

THE ROLE OF ESTONIAN CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

2013

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Introduction

Estonia has officially been a donor of development assistance since 1998 when the parliament first dedicated funds from the national budget for this cause. The civil society organisations (CSOs) quickly became important agents for drafting the policies in this sector and one of the main implementers of development projects and their involvement has been growing over the years.

This policy brief describes the current role of CSOs in Estonian development cooperation, their perception of Estonian development policy and the challenges they face in their work. In addition, recommendations are offered for different stakeholders about ways to increase civil society's engagement in development matters on all levels.

The policy brief is written in the framework of the findings of research on the role of trade in development effectiveness as part of the project activities within the framework of the European Commission project entitled: *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.*

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List of Abbreviations

AKÜ	Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation
CSO	civil society organisation
CTC	Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation
eGA	e-Governance Academy
EU	European Union
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1. Methodology

The analysis presented in this policy brief is based on an online survey and semi-structured interviews with five representatives of CSO representatives. Secondary data from reports and other writings on Estonian development cooperation were also used.

The respondents were invited to participate in the survey by direct invitations and through public announcements via mailing lists and social media channels. To boost the response rate, non-responders also received reminders. Data collection took place in November-December 2012. The web-based survey was hosted by an independent research company, Klaster. The questionnaire included different questions for policy makers, private sector people and the CSOs, which were assigned to the respondent by the category they assigned to themselves with the first answer. The survey invitation was sent to 592 emails and circulated through several mailing lists. A total of 49 people responded to the CSO survey, which indicates that a good portion of people active in Estonian development CSOs answered the questions. However, since the answers are anonymous and it is possible that several people from each organisation could have answered the questions, the results should be interpreted as general reflections of the civil society perceptions rather than factual data about their activities.

The criteria for selecting interviewees were their level of engagement in development cooperation issues, depth of knowledge of the subject matter, and position in their organisation. The objective was to interview people who work on development cooperation on a daily basis and are able to represent the opinion of their organisation not just their personal views. The following people were interviewed:

- Johanna Helin, Member of Board and Director of the Global Education Centre of NGO Mondo
- Piret Hirv, Secretary-General of Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (AKÜ)
- Mari-Helene Kaber, Information Manager of Humana Estonia; Chair of the Council of AKÜ
- Arvo Ott, Executive Director of e-Governance Academy
- Margit Säre, Executive Director of Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation; Member of Council of AKÜ

The policy brief is organised such that the first chapter summarises the general characteristics of Estonian CSOs working in the development cooperation and global education sectors. The following chapter describes the most common roles the Estonian CSOs have in development cooperation. The third chapter highlights four Estonian development organisations as good practices to learn from. The fourth chapter explains the challenges faced by development CSOs in Estonia. The final chapter offers concrete recommendations to the European Union (EU), Estonian government and the CSOs about how better to engage civil society into development policy making and implementation.

2. Background on Estonian Development Organisations (CSOs)

The historical development of development cooperation and the role of civil society organisations in the Baltic States have been described elsewhere in quite some detail¹, so this policy brief will not describe that question in much detail. It should suffice to point out that the CSOs have been actively involved in development policy formation and implementation in Estonia since almost the very beginning of these activities at the end of 1990s. The cooperation with the government has had its ups and downs, but over the past two decades the relationship has grown to be quite professional and systematic (see also Box 1).

