

Least but not Last?

Least Developed Countries in
Official Development Assistance of
Visegrad Four Countries



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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This analysis was produced as part of the international project **To Act You Have to Know**, implemented jointly by the Czech **People in Need (PIN)**, the **Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)**, the Hungarian **Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights (DemNet)**, the **PDCS**, the **Slovak NDGOs platform (P MVRO)** as well as the Dutch **European Journalism Centre (EJC)**.

The **To Act You Have to Know** project seeks to strengthen the role of Central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) within the context of European development assistance and international politics. This programme also operates on a national level to instigate public debate on the problems of less developed countries and development cooperation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DAC	Development Assistance Committee of OECD
EC	European Commission
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LICs	Low Income Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MICs	Middle Income Countries
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGDO	Nongovernmental Development Organizations
NGO	Nongovernmental Organizations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UN	United Nations
UN-OHRLLS	UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
V4	Visegrad Four countries
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

FOREWORD

This report is an outcome of a research study dealing with the position of the least developed countries (LDCs) in development policies of Visegrad Four (V4) countries from 2004 to 2008. Sponsors of the research¹ “perceive[d] that there has been insufficient lesson learning and experience sharing on the regional level and would like to support analysis comparing the national ODA systems in the V4 countries, specifically with regard to ODA allocated to LDCs” (People in Need, 2009).

Focus on least developed countries is important for two reasons. First, although according to statistics there has been significant progress made in many countries in the world over the past decades, there is still a group of states that have continued to be trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. It is thus essential to have a concise overview of how V4 countries participate in efforts to improve the situation in LDCs within national ODA policies. Second, from recent studies (for example Collier, 2007) it has been evident that the aid provided to these countries often does not have the expected impact and that LDCs in fact become dependent on external aid. This situation not only hinders their development in the long-term perspective but, contrary to the well-intended goals of development, assistance leads to increased vulnerability of the LDC populations. The issue of aid effectiveness along with the perceived need for better coordination and cooperation among the donors thus seems to be crucial in efforts to achieve goals set up on international and national levels with regard to LDCs.

Based on this assessment, the main questions for comparative analysis were therefore set in two areas:

1. How are LDCs included in development policies and official development aid of V4 countries?
2. What are the opportunities for improvement both on national levels and via cooperation among V4 countries in leveraging aid effectiveness for LDCs?

The research was conducted at the national level from December 2009 to March 2010 through study of printed and electronic materials and through interviews with key stakeholders in each of the V4 countries. The comparative analysis was performed in the period from April to June 2010 and revised and updated in September 2010.

¹ Sponsors were partner organizations of the project To Act You Have To Know.

LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES – THE CONCEPT

The concept of least developed countries (LDCs) was first introduced by the United Nations in the late 1960s with the aim of identifying the most vulnerable segment of the world in terms of development. Unlike other widely used typologies (such as the World Bank List of Economies, which divides economies into three major groups: low income, middle income and high income countries) LDCs have been assessed not just in terms of their economies but also in terms of their social, educational and health care levels, or other structural factors such as geographic circumstances, size of the population, etc. (see Box 1).

According to these criteria, currently, forty-nine countries are defined by the UN as LDCs: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia. Thirty-three of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The term "least developed countries" has been known and used in common discourse among ODA actors in V4 countries also in a broader understanding, referring to countries perceived as the "poorest" or "those most in need of help", be it LDCs or other low income countries or lower middle income countries as defined by the World Bank. Since the opportunity to monitor the improvements in LDCs according to clear criteria set up by the UN is essential in order to assess both donor policies towards the least developed countries and opportunities for improvements and cooperation, the following analysis sticks to the term as defined by the United Nations.

BOX 1: CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERING LDCS

The list of LDCs is reviewed every three years by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, taking recommendations by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) into consideration. The following three criteria were used by the CDP in the latest review of the list of LDCs, which took place in March 2009:

- (a) the “low-income” criterion, based on a three-year average estimate of the gross national income (GNI) per capita, with a threshold of \$905 for addition to the list, and a threshold of \$1,086 for graduation from LDC status;
- (b) the “human assets weakness” criterion, involving a composite index (the Human Assets Index) based on indicators of: (i) nutrition (the percentage of the population that is undernourished); (ii) health (the child mortality rate); (iii) school enrolment (the gross secondary school enrolment rate); and (iv) literacy (the adult literacy rate);

and

- (c) the “economic vulnerability” criterion, involving a composite index (the Economic Vulnerability Index) based on indicators of:
 - (i) natural shocks (the index of the instability of agricultural production, and the share of the population displaced by natural disasters);
 - (ii) trade shocks (the index of the instability of exports of goods and services);
 - (iii) exposure to shocks (the share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP, and the index of merchandise export concentration);
 - (iv) economic smallness (the population in logarithm); and
 - (v) economic remoteness (the index of remoteness).

