

Sensitive, fair and effective...

Application of the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness by Slovak NGOs (Analysis)

● Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness

International development actors around the world have started to focus increasing attention to the question of effectiveness of development cooperation. In 2005, governments and multilateral donors signed the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* and in 2008 the *Accra Agenda for Action*. These documents show a gradual acceptance of the fact that macroeconomic criteria are no longer the best indicators of aid effectiveness. Rather, effectiveness criteria should be derived from the quality of life of individuals and communities in target countries. Donors have pledged to change their methods and strategies to apply practices that have been proven to lead to sustainable change and improvement in people's lives in the Global South: *local ownership, alignment with local priorities, harmonization, result-oriented approach, mutual accountability and inclusive partnerships*.

Civil society organizations (CSOs)² have always taken part in this development. Conscious of their positive contribution as well as of their weaknesses, CSOs have decided to increase their accountability for the results and the impact of their development efforts. In 2010, the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness³ were adopted as a culmination of a debate conducted through the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. The Principles are a result of negotiations among thousands of organizations active in more than 70 world countries. The debate is still on-going and the Open Forum was also actively engaged in the discussion accompanying the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan⁴.

Several guidelines have been issued on the practical application of the Istanbul Principles.⁵ However, given that civil society organizations are characteristic for their diversity, it is important to consider the particular context in which the organization operates. When preparing the analysis and formulating the questions to help us assess the situation in the area of aid effectiveness in Slovakia, we relied precisely on the need for such a context-specific analysis.

¹ The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and The Accra Agenda for Action
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>

² Civil Society Organizations

³ Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness: <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/-home,091-.html?lang=en>

⁴ The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) Busan, South Korea, 29 November - 1 December 2011
<http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/-4th-high-level-forum-on-aid,080-.html?lang=en>

⁵ The Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Effectiveness http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_framework_for_cso_dev_eff_07_2011-3.pdf

● Debate on effectiveness in other V4 countries

The greatest progress in standard setting related to the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness has been in the **Czech Republic**. In June 2011, observer and member organizations of the Czech Forum for Development Cooperation (FoRS) adopted a Code of Effectiveness with a system of periodic evaluations of adherence to agreed principles and indicators. It was agreed that the principles of effectiveness would be monitored in the following five basic categories which are directly linked to specific Istanbul Principles: knowledge of the field, transparency and accountability, partnership, respect for human rights and equality between men and women, responsibility for results and their sustainability. Specific indicators were developed, some of which have been classified as “key”, for example: “members and observers of FoRS refuse to adopt or tolerate corruption practices in their fundraising appeals or in the implementation of activities and projects,” or “members and observers of FoRS refuse to employ images and descriptions of extreme suffering for purposes of fundraising”. FoRS places significant weight on these criteria. Any action that clearly violates one or more of the key indicators may result in sanctions or even suspension of membership in FoRS. Several Czech NGOs have their own codes of conduct (e.g. People in Need)⁶ that more or less overlap with the Istanbul Principles. Others pledge to follow other international codes such as “Stop child labor”⁷ or the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent.⁸

In **Poland**, discussion about the Istanbul Principles has not taken place yet and individual development organizations are not actively seeking to implement these principles in their internal rules. However, steps towards increasing aid effectiveness are nonetheless being adopted. The first broader initiative involved relevant development organizations signing a set of principles entitled “Best practices of Polish development organizations abroad”⁹ in 2001. These principles tend to focus on ethics rather than effectiveness, though some effectiveness principles are also included: “we do everything we can to encourage our partners’ independence, we adopt a non-paternalistic approach and avoid creating dependencies”, or “in our programs, we adopt economical and fair strategies”, or “people, organizations and communities we work with [...] are our partners. As partners, they have the right to know and understand the fundamentals of our joint project.” Some of these principles may seem somewhat old fashioned in light of current topics in development effectiveness. Yet at their inception they were not.