BOX 1: CREATING THE NATIONAL CSO PLATFORM

“The Estonian development NGO roundtable first met in 2002 to present the consolidated opinion of civil society organizations about the development cooperation principles document being prepared by the MFA. This was an informal network of interested individuals and organizations, which continued implementing activities under the Open Estonia Foundation and, later, the European Movement Estonia until 2007, when an independent legal entity was established as a result of a successful EU-funded Estonian-Finnish-Swedish capacity building project, FEST (Finland, Estonia, Sweden Together for Development). After overcoming the self defining difficulties of any new organization, the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (AKÜ), which currently has 21 member organizations, has been involved in the making of development policy in Estonia, provided capacity building services for Estonian NGOs and worked actively on raising the awareness of the general public about global development challenges. AKÜ has a strong working relationship with the MFA.” (Andrespok & Kasekamp 2012)

The national platform of non-governmental not-for-profit development organisations, called the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation or Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud (AKÜ) in Estonian, currently has 21 member organisations that are active in either development cooperation projects in developing countries or raising the awareness of the Estonian public about global development-related issues. It is impossible to provide a definitive number of CSOs involved in development cooperation, but when estimating by the number of public events organised by different organisations and their participants, there are around 40-50 organisations that work on development cooperation issues in some capacity. The number of respondents to the online survey conducted for this project confirms the feasibility of this assumption.

Most of the Estonian development CSOs are professional organisations in the sense that they have at least one full-time paid staff member - in some cases more than ten, but usually around two to six people. In addition, quite many have a couple of part-time paid staff and project-based experts. The

¹ See Andrespok & Kasekamp (2012)

practices of using volunteers vary, but about two-thirds of the survey respondents say that their organisation had voluntary workers in 2012. Usually, the volunteers help to organise events or do office chores; it is not common that the volunteers would work on advocacy, trainings, mentoring/consultation or fundraising. No Estonian organisation has recruited volunteers from developing countries and only a few send Estonians to work in developing countries.

It is probably no surprise that most of the funding for Estonian development cooperation and global education projects comes from the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the European Commission. While the survey results suggest that the Estonian MFA and European Commission are equally important sources of funding for the CSOs, available statistics and empirical evidence show that very few Estonian CSOs have received project funding from the European Commission's development budget.

A fair number of organisations have also received support from the National Civil Society Foundation (KÜSK), although funding from private sector, individuals and other sources is marginal. Yet, for the sake of demonstrating the diversity of the funding sources it is worth mentioning some of the other funders: the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, SIDA from Sweden, Open Society Institute, UNDP, UNESCO, USAID and the World Bank. A few organisations are providing paid services or sell products to fund their development-related projects.

Estonian CSOs do not often receive funding for their activities from the Estonian private sector, but there are such examples of cooperation where the CSOs offer consultation, trainings or information materials about development-related issues to companies. In a few cases, the CSOs and private sector institutions have presented joint applications for project funding or have implemented certain activities together. One organisation has organised private sector visits to developing countries to promote peer-to-peer learning and suggest new export markets for Estonian products.

3. CSO Role of Development Cooperation

Of the organisations which responded to our survey, two thirds are active in at least one development activity. Most are active in several development-related activities, but declared to be engaged in all of them. Engaging in advocacy on development policies, implementing global education/awareness raising projects in Estonia or projects in developing countries by sending experts and consultants or engaging in other ways are all equally important activities for Estonian development CSOs, as 24-31% of all organisations work in each of these spheres. This chapter explains, more concretely, what is the role of CSOs in each type of activity.

3.1. Implementing Development Cooperation Projects

About a third of Estonian CSOs implement projects in developing countries and a little more than a half of them (57%) also send experts or consultants to developing countries, which suggests that technical assistance projects are quite popular. Only one CSO participates in humanitarian aid missions – NGO Mondo.

Thematically, the majority of development cooperation projects by Estonian CSOs have focused on strengthening the civil society in partner countries, promoting democratic practices (including use of information and communication technologies for good governance) and respect for human rights. Education is another theme the Estonian CSOs work on, but other “traditional” development areas like eliminating poverty and hunger, improving healthcare, empowering women or promoting (environmentally) sustainable development are not that popular among the CSOs. Still, quite a few organisations consider the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) important either as a concrete aim of their actions or as a broad concept that they always keep in mind.

Usually, the target groups of Estonian CSOs development cooperation projects are other CSOs, public sector or youth and teachers. The specific focus depends on the nature of the project, but it does not change much for each organisation – they either target several groups at the same time or no particular groups at all.

