

BULLETIN

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Country Strategy Papers in Polish Development Cooperation

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After recent reforms in the national development cooperation system, Poland is now reaching the point when it may be ready to draft its first country strategy papers. Having programming documents in place, and with Polish expertise and resources correctly aligned with both the partner country's development needs and the activities of other donors in the partner country, would help Poland to provide assistance more rationally and professionally. Although preparing the documents may consume both time and resources, it is necessary for Poland to start working on this now if it is to become a mature and more effective donor in the near future.

Country Strategy Papers (CSPs). CSPs are fundamental programming documents used by donors to plan and implement more strategic and effective development assistance to partner countries. Although the specific name of the document may vary from country to country (Operational Plans, Indicative Programmes, Country Partnership Strategies, etc.) they all represent a programming tool that is widely employed by the majority of both established and emerging donors. For instance, the European Union (EU) has around 150 separate documents for its partner countries, as well as several regional and thematic CSPs. The EU's oldest Member States, such as the UK, Germany and Denmark, have CSPs or equivalent documents for most of their priority partners, while a new donor, South Korea, is working on the first of several strategies. Among the EU's newer Member states, the Czech Republic, for instance, already has eight strategy papers, and Slovakia is working on its first CSP for Afghanistan.

A CSP describes the donor's aims, priority sectors, aid modalities, allocation of funds and expected results for a chosen country in the mid-term perspective (between three and seven years). It is usually preceded by in-depth research on the internal situation of the partner country and its international context, which helps to identify those areas in which external help would be most desirable. CSPs play a few important functions. They not only allow development assistance to be better designed but also inform the partner country and other donors about intended activities, thus minimising the risk of duplication of efforts and improving harmonisation of international assistance. Moreover, CSPs help development policy to be communicated to a donor's internal constituencies, as they allow governments to explain more easily to society what they do with taxpayers' money and how they are going to achieve the proposed results in a beneficiary country. While CSPs are mainly relevant for large donors that conduct complex development programmes, it seems that they can also help those countries with more modest funds to use their money rationally and efficiently.

Constraints and Opportunities in Polish Aid Planning. So far, Poland has no CSP for any of its priority partners. Instead, it has communicated its bilateral development aid in Annual Plans prepared by the MFA, in which the allocation of funds and priority sectors to all priority partners were decided. This mechanism, however, needs improvements in order to make aid flows to priority countries more predictable, and to increase the effectiveness of the assistance and allow projects to be better evaluated. Even though there has been a growing understanding of the need for such strategies in the MFA, enhanced human resources and more expertise have been required in order to take on this task. However, recent changes in the Polish development system have opened a window of opportunity to make the necessary changes.

First, the Development Cooperation Act of 2011, which came into force on 1st January, gave more clarity on the legal framework of Polish aid, and introduced new aid modalities, such as budget

support. Next, the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2012–2015, adopted by the Council of Ministers in March, gave a broader overview and medium-term perspective of Polish aid objectives and priorities. Active involvement in support of democratic changes in Arab countries in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, sharing Polish transformation experiences, also proved that development cooperation may be a “smart” tool of the country’s foreign policy. Recent reorganisation in the MFA (merging two departments into one Development Cooperation Department) freed up resources and doubled the personnel responsible for strategic programming of aid, from four to eight people.

If Poland is to take advantage of the momentum and draft a CSP it must be aware of certain procedures and adhere to international standards of aid effectiveness (i.e., the ownership rule, and management for results). First and foremost, although major work on a CSP may be done in Warsaw, it is important to align the document with the aims and priorities of the developing country (usually as expressed in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, or National Development Plans) and consult with development partners in-country both within government and civil society. Donors should also take into account the work of other players in the partner country, and concentrate activities on the most neglected areas, or on those areas in which they have a comparative advantage. The EU, for instance, advises its members to focus on a maximum of three sectors per country, in those areas in which they can give added value. In the case of small donors, it is recommended that they limit their actions geographically, to chosen regions or districts, or thematically, to specific subsectors. Finally, the document should specify the allocation of funds in the mid-term perspective, describe in detail the directions and forms of aid, and be realistic in proposing expected results. For example, the British strategy for Uganda foresees that there will be 143,480 more births supervised by skilled attendants by 2015 compared to 2011, which can be attributed to its aid in the health sector in that time. Moreover, attention must be paid to other standards, such as a human rights based approach, and aid transparency, during the process.

Conclusions. Preparation of a CSP would help Poland to plan its development cooperation strategically, and to provide assistance in a more professional, predictable and effective manner. After recent reforms, country strategy papers would provide a missing link between the Multiannual Programme and Annual Plans, thus completing the process of setting up a national system of development cooperation. While preparation of the documents must be done in consultation with partners in the priority country, it is also important to assure proper coordination and wide consensus on the document, within Poland. Thus, the recently formed advisory body to the MFA – the Development Cooperation Policy Council, comprising representatives from different ministries, parliament and civil society, seems to be the most suitable body to approve the final form of the CSP.

It seems reasonable that the first of such documents should be drafted for small partner countries in which Poland has already had a significant presence, such as Moldova or Georgia, which would make the task easier. Afghanistan, which in recent years used to receive the largest share of Polish bilateral ODA, would deserve similar arrangements if Poland decided to continue its civilian engagement in the country after 2014. In the following years, all Poland’s priority partners, should have their own CSPs in place in accordance with the Multiannual Programme timeframe. In addition to this, Poland could also consider drafting special thematic strategy papers (for example, in the area of democracy support) or regional strategy papers (for the East African region).

While preparing the first CSP in line with all international norms and procedures might be a challenging task, the MFA can count on crucial help both in Poland and from abroad. Several Polish NGO’s and experts, who have for years been involved in evaluating and monitoring Polish aid programmes, may be willing to lend their support in the process. The European Commission (EC) and more experienced Member States could also share their expertise, and possibly their resources, to assist Poland. With the EC-advocated joint EU programming still a distant reality, it is in the shared interests of the EU to spend European development funds more strategically and effectively. Alternatively, Poland, which is currently presiding over the Visegrad Group, may consider proposing to its V4 partners a joint programming exercise for a chosen country of common interest.

Finally, in order to cooperate more closely with partner countries, and to make CSPs fully operational documents, the MFA might need to devolve more responsibilities to the partner-country level and build up its own development capacity. Empowering embassies’ development personnel in priority countries, closer cooperation with local experts, and introducing a career path for development specialists within the MFA, might be necessary. Only by collecting data and measuring results on the ground will it be possible to evaluate assistance projects properly, and to learn lessons to improve every subsequent strategy paper.