

From Aid to Policy Coherence for Development

10 Years of the Slovak NGDO Platform



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2002

- The Slovak Non-Governmental Development Organisations Platform (Slovak NGDO Platform) is established as a non-formal initiative of 9 member organisations.

2003

- The non-formal platform associating 15 development organisations transforms into an association of legal entities.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform is one of the 18 founding members of CONCORD, the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development.
- It becomes partner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic (nowadays, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic – MFA) in the area of development cooperation.

2005

- The Slovak NGDO Platform joins the international initiative Make Poverty History, with a local campaign renamed *World without Poverty*.
- It organises the first year of the public event named Development Day in Slovakia.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform holds the first *National Seminar on Global Education*.

Development Day

The Development Day was also attended by foreign guests

A white band, an international march to Make Poverty History, dancing and painting with the youth from the slums of Nairobi. Photography exhibition focusing on human rights, tasting of Fair Trade coffee. Discussions on larval treatment in Kenya and talks with the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Assistance.

In 2013, the Slovak NGDO Platform prepares the ninth annual Development Day. It is open to the professional and general public with an interest in development cooperation. With the exception of the first year, the event takes place every year in October, at the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The Make Poverty History campaign takes place in Slovakia, too

The first five years were devoted to the campaign *Make Poverty History* by which the organisers and participants promoted the *Global Call to Action against Poverty*. Thus the Slovak NGDO Platform became part of a coalition of over a hundred of non-formal groups all over the world. The international campaign reminded the politicians of the commitments they had made in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Slovak NGDO Platform members used the Development Days in different ways to inform the public of the importance of development cooperation, its perspectives and examples of development projects.

The first year of the event was accompanied by a band La3no Cubano within the May Fiesta Latina Festival in Bratislava. In 2006, a march against extreme poverty also took place in the streets of the Old Town in Bratislava. It was led by a samba orchestra named Bratucada.

A year later several representatives of NGOs, media and decision makers discussed the outcomes of Slovak development projects implemented in Africa, Central Asia and the Balkans.

In 2008, the Development Day hosted several important guests. Young artists from the slums of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, conducted public arts workshops in Bratislava. Louis Michel, European Commissioner, talked about the need to provide development assistance and humanitarian aid. Muturi Mwangi, farmer and Member of the Kenyan Parliament, and Mary Alice Onyura, Director of a rehabilitation centre for drug-addicted street children from Nairobi also visited Bratislava. The last Development Day under the campaign Make Poverty History took place in 2009 in the National Council of the Slovak Republic where Members of the Parliament could learn more about development cooperation.

Guests from Kenya and Ethiopia came, too

Since then, the Development Days have had a particular focus. In 2010, the conference *Slovakia helps in Sub-Saharan Africa* also involved debates and opinions of the people from the African continent. Johnson Migwi shared his experience with projects aimed at improving living conditions in the Kibera slum in Kenya. Bezabih Tolosa presented development projects implemented in Ethiopia. The following Development Days held by the Slovak NGO Platform have been attended not only by the representatives of the Slovak civil society, but also those who bring along feedback from the local communities. Moreover, the Platform has always attempted to invite policy makers and media to discuss relevant issues.

Even the public and the business are invited

In 2011, the Development Day focused on enforcing human rights in development cooperation. Then the Slovak NGO Platform engaged the public into the event, too. A photo contest "Human Rights in Development Cooperation" was organized and an exhibition of thirty best pictures selected out of the contest was held at the occasion of the Development Day.

A year later, a debate on involving the business sector into the implementation of development projects started. "In order to increase the effectiveness, it is important to mobilise specific capacities of all relevant stakeholders, including the businesses with high potential," explained Lenka Nemcová, Executive Secretary of the Slovak NGO Platform.

Our 10th anniversary was celebrated

The latest Development Day 2013 organized so far took place in the Old Market in Bratislava. The Slovak NGO Platform celebrated the 10th anniversary of its establishment as well as the launch of SlovakAid, the Slovak Programme of Official Development Assistance. This time the Slovak NGO Platform gathered development organisations, conducted creative workshops for children and schools, held discussions on the media coverage of development cooperation and the ethical code on messages and images, presented its member and partner organisations. Moreover, the public could taste different traditional foods from developing countries prepared by Slovak field workers and volunteers, admire a photo exhibition, and find out how each of us can contribute to a fairer world. A benefit concert which followed was supported and attended by La3no Cubano, Anna Veselovská, Vertigo, Cirkus-Kus and a duo of drummers from Senegal, who took part under the End Exclusion project.

2006

- The Slovak NGO Platform cooperates with the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs to draft the system of Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- It holds a **regional workshop** on *European-African strategy* within the framework of the international project *Regional Partnership Programme*. It turned out to be the first

international project of its kind implemented in Europe out of the initiative of NGDO platforms from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. The project aimed to improve the capacities of the organisations in drafting projects and increase the visibility of development issues in the new EU member states.

