

In 2015 Ecorys Polska research company conducted **an evaluation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of selected initiatives of Polish development cooperation carried out via the Solidarity Fund PL (SF)** as part of the task commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) called *Support for democracy* and own tasks being pursued in agreement with the MFA.

The evaluation was based on the following criteria: relevance, utility, sustainability, efficiency, effectiveness. The research was conducted in Poland as well as Georgia, Tunisia and Ukraine. The research concerned activities carried out in 2012-14. Qualitative techniques, including a *desk research* analysis, in-depth interviews with project coordinators, local partners, participants, experts, interviews with the representatives of the SF and the Department of Development Cooperation, as well as case studies, an expert panel and a World Cafe workshop were used above all. A SWOT analysis, *benchmarking* of solutions used in other EU countries was also conducted and, as a supplementary technique, an Internet survey was conducted among the project recipients (CAWI).

The aim of the projects under evaluation was to support democratization processes in countries listed as recipients of OECD DAC aid that were also defined as undemocratic, including in the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Initiatives were carried out through Polish non-governmental organizations cooperating with local partners. Assistance was primarily provided for developing local democracy, independent media, human rights, the justice and education systems.

The evaluation showed that Polish projects supporting democracy were usually addressed to people who, in connection with their professional activities, will further convey the acquired knowledge and skills. They included coaches, teachers, journalists, government workers, local leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations. A visible effect confirming the **relevance** of the assistance measures is, above all, the progressive change in their attitudes and change in the work style, resulting from the acquisition of new skills and observance of new models.

The analysis confirmed the usefulness of the projects for the beneficiaries, resulting from the high quality of measures implemented and consideration given to local conditions, among others. In addition, having fresh experience in transformation, Poland, as a supporter, is perceived as being more authentic than other countries.

A key issue for the sustainability of the impact of the projects is the continuation of the project activities after external financing is finished, which requires further organizational and financial involvement by local partners. In case of some of the projects being evaluated these conditions were not fulfilled and the effects of the projects turned out to be less sustainable.

An evaluation of selected projects showed that the institutional system within which the Fund carries out the tasks commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Georgia, Tunisia and Ukraine favors the growth of efficiency and effectiveness of the Polish development aid.

Some of the recommendations made for the upcoming years are:

- ➔ paying more attention to the overall and systematic diagnosis of the needs of the recipients during the conceptualization of projects;

- ➔ increasing the synergy between various Polish aid projects carried out in various countries;
- ➔ relaunching the mechanisms supporting Polish entities in applying for financing from sources other than the budget of the Republic of Poland (in particular, foreign sources), by ensuring own contributions required by the donors;
- ➔ increasing the involvement of diplomatic missions in carrying out activities related to Polish support by creating posts dedicated to Polish development cooperation in Polish aid priority countries, among other things;
- ➔ increasing the presence of the SF in priority countries for Polish aid in which the Fund's activities will be carried out;
- ➔ consistent and precise division of tasks between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SF, which will limit the risk of overlapping activities financed from various sources;
- ➔ increasing synergies between the effects of development projects and business benefits of Polish entrepreneurs;
- ➔ closer cooperation at the institutional level within the projects in Georgia in the education sector and within the support for the modernization of the Resource Centers;
- ➔ implementation of systemic solutions improving the performance of projects and cooperation with project providers, including multi-year projects and increasing the scale of projects (in terms of duration and scope of activities).

Selected strengths of Polish aid

- Fresh experience in transformation; Poland, as a donor, is perceived as being more authentic than other countries.
- Polish organizations and institutions are well aware of the conditions in targeted countries and properly identify the needs of the beneficiaries.
- Recipients appreciate the partnership approach of Polish non-governmental organizations.
- Training and workshops are usually performed on a high substantive level and in an attractive form.

What, above all, should be improved

- Increase the number of multiannual projects financed through the SF while simultaneously extending their duration.
- Polish organizations do not apply for external funds and for this reason the effects of Polish aid projects are not reinforced.
- Activities of project providers are too often based on a single leader.
- Polish companies – as opposed to companies from other EU countries - do not benefit from the effects of development support and insufficiently participate in it.