For all three criteria, different thresholds are used for identifying addition cases and graduation cases.

FINDINGS

The position of LDCs within ODA policies of V4 countries can be reflected in involvement of LDCs among territorial priorities, selection of sectorial priorities relevant for LDCs, and volume of assistance provided to LDCs. International commitments towards LDCs and domestic public opinion about assistance form the context in which policies of V4 countries are set up. An overview of these forming aspects of ODA policies towards LDCs is provided in the following section.

LDCS IN INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS OF V4 COUNTRIES

V4 countries have participated in major international multilateral initiatives addressing development in LDCs:

- » The Brussels Declaration and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for 2001 – 2010
- » United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000)
- » Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development (2002)
- » Doha Declaration (2008)
- » Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005)
- » Accra Agenda for Action (2008)

As new member states of the EU, V4 countries have also become signatory parties of different EU development initiatives relevant to LDCs:

- » Cotonou Agreement (2000)
- » European Consensus on Development (2005)
- » Code of Conduct on Complementarity and the Division of Labour in Development Policy (2007), etc.

Since all V4 countries joined these initiatives amid complex internal processes of ODA policy formation/transformation, their approach to the declared commitments as well as both political willingness and practical potential for incorporating them in the national ODA policies differed.

Participation in multilateral fora has been seen primarily as providing a general framework for ODA policies of V4 countries affirming their membership in the international donor community. As such, references to these initiatives in ODA policy documents have been used mainly to underpin the principles that ODA policies would be formed on. Official documents thus most often refer to United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000), the Conference on Financing for Development in March 2002 in Monterrey, the High Level Forum in Paris in 2005 adopting the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, etc. Although the Brussels Declaration that was the outcome of the Third UN Conference directly addressing the needs and situation of LDCs held in Brussels, Belgium on 14 – 20 May 2001 has not been directly referred to in most of the documents, representatives of all V4 countries participated in the event and actively demonstrated their willingness to contribute to its objectives by different means (see Box 2). Besides the international multilateral initiatives organized with the aim of discussing various aspects of development cooperation between donor countries and LDCs, representatives of V4 countries have however so far not used the opportunity to influence the multilateral instruments regularly and more extensively beyond the means of the yearly contributions. With limited capacities for ODA policies in general, the key stakeholders have primarily focused on negotiating and transforming different aspects of bilateral aid.

In the case of initiatives on the EU level the situation has been more complex. On one hand, by joining the EU V4 countries have committed themselves to existing EU instruments and policies in the field of development assistance and LDCs. Consequently, especially when already established by the EU law, the opportunity for re-negotiations according to national capacities or interests has been limited. This had practical implications for ODA policies on the national level, most notably in the case of multilateral aid (e.g. contributions to the EU budget, to European Development Fund, which is especially important since many of ACP countries fall into the category of LDCs).

On the other hand, the responsibilities and financial participation stemming from membership in the EU have in turn provided V4 countries with a unique opportunity to participate in designing and managing the EU instruments and policies regarding the LDCs and development assistance, which would have a far more reaching impact on life in LDCs than the national ODA policies of V4 countries could achieve on bilateral levels or through participation in multilateral institutions.

BOX 2: EXAMPLES OF WILLINGNESS OF V4 COUNTRIES TO TRANSLATE COMMITMENTS TO LDCS INTO PRACTICE

At the final plenary meeting of the Third UN conference on LDCs in 2001 the Executive Secretary of the conference noted that (Report of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 20 September 2001):

- » “Development partners recommitted to the ODA targets which they had adopted at the Second LDC Conference in Paris. ... Other countries have indicated they will endeavour or intend to increase their financial support to LDCs (Republic of Korea, Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic)” (p.78)
- » “...the EU’s initiative to extend duty-free quota-free treatment to all LDC products except arms would not have happened had it not been for this Conference. Happily, other countries have taken similar initiatives (among which Norway, Morocco, Hungary, New Zealand)” (p.79)
- » “A number of countries indicated that they will endeavour to improve access, for example by lowering tariffs/duties on LDC products, to their markets (including the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Poland, Japan, Turkey)” (p.79)
- » “Some countries indicated their commitment to increasing their training programmes for LDCs (Republic of Korea, Poland)” (p.82).

