

Compliance of the draft program of Polish foreign aid for 2009 with the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA)

(country assistance strategies, national systems, civil society, evaluation)

A significant increase in funds allocated to foreign aid in 2009 (up to 150 million PLN) directs attention to the issue of quality of Polish aid. It is also on its quality that depends whether money of Polish taxpayers will contribute in the best way to eliminate poverty and promote democracy in the world. Development cooperation can be considered not only through the prism of realisation of Poland's further international commitments but also through improvement of quality of people's lives and guaranteeing them rights to which every person is entitled. Greater quality of aid allows improving lives of single individuals – women, men and children in countries of the South.

The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) is the most recent international document establishing criteria of quality of official development assistance (ODA). It is a continuation and further development of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness commitments. In the course of the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness¹ the international community of recipients and donors (including representatives of Poland) expressed a belief that substantial changes in the way the assistance is provided are necessary. "Evidence shows we are making progress, but not enough. [...] Yet the pace of progress is too slow. Without further reform and faster action we will not meet our 2010 commitments and targets for improving the quality of aid"².

The draft program of Polish foreign aid provided through the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009 determines principles, instruments as well as particular countries and areas of support within the framework of funds at disposal of the Ministry. The program "constitutes Poland's response to international challenges and obligations resulting from international documents, regulating development assistance, including especially the Millennium Development Goals, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action (...)"³. It is therefore justified to analyse to what extent the program of Polish aid is consistent with particular AAA commitments.

The Accra Agenda for Action and the Paris Declaration indicate the ownership as a key to effective aid. AAA determines that "donors will support them [aid recipients] by respecting countries' priorities, investing in their human resources and institutions, making greater use of their systems to deliver aid, and increasing the predictability of aid flows"⁴. Polish aid should therefore be predictable, based on priorities of recipient countries and take into account to the greatest possible extent public institutions of partner countries.

In the draft program of Polish foreign aid it can be read that in the process of its elaboration the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was guided by the principle of "taking into account aid needs of priority countries of Polish foreign aid, both the nearest neighbours and countries more distant geographically". In the above-mentioned document there is however no information concerning sources of knowledge about the needs, possible consultations with authorities and civil society of partner countries or accurately determined actions through which such consultations would be

¹ 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra, 2–4 September 2008, www.accrahlf.net

² Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), final version, 4 September 2008, point 6.

³ Program of Polish foreign aid provided through Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009. Ministry of Foreign Affairs' project, Warsaw 2008.

⁴ Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), final version, 4 September 2008, point 8.

carried out. Furthermore, the annual determination of priority sectors of support brings into question the possibility of continuation of actions undertaken earlier and decreases the effectiveness of Polish aid.

In the Accra Agenda for Action donors have undertaken to increase the predictability of aid flows over the medium term⁵. They have also assumed the responsibility for informing partner countries about their rolling three-to-five-year forward expenditure and/or implementation plans, with at least indicative resource allocations. Moreover, donors agreed to address any constraints to providing such information⁶.

In order to fulfil this commitment Poland should work out mid-term plans of aid for particular priority countries in the form of country assistance strategies for each of them. Aid plans should take into consideration the principle of country-led division of labour, including already existing good practices, in order to avoid fragmentation of aid⁷. Strategies should also enable recipient countries to meet their obligation to involve civil society in preparing, implementing and monitoring national development policies and plans⁸. Polish country assistance strategies should enable recipient countries to take Polish aid into account in their budget plans and strategies for fighting poverty. The establishment of country assistance strategies by Poland, their consistent implementation and evaluation will contribute to the increased quality of Polish aid. The 2009 Program of Polish foreign aid should take into consideration the establishment of such strategies, including: the allocation of relevant funds and a system of effective consultations with representatives of the civil society from recipient countries and from Poland.

The consistent application of the principle of ownership requires the use of public and financial national systems by recipient countries. Meanwhile, as the Accra Agenda for Action reveals, donors often bypass them even when they are good-quality systems⁹. In the draft program of Polish foreign aid, apart from 3 million PLN for budget support for an unidentified country, no actions have been foreseen to use distribution channels of recipient countries. We therefore emphasise that according to commitments taken on by Poland in AAA donors should *immediately* start working on a plan for undertaking their Paris Declaration commitments on using country systems in all forms of development assistance¹⁰. It is therefore well-founded that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers applying aid instruments other than projects, including budget support. In the Accra Agenda for Action donors have reaffirmed their commitment to the broad use of programme-based approach and channeling of aid through country systems¹¹.