The priority partners for Estonian development cooperation according to the Estonian Strategy Plan for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2011-2015 are the six EU Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) plus Afghanistan. Out of these, the Estonian CSOs have implemented the most projects in Georgia and Moldova, but also some in Ukraine and Belarus. Armenia and Azerbaijan have not been quite as popular, probably because there have not been any calls for proposals from the MFA to invite organisations to work in these countries. Individual CSOs have additionally implemented projects in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Palestine, Tunisia, Nepal, Thailand, Mozambique, Angola, Malawi, Guinea-Bissau and some others. It has been noted before and was confirmed in the interviews conducted for this study that new projects usually emerge from personal contacts of CSO members who have travelled abroad and from contacts made through international networks².

Most commonly, the main partners of Estonian organisations in developing countries are local non-governmental organisations (47%), but international organisations (33%) and national government and local state institutions (20%) are also quite important.

² Andrespok & Kasekamp 2012, 11

An overwhelming majority of the CSOs' projects have a duration of one to three years, some also less than a year. The organisations consulted for this study did not report any projects that would have lasted for four or more years, but some of them have had successful follow-up projects. The short-term nature and poor success with guaranteeing funding for follow-up projects was regarded as an obstacle for sustainable development impacts by some survey respondents and interviewees.

In recent years, the discussion about development effectiveness has become more prominent on the international scene and this debate is slowly but surely also growing in Estonia. However, based on the findings of the study at hand, the understanding of the concept of aid evaluation in Estonia is fairly different from the discourse of the EU or OECD. For Estonian CSOs, the measure or reflection of the impacts of their work is whether support (finances, volunteers, etc.) to their organisation increases or not. Socio-economic change in developing countries, which is the broadest internationally agreed indicator of success, is used by very few respondents. According to the interviews, this indicator is often impossible to measure by small Estonian CSOs, because their projects in the partner countries are very small, and it would be extremely difficult and expensive to collect adequate data. What is more, a fifth of the CSOs who responded to the survey do not evaluate the impact of their work in any way and this remains a shortcoming to be addressed by all relevant stakeholders.

3.2. Raising Public Awareness

Global education and raising public awareness about global issues in Estonia is the most popular type of activity among the CSOs (31%) by a small margin. Primarily, the aims of this work are to inform the general public about development issues around the world and to increase understanding of and support to development cooperation, but some organisations also mentioned promoting volunteerism and introducing their own organisation as their motivation.

Less than a half (47%) of the organisations working on raising public awareness are also implementing development cooperation activities in developing countries themselves or have experts/consultants working there. It is noteworthy that all organisations that send volunteers to developing countries are also working with global education activities, which means that besides the benefits of such interactions to the developing countries, Estonian society also learns from the experiences of the volunteers, who often visit schools, organise photo exhibitions or even produce documentary movies after their return to Estonia.

Organising public events and trainings for various target groups as well as publishing studies, newsletters or other materials are the most common tools with which the CSOs attempt to raise awareness of development issues. Social campaigns about global issues have been used by only a few organisations. Notably, only a few organisations cooperate with the media to propose topics and raise the awareness of general public through this. Limited work with journalists is both due to scepticism that the issues would be published and due to limited capacity to present topics in an appetising matter.

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness and impact of global education-related activities, the organisations are taking small steps like in the case of service providing organisations. According to the survey, a change in public discourse about development cooperation issues and the inclusion of global matters into school curricula are used as qualitative indicators by quite a few CSOs working on global education.

3.3. Advocacy and Policy Development

Generally, the CSOs are quite aware of the development cooperation issues, but engagement in direct lobbying and advocacy on policy issues is not so common among the Estonian CSOs. Most organisations say that they engage in advocacy on global education or development cooperation issues to some extent, but some also have trouble understanding what the concept of “advocacy” means and how to position themselves in relation to it.