● **The Slovak NGDO Platform joins the AidWatch initiative of CONCORD to assess the provision of assistance.**

European AidWatch

European NGOs watch the development cooperation together

Every year CONCORD publishes an AidWatch Report, holding the 27 EU member states to account on their aid commitments in the development cooperation. Since 2006, the Slovak NGDO Platform has contributed to drafting the European report.

The AidWatch initiative aims to regularly monitor and reinforce the objectives of development cooperation. Thus, every year, a workshop on the quality and quantity of provided aid is held. Moreover, CONCORD actively approaches the media, creates topic-based campaigns, conducts research and assists its members in cooperating with the countries of the Global South.

What is the state of providing development assistance?

The AidWatch Report always analyses the provision of aid over the previous year, and drafts recommendations on how to increase its effectiveness, both on the European level and on the level of member states. With the exception of 2012, CONCORD annually publishes one report. One year after the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation in Busan, South Korea, was signed, a special report was published. The report shows that EU lags behind in meeting its commitments adhered to in Busan. Many member states have, however, made progress in transparency, which is gradually reflected in improving public access to data on development cooperation. In 2012 Slovakia, with regard to the Busan commitments, expressed its interest to join the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and to have fully implemented this standard for publishing data by 2015.

Other initiatives at the European level

Member organisations of CONCORD, including the Slovak NGDO Platform, draw attention to both the positive and negative trends in implementing development cooperation. This membership is an opportunity for the Slovak NGDO Platform members to participate in capacity building trainings. There are also special working groups that operate within CONCORD and the Slovak NGDO Platform is member of. It actively joins the debates on global education, policy coherence for development, and development agenda beyond 2015. It also contributes to drafting strategic materials, appeals and position papers. Currently, it is contributing to the negotiations of the EU *Multiannual Financial Framework 2014 – 2020*.

2007

● The Slovak NGDO Platform consults and comments on the **the Official Development Assistance Act**. In December 2007 the act is approved by all 142 present members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

A key document is created – The Official Development Assistance Act

The Official Development Assistance Act was approved by all the Members of the Slovak Parliament on the 5th December 2007, in effect since February 2008.

The Slovak NGDO Platform actively contributed to drafting the act. During several months, it commented on its drafts and consulted its final wording, which sets the long-term legislative framework for providing the Slovak official development assistance. The act particularly deals with bilateral project assistance coordinated by the Slovak MFA as well as the functioning of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC). The act defines the basic terms of Slovak development assistance, its principles, objectives, planning tools and implementation methods.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform organises the *Summer School of Development Education in Slovakia* attended by over seventy participants. The event is held in cooperation with the programme *Developing Europeans' Engagement for the Eradication of Global Poverty* (DEEEP) of CONCORD.

2008

- The Slovak NGDO Platform becomes **partner to a three-year project called *To Act You Have to Know* which is implemented with partners from V4 countries**. It aims to involve journalists, policy makers and university students into debates on development cooperation.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform contributes to the *Mid-Term Strategy of Slovak ODA for the years 2009 – 2013*.
- It organises the **first study visit** to Ethiopia for decision makers from V4 countries.

The Slovak NGDO Platform contributes to drafting legislation

Advocacy and field work – various ways of cooperation with decision makers

At the beginning of 2009, the Mid-Term Strategy of Slovak ODA for the years 2009 – 2013 was approved. This was possible also thanks to the pro-active approach of the members of the Slovak NGDO Platform who drafted and commented on its content.

Experts from the Slovak NGDO Platform and its member organisations actively attend the meetings of the working group. The final wording of the concept is also the result of the NGOs which contribute to the national programme of the Slovak ODA drafted and produced on a yearly basis. Consequently, the programme is approved by the Slovak Government at the beginning of each calendar year.

NGDOs also cooperate with the Parliament

Advocacy is one of the main activities of the Slovak NGDO Platform. It involves active contribution to drafting all significant national documents on development cooperation. The Slovak NGDO Platform initiates meetings with representatives from the Slovak MFA, as well as other decision makers. Over ten years of its existence, the Platform has been seeking possibilities how to cooperate with the SAIDC and increase the effectiveness of its functioning. It also addresses individual members associated in committees of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the Members of the European Parliament.

A frequent topic on the advocacy agenda remains the increase in the ODA budget, as Slovakia is not fulfilling its commitments made in this area. The Slovak NGDO Platform makes use of different occasions to send out letters, publications and information materials to the Members of the Parliament in order to draw their attention to major issues of development cooperation.