In 2008, an important publication in support of ethical principles in the work with visual materials and information appeared in Poland. This popular manual has been extensively used in lectures and seminars and was translated into Slovak under the title “How to talk about the world’s majority; how to provide objective information about countries of the Global South”.¹⁰ It is also available on the website of the Slovak NGDO Platform.¹¹ This publication carefully explains the rules for work with visual material both from an ethical and aid effectiveness point of view. Its principal message is that crude depiction of suffering does not help mobilizing the public in donor countries. On the contrary, it tends to perpetuate stereotyping and creates barriers between people in donor and recipient

⁶ People in Need: Relief and Development Department Manual, or <http://www.clovekvtisni.cz/index2en.php?id=782>

⁷ www.stopdetskepraci.cz, www.stopchildlabor.eu

⁸ <http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/>

⁹ Dobra praktyka w pracy Polskich NGO za granicą <http://zagranica.org.pl/Dobra-Praktyka/dobra-praktyka.html>

¹⁰ IGO, 2008, Publication of the Polish Institute of Global Responsibility http://www.igo.org.pl/download/jakmo-wic-o-wiekszosci-swiata_poradnik-igo.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.mvro.sk/sk/kniznica/category/27-verejne-dokumenty-platformy-mvro>: Manual to the Code of Conduct on images and messages

countries. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has even incorporated these rules into the project grant calls to ensure that all education projects respect and follow them. During the 2011 Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU, discussion on aid effectiveness was initiated but did not refer directly to the Istanbul Principles.¹²

In **Hungary**, the Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid, HAND, worked on a large project oriented at increasing effectiveness of development NGOs and the official development assistance both in Hungary and in other new EU member countries. The project took place in the context of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Its activities were targetted to strengthen NGOs, their advocacy skills, ability to influence official policy as well as public opinion, their effectiveness and self-reflection. The project also emphasized the transfer of transition experience by the new member states in the realm of development projects. However, it did not refer directly to the Istanbul Principles. So far, no data has been published on aid effectiveness of Hungarian NGOs and the discussion about CSOs effectiveness is only in its beginnings. Apart from a few organizations engaged in the area of development effectiveness for years, there is generally an insufficient understanding of factors affecting the effectiveness of CSOs and how ineffectiveness impacts public opinion and opinion of politicians about international development.¹³

In 2006, NGOs working in the area of humanitarian relief, international development and development education, under the heading of CONCORD, the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development, put together a Code of Conduct on Images and Messages¹⁴. Since 2010, the Slovak NGDO Platform and some of its members have adopted it. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to provide a basis on which NGOs can build and carry out their communication strategy with the public. The Code of Conduct provides a summary of basic principles to help the signatories communicate their programs and values promoted by their organization in a coherent and balanced manner.

● Goals and survey methodology in analysis of development effectiveness of Slovak NGOs

The survey was initiated by the NGDO Platform to stimulate discussion among its members about the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness. Prior to starting a serious discussion, we considered it useful to measure and compare at least some data on how we, as NGOs, meet the criteria, whether we know about them, consider them important in our work and whether we feel the need to improve our performance in light of them. The survey did not aim to point out deficiencies of particular organizations or criticize their opinions. Rather, it aimed to point out areas in which we have made progress and have provided good examples as well as indicate issues which have been neglected among Slovak NGOs and where a room for improvement exists.

Participants of the survey included 22 out of 31 members and observers of the Slovak NGDO Platform. The essential part of the survey was a semi-structured interview with a representative of the organization. Additional information was obtained from the organizations' websites and documents made available by them (annual reports, codes of conduct, manuals, etc.). Data collection took place from October to December 2011.

¹² <http://zagranica.org.pl/Efektywnosc-wspolpracy-rozwojowej/effectiveness-matters-zagranica-groups-conference-see-people-behind-politics.html>

¹³ http://www.eucivil2011.hu/downloads/HAND_Presidency_program_intro_final.pdf

¹⁴ CONCORD 2006: The Code of Conduct on Images and Messages
http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/0_internetdocumentsENG/5_Press/13-EN.-For-approval---Code-of-Conduct-on-images--messages.pdf

Principle 1: Respect and promote human rights and social justice

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... develop and implement strategies, activities and practices that promote individual and collective human rights, including the right to development, with dignity, decent work, social justice and equity for all people.

When analyzing the NGOs' adherence to principle 1, we aimed to find out whether organizations considered respect and promotion of human rights important in development work. Given that many organizations do not explicitly mention human rights as a subject of their activities, we turned our focus on a human-rights-based approach in the internal work of the organization. We asked the participants to what extent their organizations try to respect human rights and human dignity of the beneficiaries or local partners. We wanted to find out whether they consciously try to prevent discrimination and whether they developed any practical approaches to detect violence or abuse.