Out of the organisations that engage in advocacy activities at least in some capacity, practically all have regularly or sometimes targeted their message to politicians and civil servants in Estonia. Occasionally (Estonian) officials working in Brussels are also targeted, but only the national development CSOs’ platform AKÜ is working regularly with politicians or civil servants in Brussels. Hardly any organisation is working with Estonian officials in the United Nations.

However, regardless of the level of engagement in advocacy, more than a half of the respondents (55%) consider their organisation’s knowledge of development cooperation good or very good. Less than five per cent of the respondents consider their knowledge very poor. Most of the respondents (80%) of the survey are able to mention specific national and/or international development policies.

The majority of respondents (75%) who are aware of development policies say their organisation follows the Estonian Strategy Plan for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian aid 2011-2015 in their work. What is more, the CSOs consider their activities to be in line with the Estonian official development cooperation policy. Just under two-thirds (62%) are convinced of this and just under a third (31%) have difficulties evaluating it, but only seven per cent say their actions do not follow the governmental policies.

Regarding international treaties and policy documents, more than half (56%) of the CSOs use the MDGs as a basis of their work, a quarter takes into account the national strategies of the developing countries and every fifth organisation follows the Agenda for Change proposed by the European Commission in 2011.

Remarkably, almost none of the organisations (3%) take the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011) into account in their work. This is likely because there has been limited CSO advocacy on this topic at national level. The overall experiences with doing advocacy on policies of such high level are limited for Estonian CSOs and their capacity to follow the policy debates is highly limited due to financial and human resources reasons. Not to mention that often it is difficult for CSOs to see their link to the specific policies, which was also true for the Forum in Busan. What is more, the Estonian positions for the High Level Forum in Busan were mostly negotiated at civil servants’ level, closely following the European Commission’s joint position, while national level consultations with the CSOs were not organised. Therefore, the lack of interest towards the Busan Partnership is mostly a result of low awareness of the process.

4. Good Practices

This chapter highlights four Estonian development organisations that can be considered to use such good practices in their work that are worth learning from. This list is in no way conclusive and depending on the specific topic of interest there are other best practices, but these organisations do have unique characteristics that are worth outlining. It is also necessary to point out that evaluating the effectiveness of these organisations according to international policy agreements, such as the Busan Partnership criteria, is out of the scope of this policy brief even though such analysis would be a valuable contribution to the studies of Estonian development cooperation.

4.1. Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation

The Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (in Estonian: Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud, AKÜ)³ is the nationally recognised independent coalition of development CSOs (see Box 1). AKÜ as an umbrella organisation is unique among the Estonian development CSOs in that its main role is to engage in advocacy for better Estonian and European development policy.

Evidence from the survey and interviews that was presented above demonstrates that engaging in policy discussions is not common among the Estonian CSOs, because most of them are too occupied with practicalities of implementing projects or lack the skills for this job. At the same time, it was emphasized in some of the interviews that while the members of AKÜ are not able to participate in designing policies on their own, they believe that AKÜ has the necessary expertise and have given the mandate to the network to speak on their behalf.

The capacity of AKÜ to do more policy work increased significantly after a policy officer was hired at the end of 2008. The policy officer is responsible for following the most relevant policy discussions at the national and European level, drafting AKÜ's policy positions and consulting with member organisations to reach a consensus that would satisfy all members. During the past few years, AKÜ has created the first Estonian multi-stakeholder strategy on global education, provided input to the national development cooperation strategies, contributed to several public consultations of the European Commission and established solid working relationships with key partners. Additionally, AKÜ has published reports on Estonian development cooperation, which have been well received by the MFA, the national parliament and European partners.

The Estonian Strategy Plan for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2011-2015 states that civil society is one of the most important actors in the sector. AKÜ as a representative of the Estonian development cooperation CSOs has been declared to be a 'strategic partner' by the MFA, but this relationship has not been defined in more detail. Nevertheless, MFA has supported the activities of AKÜ in the form of annual budget support since 2008. The organisation also receives funding from the National Civil Society Foundation (KÜSK), the European Commission and other donors.