So far, membership in the EU has been used in V4 countries primarily as a motivation to accelerate the process of national ODA transformation in order to come near to the EU/OECD donor standards in general, and to fulfil the obligation to achieve 0.17% ODA/GNI by 2010 and 0.33% ODA/GNI by 2015 (specific for new member states) mentioned in the European Consensus on Development. Consequently, the existing tension stemming from the international UN-backed multilateral commitments towards LDCs and the EU’s approach, which rather than stressing solely certain geographical priority promotes a multi-dimensional approach to reducing poverty, remained mostly unreflected in the V4 ODA policy documents or the existing discourse.

Poverty eradication is set as “the primary and overarching objective of EU development cooperation”.² However, while the European Consensus on Development states that “the EU will continue to prioritise support to the least-developed and other low-income countries (LICs) to achieve more balanced global development” (Ibid, par. 10), it asks for attention to be paid also to MICs as “the EU also remains committed to supporting the pro-poor development of middle-income countries (MICs), especially the lower MICs” (Ibid, par. 24). Also, while the document reaffirmed the plan to reach the level of 0.17% ODA/GNI by new member states in 2010 and level of 0.33% ODA/GNI in 2015, it pledged that “at least half of this increase in aid will be allocated to Africa” (Ibid, par. 23), thus reflecting the EU foreign policy priorities rather than multilateral understanding of poverty via the concept of LDCs.

While a multitude of commitments coming from a diverse scope of meetings and conferences on different political levels (multilateral, supra-national) thus have indisputably contributed to the process of transformation of ODA policies in V4 countries, it has been evident that the basic principles forming the ODA on a national level must primarily stem from public debate and domestic consensus in particular countries.

LDCS AS TERRITORIAL PRIORITIES

The scope of development assistance to LDCs in all V4 countries has been the result of the transformation processes that ODA policies have undergone since its (re)establishment in the late 1990s. On one hand, it has built on the legacy of the communist regime in terms of established economic and political ties, especially on the institutional and business levels. Seen from this perspective, historical ties and similarity in experience of societal transition shared with developing countries of former soviet bloc created a logical basis for ODA funding. This approach prevented the majority of LDCs from being the focus of V4 assistance, with the exception of those having ties with the socialist bloc in the Cold War era (e.g. Angola or Yemen with former Czechoslovakia). On the other hand, the initial lack of coordination mechanisms on national levels allowed for identification of needs and cooperation with counterparts in developing countries from below. Newly established

² Joint Statement by the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on European Union Development Policy: “The European Consensus”, 22 November 2005

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economic and foreign policy ties and development cooperation initiatives started by some non-state actors started to influence forming priorities. Consequently, bilateral ODA of V4 countries was spread among dozens of countries, including LDCs.

Within the efforts to centralize the system and provide for improved transparency and effectiveness, the amount of priority countries is gradually being reduced in all V4 countries. The exception is Poland which stated just six countries as priority territories from 2004. To make a selection of their territorial priorities the V4 governmental institutions responsible for ODA use sets of pre-defined criteria, which are either included in the policy documents (Slovakia, Czech Republic), or are rather implicit (Poland). While all V4 countries take into consideration the level of social and economic development of the target country, the criteria also include other factors such as capacity of donor country organizations, presence of embassies in the target country, accessibility, ability of the

TABLE 1: PRIORITY COUNTRIES IN ODA POLICIES OF V4 COUNTRIES IN 2010

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovak Republic
Number of top priority countries	5 "programme countries": Afghanistan, BiH, Ethiopia, Moldavia, Mongolia	BiH, Serbia, Moldova, Palestine Authority (not a country), Vietnam + Afghanistan ³	Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Afghanistan, Angola, Palestinian National Authority	3 "programme countries": Serbia, Kenya, Afghanistan
LDCs among priority countries	Afghanistan, Ethiopia	Afghanistan	Afghanistan, Angola	Afghanistan
Countries with lower priority	"Project countries": Georgia, Cambodia, Kosovo, Palestinian National Authority, Serbia + 4 phase out countries: Angola, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia	"Project-based": Yemen, Cambodia, Kirgizstan, Kosovo, Laos, Macedonia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Ukraine, and "Sub-Saharan region of Africa"	Note: Polish ODA recognizes just one level of priority territories	"Project countries": Ethiopia, Sudan, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Albania, BiH, Macedonia, Montenegro, Vietnam
LDCs among lower-priority countries	Cambodia	Yemen, Cambodia, Laos, and "Sub-Saharan region of Africa"		Ethiopia, Sudan

³ Afghanistan and Iraq are so called priority countries on the basis of international obligation. In Iraq there is no mission currently

target country to absorb the provided aid, presence of other donors and national foreign policy and economic interests. In this way, the priority countries are selected on the basis of agreement achieved between those actors involved in ODA policy design, rather than on sectorial priorities that might promote focus of ODA on LDCs.