When asked which of the 8 criteria the organization considered to be the most important and the most widely applied in their own activities, 7 out of 22 organizations mentioned principle 1. Respect and promotion of human rights as fundamental principles included in internal documentation are found primarily amongst those organizations that are members of wider international networks or organizations and have adopted these principles from their international partners or headquarters (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Caritas Slovakia, the Slovak Red Cross, UNICEF Slovakia). Apart from these, three more organizations declared existence of internal rules related to respect and promotion of human rights. Two have made these documents available to us during the survey.

The majority of respondents denied using crude images with an aim to raise money, appealing to the "Code of Conduct signed by the Platform". Some did not know the exact name of the Code, or even whether their organization was a signatory. It is a good sign, however, that they know about these principles and almost all of them are aware that it is wrong to use such images and that photographs should only be taken with consent of those being photographed. A few respondents have provided a deeper reflection on the matter:

"We ask permission to take the photograph but we don't ask one to publish the photograph. I think we all have something to improve there. We can't always guarantee that the photographer who provided us with the picture has asked permission to take it."

"In countries run by dictators, photos could not only violate dignity but also threaten the safety of those in it. That's why it's not always appropriate to take photographs."

"In the past, we used to show photos from surgeries at expert conferences but we don't do that anymore. In programs combating malnutrition, photographs are taken of children at the beginning and at the end but these are only used for parents and we always ask their permission."

"After we've signed the Code of Conduct, we are more conscious of the importance of rights in taking photographs. This is also why we used graphic symbols instead of photos of elderly sick people in our campaign to support hospices."

Some respondents argued that from an ethical point of view, it is enough to ensure that the person in the photograph cannot be recognized and pretty much everything may be depicted. It is clear that not everyone understands the principle of respecting human dignity in providing photographic images in the same way.

Another sign of a human-rights based approach is non-discrimination. From the information provided it was clear that none of the organizations participating in the survey discriminates in their selection of target groups, or during its work in the field. However, not all of them take account of the non-discrimination principles in their strategies, policies or projects. It is encouraging that all participating organizations that are linked to churches named examples of partners who do not share the religious belief of the organization. At least to some extent, the majority of organizations help minorities and margi-

nalized groups, trying to improve their situation and promote their human rights. Only a minority of respondents considered respect and promotion of human rights as a benchmark to measure successfulness of their activities.

Only a single organization amongst all the respondents (Habitat for Humanity) has a weblink and an internet channel which can be used by anyone to report abuse, violence or embezzlement on the part of the organization¹⁵. Two others have prohibition of child labour contained in their Codes of conduct; several others have recalled international treaties on human rights which they must follow. Some organizations make sure that human rights principles are part of their contract with a partner. Rarely do they have effective procedures in place to prevent child labor or violence or abuse on the side of the partners in their projects.

"It's hard to check out local employees in developing countries."

"It's all built on trust and mutual communication."

Some organizations try to employ only people recommended to them. Alternatively, organizations active in particular communities for a long time rely on the knowledge of the local people, giving them at least some guarantee of integrity. Only three organizations addressed their particular experience in solving this problem.

"We withdrew from co-operation with a partner organization after we found out about cases of child labor and violence. We complained to the ministry."

"A doctor was accused of sexual abuse, the case was investigated, the doctor was deemed not guilty. "

"One of the local workers was suspected of theft but because he was tortured by the police officers, we took the accusation back."

Only three organizations said they would deal with an issue of abuse in a legal way. Others, if responding at all to this question, said they would end cooperation with that person or that subject.

Slovak development NGOs that participated in the survey certainly have the knowledge about the importance of respect and promotion of human rights in the development context. Most of them try to apply human rights in practice, regardless of their area of activity. It is not possible to say that the majority of organizations applies a human-rights-based approach as such, whereby success is measured by ensuring respect for human rights of the project's beneficiaries. The organizations try not to discriminate in any way and almost all of them devote at least part of their activity to minorities and marginalized groups. In most cases, the organizations do not deal with human rights prevention or abuse of human rights of the aid recipients in a systemic way. Compared with developed European organizations, there is still room for improvement.

Principle 2: Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girl's rights

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... promote and practice development cooperation embodying gender equity, reflecting women's concerns and experience, while supporting women's efforts to realize their individual and collective rights, participating as fully empowered actors in the development process.