AKÜ is a member of the European confederation for development and relief, CONCORD, and works closely with the TRIALOG V project for advancing development issues in the countries that have joined the EU after 2004.

³ See more at www.terveilm.ee.

4.2. e-Governance Academy

The e-Governance Academy (eGA)⁴ was established in 2002 by the United Nations Development Programme, Open Society Institute and the Government of Estonia with the mission to enhance ideas of e-governance and e-democracy at home and abroad via training, consultancy and research activities. Specifically, eGA sees as its mission to train and advise leaders and stakeholders in using information and communication technology to increase government efficiency and to improve democratic processes with the aim of building open information societies. So far, high level civil servants, CSO leaders and municipal leaders from more than 40 countries have been trained and advised.

The training programmes and trainers involved in eGA's work are constantly evaluated and updated. Quite uniquely among Estonian CSOs, eGA works closely with private sector companies and perceives creating business opportunities for Estonian companies as one objective of their work. Promoting effective public-private partnership is also an important mission.

eGA has received the most funding from the Estonian MFA for development cooperation projects and they are also one of the few who have implemented long-term projects or several follow-up projects. eGA is one of the founding members of AKÜ and has actively contributed to development policy making in Estonia.

4.3. Mondo

Mondo⁵ is quite young, founded in 2008, yet one of the most active Estonian development CSOs and the only one that has specialised exclusively to this sector. Mondo manages various development cooperation projects, is the leading force in global education activities and the only Estonian CSO that delivers humanitarian aid (including rescue missions, post-disaster reconstruction activities and transition to development cooperation).

In terms of geographic scope, Mondo drastically differs from most other Estonian development CSOs as their programmes take place in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and Afghanistan, not the post-Soviet countries. The types of activities Mondo implements (support-a-child educational programmes, ethical gifts to widows, friendship schools and micro loans) are also quite unique in the Estonian context. Most recently, a social entrepreneurship café was opened in Kampala, Uganda which serves as an internship and work place for disabled youth. All of these programmes have come into existence through personal contacts of the members of Mondo. Furthermore, these projects are primarily funded by donations from private persons in Estonia and not from national or European taxpayers' money.

Another outstanding element of Mondo's work is their Global Education Centre⁶, which provides teachers, young people, CSOs and all other interested parties materials about global issues by producing Estonian language materials, organising trainings for teachers, coordinating documentary film clubs for youth, and managing a library of documentaries and printed materials. Mondo is a member of AKÜ and chairs its global education working group. The Centre also supports the work of the Estonian UNESCO Associated School Network (ASPnet).

⁴ See more at www.ega.ee.

⁵ See more at www.mondo.org.ee.

⁶ See more at www.maailmakool.ee.

4.4. Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation

The Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (CTC)⁷ is a non-profit institute that has been promoting balanced development of border areas, especially in Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe region since 1993. Peipsi CTC has been active in establishing International projects that encourage cooperation between Estonian, Russian and Latvian local governments, CSOs and other organisations – an experience that has now become the cornerstone of the organisation's development cooperation projects.

Over the past decade, Peipsi CTC has also implemented several successful development cooperation projects dealing with water management and public involvement in the Moldovan-Ukrainian, Kyrgyz-Kazakh, and Albanian-Macedonian transboundary water regions. Peipsi CTC is also a founding member of AKÜ.

Year by year, Peipsi CTC is putting more focus on raising Estonian public awareness of global environmental issues. Previously such activities were more focused on the national issues, but the participation in AKÜ's work and implementing development cooperation projects has broadened the scope of these activities – a sign that the organisation has developed through international cooperation.

⁷ See more at www.ctc.ee.

