awareness. The case in point is the KARAT coalition, which has worked on mainstreaming the question of the position of women in target countries and overcoming stereotypes related to trafficking by engaging in activities of cross-border development platforms. An example of such actions is the “Through Their Eyes, Through Ours” project in which exhibitions and publications were featured in three other European countries apart from Poland (Belgium, Germany and Slovakia). The secretariat of the coalition serves as a partner for international projects as well as communicating positions of local members to the national and European level for advocacy purposes.

In general, it may be concluded that the organisations recognise the need to tailor their message and adapt the instruments for its delivery to specific audiences. As the general public comes to recognise the value of engaging in dealing with global issues, development actors choose to target influential groups (business, officials, academia) so as to promote deepened understanding of specific assistance needs.