How to address Members of the Parliament? For example, by a study visit to a developing country

Before the parliamentary elections in 2012, the Slovak NGDO Platform conducted a survey among the political parties on how important they considered development assistance to be. The low number of returned questionnaires sent out to 26 political parties as well as the overview of the elections' programmes showed that development assistance is not a priority at the national political scene. This encourages the Platform to strive more for a change in their approach in a more creative way. As such, the Slovak NGDO Platform engages decision makers to take part in discussions, Development Days or study visits to developing countries. The decision makers have thus had the chance to witness various development projects and the efficiency in the assistance provided directly in the field. So far, the Slovak NGDO Platform and the V4 partners have organised two such study visits. The latest visit aimed at the Members of the Parliament took place in 2012 in Ethiopia within the project *V4 Aid – United Support for Millennium Development Goals*.

2009

- The Slovak NGDO Platform actively comments on the **Act on Volunteering**.
- It publishes the first issue of **Development Assistance Magazine**.

Development Assistance/Cooperation Magazine

Meet field workers

For over 5 years already, the Development Cooperation Magazine has brought information about the field activities of development organisations and on the latest developments in the area of development cooperation in Slovakia and abroad. Journalists, PR officers from NGOs as well as field workers express their comments, opinions, experiences or analyses twice a year.

"In 2009 we realised that Slovakia lacks an academic-popular magazine that would broadly cover primarily the various aspects of development cooperation," explains Lenka Nemcová, the Executive Secretary of the Slovak NGDO Platform. "We are glad that the Slovak MFA is aware of the importance of such a source of information and that since the beginning it has financially supported to produce this publication thanks to the SlovakAid."

During the first four years, the magazine was titled Development Assistance; in 2013 it was renamed Development Cooperation. Although it is published two times a year, its authors aim to address the latest developments in the world as well as bring updated news in the field of development cooperation. The first issues were more broadly focused and informed about the importance of providing assistance to developing countries and how the Slovak organisations contribute to it. Gradually, the structure of the magazine has become more stable and it encompasses all the areas of development cooperation.

News about projects and lives

In Development Cooperation, you can read about the state of global education in Slovakia, about human rights and humanitarian assistance. The regular column *Slovaks in the field*

reports about active Slovaks who contribute to improving the living conditions in developing countries.

"The people we meet are mostly very kind; we are generously welcomed with food and gifts. That's why it is so sad to see them accustomed to violence. When I came to Afghanistan on a monitoring visit, I used to move with locals in a car. In cases when we would say that a road accident has happened, Afghans would say of Taliban that they have recently poisoned the water in the girls' school we were driving by," Marcel Kaba from ADRA Slovakia said for the column.

There you will not only read about the implementation of projects, but also about the life that our field workers and volunteers lead in developing countries. The column *Volunteering* is especially written by young Slovak volunteers mainly those who share their remarks from their roads to knowledge.

We address the competent ones

Each of the latest issues has had a particular focus. "In 1998, it was the first time I was in Sudan. A civil war went on and very few people in Slovakia were aware of it. I knew there would be nothing common, we didn't even get a visa in our passports. We were told that the issue would be settled on the spot. In Uganda, before leaving for Sudan, I found out that the government forces were bombarding one of the hospitals in the south. I realized that this African country undergoing a long-term civil war was forgotten by Slovakia," said Marián Čaučík about his first journey to South Sudan in the interview for the autumn issue of the magazine in 2011. At that time the main topic of the magazine was South Sudan, which declared independence in July 2011. The human rights column of the magazine also brought an interview with José Luis García Paneque, the Cuban dissident, deported to Spain.

Answers to questions we should be asking

The magazine reveals topics discussed at various levels of decision-making or relating to implementing development projects. It also offers topics that the public rarely takes notice of, as they happen backstage.

Even though the Arab Spring, one of the topics of the magazine, was more visible to the public due to demonstrations, the news did not cover the work of the Slovak NGOs in the field. The fact that Slovaks use larval treatment of open wounds in Kenya is not known either, yet it is a great example of the involvement of the private sector in development. Concrete examples of implementation of the National Strategy of Global Education were shown in the spring issue of the magazine in 2013. The latest issue of October 2013 brought examples of incoherence of various European policies with the development policies. Why do the Indonesians kill endangered species of orangutans for twenty dollars? How to ensure food security in Kenya? These questions concern us, too.

2010

- The Slovak Non-Governmental Development Organisations Platform and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic sign a *Memorandum of Understanding*, which recognizes the Slovak NGO Platform as an official partner of the Ministry and defines the general framework of mutual cooperation in providing development assistance and humanitarian aid.
- The Slovak NGO Platform sends nine Slovak volunteers to Georgia, Mongolia, Vietnam, and Kenya. The pilot **Programme of Sending Volunteers** is implemented by the Secretariat of the Slovak NGO Platform in cooperation with four member organisations: People in Peril, eRko, SAVIO and Tabita/GLEN programme.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform becomes a signatory to the **CONCORD Code of Conduct on Images and Messages**.

Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

Guide on how to disseminate information

How do you imagine life in Africa? Dirty, barefoot children with big bellies are running around on the clay ground. Mother is cooking corn porridge in a bamboo shed, probably half-naked. You arrive as a tourist and presume that someone robs you right after getting on a bus which is in terrible condition. If this is your image of Africa, it is not a coincidence. Who have seen this continent through their own eyes, after all? And who of you know it from the media?

In 2010, the Slovak NGDO Platform signed the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, by which it officially committed itself to quite a different depiction of developing countries than the one described above. In 2006, the code of conduct was created by NGOs associated in *CONCORD, the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development*. Besides the Slovak NGDO Platform, ten Slovak NGOs have publicly committed themselves to implementing its principles. These organisations are striving to fight emerging stereotypes about developing countries and the life of their inhabitants when communicating with their target groups.

Basic principles against stereotypes

This code sets rules that should be natural when addressing development topics to general public or media - the intermediaries between the civil society and the general public.

The main principles are based on human rights and freedoms and take into consideration the value of human dignity. The code encourages the messages to be written with respect to the sources of the information. It is necessary to know whether the person we are talking about agrees to be named and portrayed. Furthermore, it is essential to represent their stories completely and realistically. As children are most frequently portrayed in relation to serious problems of developing countries, the code emphasises conformation to the highest standards in relation to children's rights according to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Being the most portrayed, they are also the most vulnerable though.

Support creativity in journalism

The media usually tend to exaggerate the news in either positive or negative sense. They assume the audience wants to see and hear something that they know, so that they don't have to think about it. Another explanation is that the audience is more interested in negative news. Or perhaps, the media don't inspire people to think about development cooperation, because they themselves do not know how to help, or because journalists do not have the opportunity to travel.

"Since we became signatories to the code, we have been trying to think more about the way we communicate messages. It accounts us to more self-reflection and thinking of how we are talking about the life in the countries of the Global South and of the development cooperation itself. By committing to the code we perceive it as an important educational tool for our work," said Andrea Girmanová, Project Manager of the Slovak NGDO Platform.

The Platform actively contributes to drafting such materials for journalists that do not bring stereotypes, but rather encourage discussions on how to portray a distant reality in a creative and fair way.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform leads the **public consultation process for creating the *National Strategy of Global Education***. Its preparation is preceded by an analysis of the state of global education in both formal and non-formal education.
- The **first report on providing Slovak development assistance** is published.

National AidWatch reports

An analysis is not enough; the NGDO Platform suggests further steps

Annual national reports of the Slovak NGDO Platform on providing development assistance define the threats and positive moments. The Platform also recommends the direction we should be heading for.

Since 2011, the Slovak NGDO Platform has published the *AidWatch Report*, an annual national evaluation report on the provision of official development assistance over the past year. It includes a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the Slovak ODA, the financial resources allocated on ODA over the past year in comparison to the year before. The report also assesses the quality of aid, the ratio of bilateral and multilateral aid, and its territorial and sectoral priorities. Moreover, it compares the progress made in the previous year and the position of Slovakia in ranking among the newer EU member states (EU-12). The report reflects upon the latest discussions in the field of development cooperation, such as aid transparency or policy coherence for development.

Not only criticism, but also recommendations

Besides summing up important figures and facts included in each report, the Slovak NGDO Platform suggests measures to increase the effectiveness of providing development assistance. In case of the latest report entitled *Slovak Development Assistance in 2012*, the authors point out to the need for long-term donor plans relating to the provision of assistance for all target countries.

The report also recommends establishing an institutional framework to create coherence among Slovak policies with the development cooperation objectives, to accelerate the process of joining the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) or to draft programme approach to financing aid in selected countries.

“We have elaborated background recommendations for long-term donor plans for programme countries such as Kenya, South Sudan and Afghanistan. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic has approved the programme document for Kenya and we believe that other countries will follow,” said Nora Beňáková, Development Policy Co-ordinator from the Slovak NGDO Platform.

- Within the working group on *Volunteering* the Slovak NGDO Platform drafts recommendations to create the national programme of sending volunteers under the official development assistance.

Slovak development volunteering

Green light for the Slovak development volunteering

In 2011, the Slovak NGDO Platform and its member organisations proposed a mechanism on how to send volunteers to less developed countries and include the costs related to this activity in the budget of the official development assistance. A year later,

the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) approved the draft, and the first participants were sent under the MFA Programme of Sending Volunteers and Experts to Developing Countries under the SlovakAid.