5. Challenges of Civil Society Organisations

An overwhelming majority of the CSOs (80%) do not evaluate the Estonian development cooperation policy very positively. While less than a fifth considers it very poor, it is still an alarming indicator in terms of trust and the general feelings about the direction of the Estonian development cooperation sector. However, the interviews revealed that it is actually not the development policies like the national strategy for development cooperation that people are unhappy with, but the regulations on funding for CSO, which are seen to be highly bureaucratic and not supportive enough of CSOs. In some cases, the Estonian regulations system seems to be much more rigid than even large donors' like the European Commission or SIDA in Sweden.

There is a feeling among the CSOs that the MFA, which is responsible for managing bilateral development cooperation funds in Estonia, is too focused on accounting every cent spent in a project and does not pay enough attention to the substantive aspects and real development impacts of the activities. Furthermore, while the national funding system is perceived to have improved over the past few years, the CSOs are critical of the fact that most projects are short term and that there are limited possibilities for follow-up projects.

Furthermore, echoing the situation of civil society as a whole in Estonia, several CSOs are worried about the unpredictability, instability and inaccessibility of the funding for development, particularly from the European Commission. Also, all donors have different requirements and criteria for CSOs and it is a considerable workload for organisations.

More broadly, the constant demand from donors for "innovative" activities is another obstacle for some CSOs. They often have to replace their familiar and effective tools and methods based on the demands of the donors. The interviewees explained that the CSOs have usually developed solid relationships with their partner countries and established effective practices to achieve certain development results, but the donors' desire to constantly see something "new" does not allow using those methods anymore. This is perceived as a violation of the ownership principle for the CSOs, because they cannot be fully in charge when planning their own activities.

There are also challenges related to capacity building. Based on the survey responses, it is evident that the knowledge, motivation and skills for participating in development policy-making could be improved. The interviews confirmed that even though policy making is seen as an important element in development cooperation, most organisations do not know how exactly they could participate in it. The national platform AKÜ is particularly concerned about this issue, because on the one hand, it is difficult to explain complex European policies to its member organisations, and on the other hand, forming good quality policy positions without members' participation is challenging.

Low public awareness of development issues and support for development cooperation is perceived as a challenge by some CSOs in terms of gaining support for their activities. According to the latest Eurobarometer published in October 2012, a total of 73% of Estonians consider helping people in developing countries important, which is lower than the EU average 85%. In addition, 26% of Estonians (twice as many as the EU average) do not consider it very important or think it is absolutely unimportant, which is what the CSOs are worried about. The CSOs believe that more global education activities would raise the public awareness.

6. Policy Recommendations

Based on the evidence and analysis presented above, this policy brief will outline concrete suggestions to elaborate a better model for the involvement of civil society representatives into development policy making and implementation. The recommendations are directed to the EU, the Estonian government and the CSOs.

European Union

- Based on the study of Estonian CSOs, the most important policy recommendation for the EU is that its **policy development and funding processes should be more transparent and accessible to CSOs** from all Members States. The CSOs feel that the current systems are not easy to understand and funds are difficult to access. The policy making system is so complex and rigid that the Estonian CSOs have very limited interest to participate in it. Since CSOs are one of the key stakeholders in development cooperation, the EU should put more emphasis on enhancing their capacity to increase involvement in European development policy making and implementation.

Estonian Government

- **Increasing effective and meaningful CSO participation** in development policy making and implementation is also a recommendation for the Estonian government. Primarily this means making efforts to include CSOs into the policy making both at the national and multilateral levels. This requires a pro-active attitude to invite the CSOs to comment on policy documents as well as demonstrating how those documents are relevant for the work of the CSOs. It is necessary to cooperate with the national development CSO platform AKÜ in this matter.
- In terms of finances, the CSOs mostly expect the government to **reduce bureaucracy in the development cooperation funding system**. The government regulation on development cooperation funding principles was updated in January 2013 and reduced some bureaucracy, but most changes were cosmetic and will probably not satisfy all of the CSO criticisms. Open discussion with the CSOs about how to reduce bureaucracy is a good idea.
- When looking at the projects funded from the Estonian tax-payers money, their eligibility and impacts, the MFA should **develop a system for assessing the real development impacts of all activities**. Currently, there is no formal mechanism for qualitative evaluation of projects or the overall development impacts of Estonian development cooperation programme. While developing a cost-effective model for evaluation is challenging, there is a clear demand for it. Having such a system at the government level would likely also be a motivation for CSOs and other development actors to better evaluate the impacts of their work.