We were interested to see how Slovak NGOs apply the criterion of gender equality not only in relation to the female beneficiaries but above all in their internal operation. We wanted to see whether women are equally engaged in decision-making and programming and whether this is reflected in gender sensitive programs and budgets. We also inquired

¹⁵ <https://www.mysafeworkplace.com/SplashPages/habitat/habitat.html>

about the suitability of working conditions and safety provisions for female employees.

The information provided confirms that nearly all participating organizations (20 out of 22) apply gender equality in their internal operation. Though some stated at the beginning that gender issues are not their primary concern, more detailed interviews showed that several aspects of this criterion are naturally met within the organization. There is a majority of female workers in the majority of the organizations. These are not only employed in ordinary but also in leading roles (executive, boards). The organizations themselves admit that the development NGO sector is overly balanced towards women employees and that they often have to organize targeted recruitment of men to ensure a balance exists between the male and female employees. In several cases, the respondents considered necessary to emphasize that the primary criterion for selection of employees is qualification, not gender, which is only secondary. Only one organization organizes targeted recruitment of women for certain positions.

Almost all organizations have a supportive system for mothers in place such as flexible working time, the option to work from home or even the possibility of bringing the child to the office. Supportive and safety provisions for local women working within the projects are also important.

"In factories with the majority of female workers, nurseries are in place to look after the children. If the children are still small, women are given time to breastfeed during their working hours. Security guards are present in the factory. Workers work two shifts to avoid going to and from work in the dark."

"After consulting with the local partner organization, we aim to build community centers for women in safe areas."

"If the woman is supposed to go to work, we talk to the family, the husband is present also at the interview."

Women are naturally involved and often dominate in decision making processes as well as in policy formulation in different organizations. It is probable that due to the significant presence of women in these organizations, almost all of them participate in special projects to support women's rights, improve their position on the job market and protect them from violence and abuse. This is also related to the fact that women in developing countries often constitute a marginalized group. Some respondents admit that the more difficult task is to involve women in the process of identification of needs or project evaluation and decision-making processes about the desired development path. However, some organizations do manage to do this.

Amongst the organizations, this principle is fulfilled intuitively, rather than consciously reflected upon. Relatively few projects focus on the political emancipation of women. The majority focus on supporting women who are vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged. This, however, often depends on the overall focus of the given organization. In Slovakia, there is no development organization focussing purely on gender equality. There are no projects to support women's organizations in developing countries, though women's organizations are important local partners in a diverse range of education projects, community development and rural development.

Principle 3: Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... support the empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their democratic ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives, with an emphasis on the poor and marginalized.

We understand this principle to refer to the situations where the projects come from a true knowledge and understanding of the conditions, the problems and priorities of given target groups. In other words, in both the preparation and the realization of the project, the organizations uphold the principle of democratic ownership. We were interested to see whether local partners are involved already during the problem identification and project formulation stage. Active participation also refers to how organizations use their knowledge of development in practice to actively influence priority setting within development programs.

Only about a quarter of the organizations participating in the survey could demonstrate examples that they truly uphold the principle of democratic ownership, i.e. that the themes of the projects and the identification of needs come from "below", not only from the partner organization but from the people- the potential beneficiaries of development cooperation. A common characteristic of these six organizations is their long-term presence in the area, long lasting partnerships or permanent missions and branch offices. These organizations have been active in the area for years, they not only know the partner organizations and the local government, but they also know the people in the given area. Therefore, they build on their experience and trust.

"Community organizations - young people themselves wanted to clean the slums, then they came up with a project to build a library and a study room, they went around all the administrative offices themselves to get the necessary permissions. What project we get involved in depends on the suggestions from our partners."

"It is common that families who were helped through our projects then go on to help other families."

"The beneficiaries of the project choose the courses themselves to improve their education and skills and to increase their chances on the job market."

"Microfinance project: the beneficiaries themselves suggested a loan structure (instalments, interest). In this way, people trusted the system more and they followed the rules more."

The majority of the organizations conduct project monitoring at least once a year, a large part of the responsibility rests on the local partner. Some organizations described their evaluation system with great precision.

We have to admit, however, that there are also organizations that do not encourage democratic ownership and that they lack the knowledge on the principles and methods of the application of democratic ownership at project planning and implementation level. The following answers provide a sample to illustrate this. These were put forward as examples of active participation and democratic ownership.