On one hand, development volunteering is a tool for building capacities of young people, on the other hand, it enables experts to work in less developed countries and provide both parts with the opportunity to enrich one another. "While most of the countries are fighting economic crisis, development volunteering is becoming an even more relevant issue than usual. We appreciate that the Slovak Republic has launched a programme that enables young people to acquire experience in the development area and it also helps build capacities of experts in global education and development cooperation," Lenka Nemcová, Executive Secretary of the Slovak NGDO Platform said in September 2012. During a seminar on development volunteering the Slovak NGDO Platform presented a publication entitled *Slovak Guide to Development Volunteering*. Authors, who are former volunteers, describe the whole cycle of development volunteering starting from choosing an organisation to global development education activities upon their return. The guide serves as a useful tool also for organisations who are interested in sending volunteers.

Great progress in just three years

Upon their return from developing countries, volunteers describe the culture shock they experience in Slovakia, however. During the half-year period that they usually volunteer on development projects, they have a feeling that they receive more than they give. Some of them are university students who are going there to learn something new. Others are experts in a particular field and they want to get involved and share their expertise in other than e.g. the private sector in Slovakia.

Before the official programme was approved, Mirka Triznová was one of the first nine volunteers sent into the field. In 2011, the MFA supported the first volunteers, among other reasons, also to find out how to best support sending volunteers in a systematic way. In a local centre in Kenya which is supported by the Slovak organisation eRko, Mirka helped the nurses to take care of disabled children. After coming back she has been talking about what volunteering has given her, "Maybe also a reflection on how to help, if you want to. First, whether the people concerned want it, and then if it will actually help them."

These remarks of volunteers can make development cooperation more effective. The Slovak Centre for Communication and Development has decided to use the programme to support volunteering in Georgia - by means of volunteering. Slovaks are supporting it by laying the basis for institutionalizing volunteering in this country.

Today, the volunteers are actively contributing to running development projects of nine Slovak NGOs that participated in the Slovak MFA programme. Up to now, 38 volunteers have been sent under this scheme. Since the legislative anchoring of the concept of "development volunteering" in 2011 this is considered a major step forward.

- **Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development** visits Slovakia. He presents to Slovak politicians the plans for increasing ODA effectiveness and persuades them about the need to meet their commitments by increasing the amount of ODA. The Slovak ODA should achieve the level of 0.33% of gross national income by 2015. All members of the Slovak NGDO Platform are invited to an informal meeting with the Commissioner at the Slovak MFA to discuss the EU development policy.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform along with member organisations active in South Sudan organises public events at the occasion of **South Sudan becoming an independent state**. The field workers appear in the media. A workshop on development cooperation

tion in South Sudan results in recommendations how to increase its effectiveness in the country. With the support of the Slovak NGDO Platform, Matúš Krčmárik, editor of the Daily SME, travels to South Sudan to bring up-to-date news from the field.

- The Platform organises a *roadshow entitled SlovakAid Helps*. In several Slovak towns, debates with development volunteers are held, along with an exhibition of children's toys from developing countries and an exhibition of photographs from projects financed by the SlovakAid.
- It organises the first year of the **photo contest *Human Rights in Development Cooperation***.

Human Rights in Development Cooperation

This is how the public perceives human rights

A hundred pictures were submitted to the first year of the photo contest for professionals and amateur photographers. Their authors visit developing countries for numerous reasons and decide to share their views of how human rights are respected in the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Since 2011, the photo contest has been organized annually. A jury consisting of professional photographers and representatives of the civil society decide on 30 best pictures to be exhibited in several Slovak cities and towns. The Slovak NGDO Platform makes best use of the contest to address a wider public. Travellers, volunteers, and field workers from NGOs take part in it. From time to time, it happens that one of the contest winners does not attend the awarding ceremony at the Development Day, as they are on a different continent at that time.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform actively cooperates with the media. Within the frames of ongoing projects it supports study visits of journalists to developing countries.

Study visits of journalists to developing countries

Witness it yourself

The civil society operating in the field of development cooperation and Slovak journalists are still looking for a way how to get to know one another. It is often difficult for NGOs to have their topics covered in the media. That's why the Slovak NGDO Platform tries finding ways how to change it.

Journalists, too, return changed from developing countries

By the end of 2013, over 10 journalists have travelled to developing countries thanks to the Slovak NGDO Platform and its member organisations, standing witness to the field work of development NGOs. Over the past years editors of major newspapers, such as the dailies SME and Pravda, the Economist Daily, or the radio and TV departments of RTVS, have visited South Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Moldova, or Rwanda.

Besides professional journalists who visited Rwanda in the summer of 2013, a participant of the e-learning course for junior journalists took part in it. It was held within the project *V4 Aid – United Support for Millennium Development Goals*.