In practice, this approach based on building consensus among various domestic actors has proved to be difficult to implement. For example, Slovakia, despite its proclaimed will to shorten the list, in its mid-term strategy for the period 2009 to 2013 defined as many as 19 priority countries – three “programme” countries as main priorities and 16 so-called project countries (Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí Slovenskej republiky, 2009). Only in the ODA National Programme for 2010 was the number of countries partially reduced, with substantial cuts endangering the bilateral aid budget due to the economic crisis seemingly one of the steering factors. On the other hand, the attempts to accommodate all interests, including the international commitments, proved to create space for targeting part of bilateral ODA directly on particular LDCs. This has happened in the case of the Czech Republic when Ethiopia was selected as one of the priority countries. In the Czech case the process of reducing the number of priority countries was also steered by the recommendations and direct feedback of the OECD DAC special review and World Bank analysis. Along with the new development cooperation concept for 2010 – 2017, the number of 8+2 priority countries was further cut to five programme countries.

Surely, the allocation of ODA will continue to reflect the political demand, as the case of Afghanistan illustrates (see Box 3). Nevertheless, in the context of the past institutional legacy and attempts to accommodate different interests, the selection of at least some countries as priorities using the concept of LDCs seems to be an appropriate approach for V4 countries.

From among multilateral instruments that have specific geographical focus, the EDF could play an important role as a new channel for funds to LDCs in ODA policies of V4 countries. Although this mechanism was established long before accession of V4 countries to the EU and thus reflects primarily interests of the old members, by joining the fund and committing to regular contributions V4 countries could use new opportunities to extend their development activities beyond the framework provided by bilateral aid. Here the cooperation among V4 governments would be meaningful in terms of securing equal conditions for implementing agencies from their respective countries.

LDCS IN SECTORIAL PRIORITIES

Specification of sectorial priorities in V4 countries has primarily been a result of involvement in various international initiatives (the Millennium Development Goals in particular) on one hand, while on the other hand it is influenced by expertise and capacities available in a particular V4 country. Although territorial focus of ODA policies in V4 countries has not been based on sectorial principles, goals such as poverty reduction, ensuring general education, decreasing of maternal and child mortality, improving access to health services, but also building of civil society or gradual integration of partner countries to the world economy, demand that V4 governments take the needs of LDCs into account.

Currently, the above-mentioned goals appear in various combinations in policy documents of all V4 countries with sectorial priorities defined at two levels. More generally at the level of mid-term and long-term strategies and specifically in annual plans, country strategy papers, and calls for proposals or terms of references, which are usually connected to selected territory. However, the documents do not address the link between sectorial and territorial priorities. Rather, concrete sectorial priorities are formulated for pre-selected territories (which also applies to crosscutting sectorial priorities such as tackling climate change impacts). Thus support for LDCs or other LICs remains a question of their presence among territorial priorities.

Nevertheless, the understanding that sectorial priorities are an important interface between broad aims and goals of policies and the concrete focus of implementing projects has been gradually adopted among the decision-makers in some of the V4 countries. In this respect, for example the Czech Republic made significant progress in the process of targeted transformation of ODA policy between 2006 and 2010. The process involving key ODA actors helped to define sectorial priorities more relevant for selected territories and more coherent with overall policy aims. In other V4 countries the discourse among key actors about sectorial priorities has so far been rather limited and ad hoc.