"The organization explains to them everything, for instance how to use the well."

"We use data from [project] monitoring. Based on this, we know what we have to do in the given country and where we should be heading."

"The partners can send their remarks on the project."

More than a half of the organizations declared that they participate in the creation and issuing of comments to development policy-making through the NGDO Platform.

Democratic ownership and active participation of people for whom we work is a weak point in the majority of the organizations. The better case is when projects are formulated together with the partner organization. However, it is still not uncommon that projects are formulated in Slovakia and the organization looks for a partner and a target group afterwards. It might be worth considering to offer a course on different techniques to engage communities in creating their very own future.

Principle 4 : Promote Environmental Sustainability

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... develop and implement priorities and approaches that promote environmental sustainability for present and future generations, including urgent responses to climate crises, with specific attention to the socio-economic, cultural and indigenous conditions for ecological integrity and justice.

Whether organizations have a primarily environmental focus or not they should nonetheless give preference to environmentally friendly solutions within their projects. We wanted to determine whether environmental impact of particular projects is considered in the project evaluation, whether the realization of project activities (not specifically environmental projects) takes into account the principles of environmental protection and whether the organizations try to give a good example and educate local communities in developing a responsible approach to the environment in their day-to-day activities.

Nine organizations indicated right at the beginning of the interview that they do not consider environmental issues as their strong point. They usually do not focus on the issue and do not have projects directly concerned with the environment. However, in the course of the interview, it became clear that the organizations do, at least in an intuitive or occasional way, consider environmental sustainability, whether this be in waste processing, water management, agricultural projects etc. One organization (non-environmental) mentioned a systematic effort on its part to encourage an environmentally friendly behaviour and promote a non-consumerist way of life.

Less than a half of the organizations said to engage in a systematic monitoring of their projects' environmental impact (e.g. ground water monitoring, analysis of the project's impact, regular consultations with local collaborators and beneficiaries). One organization talked about a case in which negative findings in this realm were addressed by arranging an appropriate remedy (agriculture - desiccation of pastures).

Despite the fact that only one organization among the 22 participating in this survey has a primary focus on environmental issues, all 22 in fact pursue at least some activities directly or indirectly relevant to environmental sustainability.

"Implementing a project to allow access to drinking water to the local population resulted also in reduced erosion around the river as the people stopped coming to take water from it."

"A girls' school- education about new agricultural methods, an effective use of the soil, the utilization of rain water and its recycling, which they did not use to do before. School gardens have been turned into training centers, the students learn to grow different crops, this also has an ecological dimension to it."

"Two hospitals process biological and other types of waste, they have their own little incinerator and lavatories, some bury the waste in the ground. The hospital management is directly responsible for waste processing. Where there are deficiencies, we discuss these with them and try to push for improvement."

At least to some degree, topics chosen for courses and lectures contain environmental issues and climate change. It is certainly positive to see that within their field of activity, the majority of the organizations try to act in an environmentally friendly manner and educate local collaborators and beneficiaries in this area.

"After the tsunami in Sri Lanka we were cleaning up the waste, we talked to the local autonomy about the waste. We did the same after the earthquake in Pakistan. We also hired experts in the field."

"People there didn't even have rubbish bins. Our workers were looking for rubbish bins and the local people grew more interested in having them. This was a good opportuni-

ty to introduce rubbish bins into practice by giving a good example."

The majority of Slovak development organizations have a sense for the importance of ecological sustainability of the environment and the lives of the people they work with, as well as of the organization's own environment. We have not encountered an understanding of the issue of environmental sustainability in the framework of human rights, as might be envisaged by this particular Istanbul Principle (the right to a healthy environment). However, environmental issues represent a natural and unforced part of education, community mobilization or even support of small sized enterprises. A more thorough monitoring of the long term environmental impact of development activities is something to be desired.

Principle 5: Practice transparency and accountability

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, multiple accountability, and integrity in their internal operations.

This principle means that organizations are fully accountable for the results and the methods used in their work and that they are ready to present them in the public. Information about their activities and financial resources is available on websites and in publicly available annual reports, organizations have their work evaluated both internally and externally (some undergo audits). Results from these forms of evaluation are made available to them and contain truthful and unbiased information about their work, the partners and target groups. The organizations also have a transparent governing structure, information about which is available to the public (including contact details for leading staff members). They also have a transparent financing system. In following this principle, the organizations are supposed to refuse to tolerate any corruption practices in obtaining financial resources for their activities and project implementation.