In addition to interesting topics, the study visit brought her to thoughts about journalist ethics. "I kept asking myself whether it is a good idea to carry an extra suitcase full of shoes for children on the board of the plane to the other side of the world. How many pictures of children with large eyes will be published and unintentionally strengthen the image of

“poor black children”? Has the telling of personal stories a borderline of intimacy?” she admits. It seems that the study visits for journalists do not only fulfil the primary goal of increasing visibility of development cooperation, but also make journalists think about showing and reporting on the reality.

Many editors supported by the Slovak NGDO Platform continue contributing to the Development Cooperation Magazine.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform organises the second study visit of Members of the Parliament to Ethiopia under the project *V4 Aid – United Support for Millennium Development Goals*.

V4 Aid – United Support for Millennium Development Goals

Already since 2008 NGOs from Visegrad countries have been cooperating in order to increase the awareness of development assistance and discuss significant topics. Firstly, they persuaded the public of the fact that before acting one has to know. In February 2011, the project To Act You Have to Know was followed by another activity financed by EuropeAid: V4 Aid – United Support for Millennium Development Goals. The project aims to work with decision makers, the media and wider public. In Slovakia it is being implemented by the Slovak NGDO Platform and PDCS, one of its member organisations.

Media coverage

Over three years there have been various ways of information flows to the target groups. The Daily SME published two 4-page supplements focused on human rights and sustainable development in Africa. An e-learning course **Reporting and Writing About Development** was also part of the V4 Aid project. 12 students of journalism and international relations from Slovakia attended the course. Four students had an opportunity to follow the course as observers. In addition to the tasks that the beginning journalists were elaborating online, Bill Mitchell, an American lecturer from the Poynter Institute, came to Bratislava to deliver a lecture and share his life-long experience as a journalist in various parts of the world.

Room for expert discussions

In 2011 and 2012, the Slovak partners of the project elaborated expert materials on *transparency and effectiveness in development assistance, human rights in the context of development assistance, involving entrepreneurs in development cooperation, V4 cooperation in Moldova, and on policy coherence for development.*

Cooperation of Visegrad countries (V4) in the area of international development cooperation had begun even before the member countries formed their own systems of development assistance. Ministries of Foreign Affairs declare close cooperation and share their mutual experience. NGOs cooperate on a long-term basis in the area of advocacy and raising awareness of development cooperation in each country. In joint projects, the NGOs from V4 countries focus primarily on raising awareness and promoting development assistance. In 2012, the Central European Development and Relief Organizations Network (CEDRON) was established to intensify field cooperation. It was supported by the International Visegrad Fund. Development and humanitarian organisations from the Central European region are using the CEDRON to strive for more effective development cooperation and humanitarian assistance with impact on local communities.

Since 2011, NGOs from the V4 region have organised three conferences to narrow cooperation of V4 countries in the area of development. In autumn 2011, a conference on transparency in development cooperation of V4 countries took place in Prague. The conference has started the process of increasing transparency in publishing data on development assistance. In the following year, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia expressed

their interest to join the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

At the beginning of 2013, a V4 countries conference on development cooperation took place in Budapest. It aimed to map the capacities and possibilities to implement joint activities and joint programming of V4 countries in international development cooperation. The conference also served as a forum for sharing experience in increasing visibility of this topic in national parliaments and in wider political spectrum of the V4 countries. Besides members of parliaments and representatives from ministries of foreign affairs, academia and NGDO representatives from the V4 countries exchanged their experience.

At the occasion of the Africa Day, the Slovak NGDO Platform and PDCS prepared a conference entitled *Visegrad Group and International Development Cooperation towards Africa* aimed at professional public. It took place in May 2013 in the premises of the the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. The conference was held after the Budapest conference and provided space for seeking synergies between development cooperation activities in relation to Africa, at the European level and at V4 countries national level. Discussions on the involvement of the private sector of V4 countries in development cooperation were also on the agenda of the conference.

Focus on the Parliament

In 2012, Eva Horváthová and Jozef Viskupič, Members of the Slovak Parliament, took part in a non-formal study visit to Ethiopia where V4 countries implement projects, including the one of the Integra Foundation from Slovakia. After their return, together with the Member of Parliament Mikuláš Huba, they organized a seminar *On the Approach to Human Rights and Development Assistance at Home and Abroad*. "We held it directly in the Parliament, but the attendance of Members of the Parliament from both sides of the political spectrum was very weak. They say our country is facing our own problems," Eva Horváthová said for the Development Cooperation Magazine. Jozef Viskupič returned from the journey convinced that Slovakia has a moral obligation to support developing countries: "We are the 44th richest country in the world, we should start building some know-how. It doesn't have to happen right now, but gradually we have to get there. For example, I like the idea of sending teachers there, rather than supporting people coming from developing countries to study in Slovakia. Such a system could be part of the state scheme of development assistance," he suggests a concrete solution.