The ownership of development actions of recipient countries is not possible without effective partnership of various social actors and civil institutions involved in the process of development. AAA points to the role of donors in building and strengthening competences of Members of Parliament, local and central authorities, non-governmental organisations, research institutions, media and private sector. At the same time it recognises the special and independent role of civil society organisations supplementing efforts made by governments and private sector. In AAA donors have committed to “deepen their engagement with civil society organisations”¹² and

⁵ AAA, point 26.

⁶ AAA, point 26 c.

⁷ AAA, point 17 b.

⁸ AAA, point 13 a.

⁹ AAA, point 15.

¹⁰ AAA, point 15 d.

¹¹ AAA, point 15 e.

¹² AAA, point 20.

cooperation in order to “provide an enabling environment that maximises their contribution to development”¹³.

In the draft 2009 program of Polish foreign aid strengthening competences of the above-mentioned actors and institutions occupies a very important place. Despite this there is lack of support for civil society – mentioned in case of almost all priority countries – in sectors defined for Africa where development needs are the greatest. The ownership should always have a democratic character, therefore we recommend adding support for civil society to priority sectors for Africa, particularly in the area of social participation and the promotion of active participation in public life. This recommendation is based not only on the analysis of the implementation of AAA commitments but also on the local research on priorities, conducted by experienced partner non-governmental organisations¹⁴ from recipient countries.

While the ownership is described as a key to effective assistance, the responsibility for achieving results should remain in the centre of all undertaken actions: „More than ever, citizens and taxpayers of all countries expect to see tangible results of development efforts”¹⁵. One of the tools of demanding accountability for the proper use of public funds is the evaluation. AAA signatories have committed to evaluating the impact of implemented development policies and adjusting them as necessary¹⁶.

The draft 2009 program of Polish foreign aid allows for 1 million PLN for an external evaluation of selected Polish foreign aid programs. However, it lacks more detailed information about its character, selected sectors and any schedule of planned actions. We draw attention to the fact that an effective, independent system of evaluation is necessary for results-based management that enables better planning of Polish aid and accountability for its effects to the authorities and the society in Poland and in partner countries. Referring to the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action commitments we call for intensified work on an effective, external system of evaluation of Polish aid, involving recipients from developing countries. The schedule of this work and its results should be made publicly available for Polish citizens and partner countries. Transparency in the area of achieved results and accountability may significantly contribute to the increased quality of aid¹⁷.

We also underline that the discussed program covers only a small part (about 10%) of funds qualified as Polish ODA (official development assistance). As a result, the major part of funds does not seem to be regulated in a strategic way. The entirety of Polish activities in the area of development cooperation is regulated by the Strategy of 2003. In spite of public declarations about a swift adoption of a new strategic document it isn't mentioned in the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 2009 program. By signing the Accra Agenda for Action Poland has committed to lifting legal and administrative impediments to implementing international commitments on aid effectiveness¹⁸. It is particularly important in the context of lack of multi-annual financing and difficulties in using financial institutions and public procurement systems of partner countries.

¹³ AAA, point 20 c.

¹⁴ It includes e.g. LEAT, partner organisation of the Institute of Global Responsibility (IGO) from Tanzania.

¹⁵ AAA, article 10.

¹⁶ AAA, point 23 b.

¹⁷ AAA, point 22.

¹⁸ AAA, point 23 d.

CONCLUSIONS

Poland – as a new EU Member State and donor – is currently at the stage of formulating its development policy. It is therefore particularly important for Poland to implement from the very beginning good practices elaborated by recipient countries themselves and more experienced aid donors. Establishing strategies for priority countries; applying instruments based on the use of country distribution channels; an effective, external mechanism of evaluation are measurable actions that can increase the quality of Polish aid. Undertaking these actions is necessary and possible, although it requires considerable efforts and essential social and political support. A helpful role in this process can be played, among other actors, by Polish non-governmental organisations.

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