Based on a simple internet survey, we found that 9 out of 22 organizations have made their annual report for the year 2010 available on the website.¹⁶ In the interview, one organization indicated that it was unable to provide access to the report as it was considered an internal document of the organization. 12 organizations have a publicly available list of members of their executive board. Four organizations that do not have an executive board, provide a full list of the team of collaborators including their contact details, possibly resumes. Six organizations claim to have neither an executive board, nor a team of collaborators. Almost all of them, more specifically 20 organizations, define the target groups and their project partners on the website.

Only 7 organizations can be said to carry out a systematic evaluation of their projects based on a methodological approach and using the given output to improve their projects and/or their strategic planning. The majority of the organizations, if they carry out evaluation at all (often merely in a form of a continuous monitoring of activities), consider it more as a formal matter they have to engage in because of the conditions set by donors and international partners. About a half of the organizations claim to be using external audit.

The respondents did not want to voice their opinion on the matter of corruption very much. Some mentioned examples of refusing to exchange money at a black market or bribe administrative workers but they also admitted it is often necessary to cooperate with the local government despite its corrupt nature in order to achieve the desired project outcome. Only one organization said to have a principle of absolute non-acceptance and non-tolerance of corruption embedded in their contracts. This organization also has an internal

¹⁶ Data collection was done in autumn 2011.

system for fighting corruption. One other organization said to have this principle included in its code of conduct.

When applying the criterion of transparency and accountability, the Slovak development NGOs still have scope for improvement. Not every organization provides information that might be of interest to the public. Many organizations do not have a carefully designed system to evaluate the impact of their activities.

Principle 6: Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, solidarity and global citizenship.

This principle presupposes that organizations share all the information related to common goals and activities with their partners. The partners are supposed to have access to project documentation and final reports about the joint projects, including financial statements. Statements on the main principles of the program or project cooperation are approved by both parties and stated in partnership agreements. This principle also demands respect for different opinions, attitudes and skills among partners, a decision-making process to be based on consensus, and prevention of a self-interested misuse of shared information and know-how to the detriment of the partner.

We found that the Slovak NGOs tend to act in a just and fair way towards their local partners and they try to establish equal partnerships. Most of the time, the whole project documentation is shared with the partner. If the project documentation is in Slovak, translation is often given to the partner. Almost all of the surveyed organizations create their budget together with the partner. However, not every organization managed to convince us that the project idea and its content always starts as a common product of both parties. In reality, many ideas seem to be thought out in Slovakia, announced to the partner (or a suitable partner is sought out) and then, to a greater or a lesser extent, modified by the partner. This is a problem directly relevant to principle 3 – democratic ownership. However, an overwhelming majority of organizations sign partner agreements or memoranda of understanding that contain obligations of all parties involved. A marked weakness of these documents is a lack of provisions for the cases in which one of the parties fails to meet its obligations.

Apart from a few exceptions, generally, we have not encountered a paternalistic and unequal attitude towards the partners. It would be better to say that the organizations surveyed lack the know-how to improve some of the processes they engage in, so that both sides involved would have a sense of equality and the potential of the local partner would be used to the greatest degree possible.

Principle 7: Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... enhance the ways they learn from their experience, from other CSOs and development actors, integrating evidence from development practice and results, including the knowledge and wisdom of local and indigenous communities, strengthening innovation and their vision for the future they would like to see.

Development organizations should engage in activities focused on knowledge transfer between partners. To examine the situation in the Slovak development NGOs, we asked the respondents whether knowledge sharing and mutual capacity building forms a part of project partnerships and activities and whether the organizations developed ways to build both their own capacities and those of the partner. We also asked about the preservation of the organization's institutional memory. We were interested to what extent the organizations are willing to share their know-how and information with the partners as well as with other actors within international development cooperation.

In relation to this principle, it is mainly education institutions that feel particularly strong in fulfilling it, as the content of this principles is directly included in their mission. Almost all education projects and activities are designed in a way which maximizes the mutual learning process, knowledge sharing and transfer of know-how. Organizations that do not have education activities as their primary focus try to share knowledge with their local partners during and after the project.