2012

- The government approves the *National Strategy of Global Education for the years 2012 – 2016* to which the Slovak NGDO Platform had prepared background materials.

National Strategy of Global Education 2012 – 2016

Development education becomes global

In 2012, the National Strategy of Global Education (GE) was approved. It defines global education and its starting points in the national and international context.

The document analyses GE at the level of formal and non-formal education. It defines the topics, key stakeholders, goals and target groups. Since 2010, a working group contributed to drafting the strategy which involved representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, the National Institute for Education, Methodology and Pedagogy Centre and representatives of member organisations of the Slovak NGDO Platform which coordinated the whole process.

Alternative perspective

The projects supported at an earlier stage, especially at schools and before the strategy was approved, focused more on the areas of development education. “The global dimension was missing. The projects were closely connected with the topics of development assistance, poverty, the Millennium Development Goals. There was no emphasis on the connection between global topics and our local environment,” says Andrej Návojský from the Milan Šimečka Foundation, one of the main contributors to the strategy. Thanks to the activities of experienced NGOs, the Slovak NGDO Platform successfully broadened the area of interest from development topics to global ones. “Global education is presented as an alternative perspective for the content of education. It is not defined as a new topic, instead it emphasises the global context in each subject taught,” Návojský says. He sees it as an important contribution to the strategy.

Varied activities of the NGOs

In Slovakia, several NGOs deal with global education, using their own professional and creative approaches. People in Peril Association creates methodology for teachers and it has recently launched a new website www.globalnevzdelavanie.sk. Slovak Centre for Communication and Development participates in an international project *Global E-learning* that will create online learning modules in 9 languages. CEEV Živica points out the consumer lifestyle and its impacts on the lives of people in developing countries, for example by an interactive exhibition *World in a Shopping Basket*.

Universities also get involved in the activities of global education. In 2012, the Pontis Foundation invited Vanessa Andreotti from the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Oulu. At non-formal breakfast together with other participants she discussed the forming of global education in universities. “Every practical output has a concrete theory behind – that’s why one shouldn’t separate the contribution of the government, the theoretic background of universities and the practical experience of NGOs,” she pointed out.

The only thing left is to engage the Ministry of Education

The National Strategy also defines the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic as one of the key stakeholders. “Higher responsibility (political and financial) for the agenda of global development education should be gradually taken over by the Ministry of Education,” wrote Soňa Časnochová from the Department of Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in her contribution to the Development Cooperation Magazine. The NGOs agree with her. After years of defining global education, it is clear that development education is but a part of global education. As the former falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the only thing left is to even more engage the Ministry of Education.

- Members of the Slovak NGDO Platform attend the **Development Forum in Nairobi** in November 2012. Within promotion of the SlovakAid programme, they distribute a leaflet *Slovakia has been helping Kenya for 17 years*.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform publishes two national **AidWatch** reports and the **Slovak Guide to Development Volunteering**.

2013

- The Slovak NGDO Platform drafts a background paper related to **country strategy papers for Kenya and Afghanistan**.

- The Slovak NGDO Platform prepares a document with arguments to keep **South Sudan a project country of Slovak ODA**.

- The Platform prepares a background material as a basis for the new **Mid-Term Strategy of Slovak ODA for 2014 – 2018**.

- The Platform joins **World-Wise Europe: A more coherent Europe for a fairer World**, a new project financed by EuropeAid.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform holds the **Development Day 2013** intended for the general public at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak NGDO Platform as well as the SlovakAid programme.
- The Slovak NGDO Platform launches its first **public collection with a symbol of a giraffe under the campaign ŽÍ FÉR (Live fairly)**, to support seven development and education projects in 2014.

Policy coherence for development

Development assistance alone is not a solution to poverty

Ten years ago when the Slovak NGDO Platform was being established and the system of providing Slovak official development assistance was being formed, “aid” was the key word. Along with developments in the world, more experience with work in the field was acquired and new modes of its implementation emerged, the discourse moved from aid to cooperation. In 2013, another relevant change is brought about in Slovakia. The policy coherence for development is being discussed at the EU level.

The change of discourse towards policy coherence for development (PCD) is not coincidental. Quite the contrary, as nothing happens without a cause. The living conditions of people in the poorest countries of the world can be influenced by each of us – on an individual level. And the European Union, which we are part of, can influence them, on global level, too.

We are living in a globalized world

In Indonesia, rainforests are chopped every day to plant oil palm. The oil is used in virtually all biscuits made here – in the West. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children mine Coltan, which is inevitable for the functioning of mobile phones and laptops. However, European salesmen are not interested in the origin of the mineral.