Civil Society Organisations

- The CSOs should **evaluate the impacts of their work to find out the real development impacts** on the final beneficiaries. Knowing the outcomes of the implemented projects and other activities is a prerequisite to planning any future activities. Being able to clearly demonstrate the impacts of their work will also increase possibilities for follow-up funding and be a good role-model for other development actors. AKÜ and the MFA should make efforts to explain the importance of evaluation and the available tools to the CSOs.

- Raising the awareness of the general public about development issues is an important concern for most CSOs. In order to achieve better results in this area, the CSOs should **work more actively and systematically with the media** to propose topics and offer expert opinions. Each CSO should seek opportunities to improve their media work skills and the AKÜ can offer more seminars on relevant topics.
- The CSOs should **engage more in advocacy on development policy making** to guarantee a better working environment. Even more importantly, this is a way to make sure that various national and multilateral policies support their work in developing countries and do not undermine the development goals.

7. Conclusions

To sum it up, the Estonian CSOs play an active role in Estonian development cooperation. About 40-50 organisations are active in either development cooperation or global education activities and most of them are professional organisations with at least one full-time paid staff member. The organisations are mostly funded by the Estonian MFA and the European Commission.

Implementing global education and awareness raising projects in Estonia or projects in developing countries by sending experts and consultants or engaging in other ways are all equally important activities for Estonian development CSOs. Thematically, the majority of development cooperation projects by Estonian CSOs have focused on strengthening the civil society in partner countries, promoting democratic practices and respect for human rights. Most of the CSO projects have been implemented in Georgia and Moldova, but also in Belarus, Ukraine, Afghanistan and some African countries. Global education is seen as an important tool for informing the general public about development issues around the world and to increase understanding of and support to development cooperation.

In terms of aid effectiveness, it seems that the CSOs working on global education understand quite well the need to evaluate the impact of their work in terms of societal changes like updated school curricula or support to development cooperation. Unfortunately, the CSOs implementing development cooperation projects are primarily measuring their effectiveness by increasing their own financial sustainability than on qualitative indicators like the socio-economic changes in partner countries. Low awareness of the importance of measuring real development impacts of activities is a challenge that should be addressed both by the CSOs themselves and the government.

The study highlighted four Estonian CSOs that can be considered to use such good practices in their work that are worth learning from. AKÜ as an umbrella organisation is unique among the Estonian development CSOs in that its main role is to engage in advocacy for better Estonian and European development policy. eGA is the one of the biggest Estonian development organisations, which has a very broad geographic scope and has also been successful in cooperating with the private sector. Mondo is the only Estonian CSO that has specialised exclusively to the development sector and stands out both with its projects in Africa and Afghanistan as well as with the pioneering work in the global education field. Peipsi CTC is an example of a CSO who is successfully sharing their own experiences of enhancing transboundary cooperation with the neighbouring countries with other regions of the world.

To summarise the main challenges faced by the CSOs, the keywords are bureaucracy and capacity building. There are expectations that the level of bureaucracy both in Estonia and the European Commission funding systems should be reduced to allow more CSOs to participate.

To overcome the challenges faced by CSOs thereby strengthen their role in development cooperation, we recommend that the EU should be more transparent and inclusive of the CSOs, that the Estonian government should focus more on the real development impacts of its programmes and less on bureaucracy, and that the CSOs seriously evaluate the effectiveness of their work to guarantee more legitimacy and better results for their activities.

References

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