The organizations are aware of the need to encourage mutual learning and discussion both in Slovakia and on the international level. Approximately half of them claimed to be actively engaged in transfer of know-how within one or the other international network or initiative. One organization (People in Peril) has itself initiated the creation of one such network to foster cooperation among humanitarian organizations in Central Europe.

"Connected to one another, smaller organizations have a better chance to get involved in bigger projects. They will exchange know-how, information and will learn from each other. Through this, they will become a more attractive partner in the eyes of larger organizations from which they will be able to learn a lot."

Organizations participating in the survey have welcomed the education and know-how sharing opportunities created by the Slovak NGDO Platform and its members. Many criticize the lack of debates with international development experts about new trends in development cooperation.

"On the international level, we can see a great potential to show Slovakia the different trends in this area which we might not be used to very much... Development assistance isn't so much of a one-way process as it is still perceived by some actors in Slovakia. It's not only about raising the developing countries' GDP. We should also be learning from them, for example from their spirituality or modesty."

Less than a third of the organizations (7) confirmed having a system in place to provide internal education for their workers and volunteers, including those deployed in the field, and methods for preserving the organization's institutional memory. This area belongs to the weaker side of the Slovak development sector.¹⁷

Principle 8: Commit to realizing positive sustainable change

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... collaborate to realize sustainable outcomes and impacts of their development actions, focusing on results and conditions for lasting change for people, with special emphasis on poor and marginalized populations, ensuring an enduring legacy for present and future generations.

This principle presupposes that strategic activities and provision of financial resources are formulated and conducted in a responsible manner, that they are targetted for a longer time period and stem from a thorough knowledge of the situation. Long term priorities must not be changed ad hoc, based merely on donor grant calls. We investigated the extent

¹⁷ See also: *Príprava pracovníkov vysielaných v programoch rozvojovej a humanitárnej pomoci*. PDCS 2010 <http://www.pdcs.sk/pripadove-studie-prieskumy>

to which organizations are aware of their accountability for positive as well as negative, planned and unplanned impact of their own development interventions on the target groups and other development actors.

Amongst our organizations, there are some that perfectly apply this principle, e.g. eRko, Integra, People in Peril and Savio. These are mainly organizations that have been active in particular areas (sectoral and territorial) for several years. They try to meet their goals in a systematic manner through creation of long lasting partnerships based on trust and mutual knowledge of the beneficiaries of the organizations' projects. Workers from these organizations have worked in target countries for a long time and have established a close contact with local people. They aim to achieve greater effectiveness and strengthen the local people's potential.

We have also encountered organizations that do not consider it necessary to assess the impact of their projects and whose understanding of evaluation is limited to collecting a list of positive impressions of the course participants.

As we mentioned in the section dealing with principle 5 – accountability for results – only a few organizations conduct evaluations and even fewer analyze long term impact of their activities. However, there are also examples of our organizations that remain interested in their beneficiaries' situation even after the end of the project. If they detect negative impact of their previous activities, they take responsibility for it and actively seek to remedy it.

"If there are no mistakes reported, that means that the organization has bad information about its projects and their impact. The beneficiaries of development projects have already got used to answering questions and they know what donor organizations want to hear. To detect any negative impact of projects, an expert analysis is needed."

Conclusions

The Slovak NGOs have achieved a most thorough internalization of the following Istanbul Principles: principle 1(human rights); 2(gender equality); 4(environmental sustainability) and not least also principle 6 (equitable partnerships). Deficiencies were detected in relation to principle 7 (mutual learning). Also, our development community should not be satisfied with the level of fulfillment of principle 3 (democratic ownership), 5 (transparency, accountability) and 8 (sustainable change). That we have begun a discussion on this issue is undoubtedly a good sign. The respondents' reactions also suggest they would welcome further discussions, exchange of know-how and capacity building. Given the small size of the development community and a low level of financial resources allocated to this sector in the Slovak Republic, we should always aim for increasing the effectiveness of our activities. The Slovak NGO Platform can help in the process of mutual learning and ensure education about the principles and methods that have not been consistently applied so far. It is suitable to consider the adoption of a codex on effectiveness that would set the minimum standards for the application of Istanbul Principles that all regular members should adhere to.

The Slovak NGO Platform would like to express its gratitude to all who have participated in the survey by sharing their opinions and experience.

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