The term “food security” is used more and more often. Grabbing land from small local farmers by international corporations in Kenya and Ethiopia used to be a public secret until recently. These are just a few examples illustrating that in the West, we act as if we weren't living in a globalized world. In Slovakia, too, – as if what happens beyond our borders had no influence on our lives.

We can contribute, too

The Slovak NGDO Platform and its nine partner organisations from the EU under the *World-Wise Europe: A more coherent Europe for a fairer World* project (2013-2016) strive to draw more importance to discussions on policy coherence for development among general public, media and decision makers. They also try to create space for NGOs to strengthen policy coherence in their advocacy and communication with media. “For me, it was very important to find out how the civil society in Slovakia can contribute to forming coherence through our government and Members of the European Parliament,” said Tomáš Bokor from People in Peril Association, who attended a study trip to Brussels with a focus on this topic.

Interview

The Slovak NGDO Platform serves the NGDO community, according to one of its founders

Mária Čalfová was the first statutory representative and Executive Secretary of the Slovak NGDO Platform. In 2003 she founded the Platform along with Marián Čaučík and

other development cooperation enthusiasts. Ten years after its establishment, they reflect on how the Platform was created.

What was the first impulse to found an NGDO Platform in Slovakia?

Čaučík: For me personally, the first strong impulse came from neighbouring Austria. Under the Austrian Presidency in the EU in 1998, their platform organised a large conference on EU enlargement and the role of non-governmental development organisations. There we could see that development cooperation would become an important topic. There was no reference to it in Slovakia then. We managed to acquire good partners even beyond Slovakia. Thanks to this initiative the TRIALOG project emerged later which networked development NGOs from the countries getting ready for EU membership.

Čalfová: The entry of Slovakia to the European Union was closely related to the preparation of the country for its role as a future donor in the field of development assistance. At that time, the Slovak civil society was very little aware of this topic. At that period already a few NGOs that had recently started their activities, cooperated with foreign partners to implement the first development projects. It was necessary to support this type of civil activism, both morally and legally, to present the united voice of non-governmental development organisations, and to contribute to creating the very first Slovak development policy.

How do you recall on the beginnings of the Slovak NGDO Platform?

Čalfová: It was an altruistic adventure. Altruistic, because we did not know what results our daily effort would bring. And an adventure, because the Slovak NGDO Platform emerged literally out of nothing. We had the strong support of EU non-governmental organisations and thanks to the TRIALOG project and ODACE, a Canadian government development institution; we were capable to start building something that hadn't existed in Slovakia before. We wanted to create a sustainable base for something good not only to Slovakia, but in particular to the target countries of the Slovak development assistance. In cooperation with other enthusiastic people, such as Marián Čaučík, Juraj Barát, Nora Beňáková, and Milan Nič, we managed to set the ground for the common Slovak development policy.

How is the Platform as we know it today different from the original idea?

Čalfová: At first, we aimed to strengthen the institutional and professional features of the Slovak NGDO Platform, and to make it visible in the society. I believe that today it is one of the most compact and unified platforms that operate in Slovakia. And that is despite the persistent financial issue which its activities depend on. As far as the personal and professional issues are concerned, the Slovak NGDO Platform has developed in a positive way. It keeps an information database, a website, it regularly sends e-mail updates to the community of development organisations, and provides them with a solid background. I would say it "serves" this community.

What I see as a failure is that not even the ten years of our advocacy have been enough for us and our development partners to be able to convince the politicians of the importance to meet the development goals and international commitments.

What do you consider to be the greatest success after ten years of activity?

Čalfová: The Slovak NGDO Platform plays an important role in the field of development assistance in Slovakia. It represents the voice of non-governmental organisations both on national and international fora. I consider its greatest success to be the forum for cooperation among the non-governmental organisations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and SAIDC. It plays an indispensable part in forming the Slovak development policy and creating the system of providing development assistance.

Where is the Slovak NGDO Platform in comparison with other European platforms established in the same period of time?

Čaučík: The Slovak NGDO Platform is one of the most stable umbrella organisations in the EU-12 countries. It has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; it is a founding member of CONCORD, the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development. Thus it has become an important partner in the field of development cooperation. This role has been fought for by its persistent and quality work, as well as by the stability in key positions. Not every platform in the newer EU member states has achieved this.

What would you wish to the Slovak NGDO Platform for the upcoming years?

Čalfová: I wish its employees and members to keep the passion, zeal and enthusiasm that we had in the beginning. Let the current crisis which has moral, financial and relational features be a challenge and a stepping stone. Let them look forward and trust young people. Let the Slovak NGDO Platform be their bridge for a broad cooperation and a lighthouse of the Slovak development assistance.

*The interview was conducted by
Magdaléna Vaculčíaková, collaborator of the Slovak NGDO Platform*