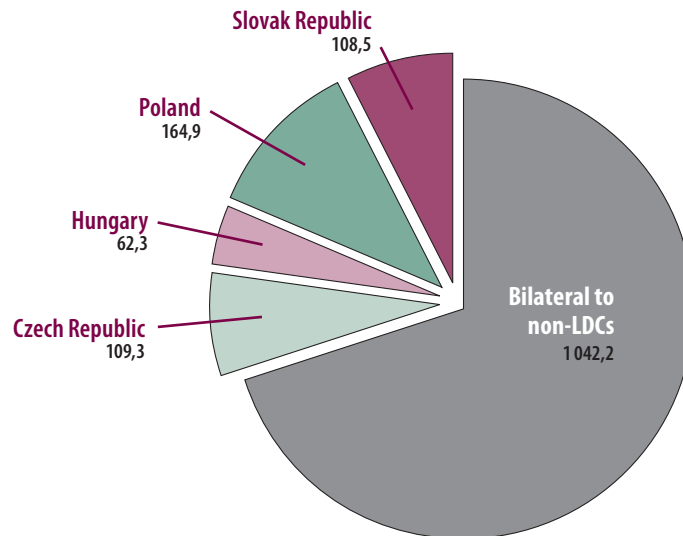
VOLUME OF ODA TO LDCS

Data on ODA financial flows have been primarily used to track the targets stemming from the international commitments. The attention of key stakeholders in all V4

countries usually concentrates on the following: the overall volume of ODA/GNI (based on the commitment to meet 0.17% ODA/GNI by 2010 and 0.33% ODA/GNI by 2015), although Brussels declaration signatories also stated that “[w]e take upon ourselves not to spare any effort to reverse the declining trends of ODA and to meet expeditiously the targets of 0.15% or 0.20% of GNP as ODA to LDCs as agreed” (Report of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 20 September 2001 p. 8) By 2010 all these commitments exceed overall ODA/GNP proportions of V4 countries.

By virtue of the OECD typology used for the statistical evidence, it is possible to track the amount of bilateral ODA invested in LDCs. Between 2004 and 2008 V4 countries’ support to LDCs through bilateral assistance totalled up to 444.99 million USD in constant prices in 2008 (see Chart 1).

CHART 1: SHARE OF LDCS IN BILATERAL ODA OF ALL V4 COUNTRIES IN 2004 – 2008
(CONSTANT PRICES FOR 2008, MILLIONS OF USD) INCLUDING DEBT RELIEF. BASED ON (OECD, 2010)



While bilateral aid to LDCs formed on average 30% of total bilateral ODA provided by V4 countries between 2004 and 2008, the proportional irregularities evident in different years have illustrated a lack of long-term strategy for the provision of aid to LDCs (see Table 2 and Chart 2).

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TABLE 2: LDCS OUT OF BILATERAL ODA

(% AND ABSOLUTE AMOUNTS IN MIL. USD IN CONSTANT PRICES 2008) **INCLUDING DEBT RELIEF**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Czech Republic	14.87%	7.96%	12.76%	21.73%	44.72%
	14.86	7.53	13.56	20.92	52.38
Hungary	6.53%	51.40%	0.56%	77.28%	29.06%
	3.12	26.42	0.62	27.68	4.49
Poland	38.59%	1.93%	78.91%	3.69%	15.72%
	16.01	1.33	127.66	6.70	13.17
Slovak Republic	12.45%	69.56%	69.37%	69.89%	63.13%
	2.18	33.54	24.44	22.61	25.77

CHART 2: SHARE OF LDCS IN TOTAL ODA OF PARTICULAR V4 COUNTRIES IN 2004 – 2008

(CONSTANT PRICES FOR 2008, MILLIONS OF USD) **INCLUDING DEBT RELIEF**. BASED ON (OECD, 2010)



A closer look at the high increase in the LDCs share in overall bilateral aid in Hungary in 2005 and 2007, in Poland in 2006 and in the Czech Republic in 2007 and 2008 and in Slovakia since 2005 (see Tables 2 and 3) indicates that it has been caused primarily by inclusion of debt relief and partial costs of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan.

TABLE 3: EXAMPLES OF HIGHEST SUPPORT FOR LDCs IN ABSOLUTE AMOUNTS

(IN MILLIONS OF USD IN CONSTANT PRICES FOR 2008)

		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Czech Republic	Afghanistan	9.55	2.88	5.75	12.64	42.10
	Angola			1.08	1.75	1.87
Hungary	Afghanistan				8.16	
	Mozambique				19.23	
	Tanzania		12.43			
	Yemen		13.02			
Poland	Angola			125.57		
Slovak Republic	Afghanistan		6.77	2.19	1.56	0.26
	Liberia					25.07
	Sudan		26.51	21.33	20.72	0.15

Note: Bordered cells show disbursements in particular years that consisted primarily of debt relief. OECD statistics do not provide a detailed breakdown of debt relief according to countries. Information on debt relief was derived from statistics and reports of V4 governments.

In the case of Slovakia, the debt relief for Sudan and Afghanistan was spread over three years from 2005 to 2007 and constitutes the great majority of all reported funding. For example, overall debt relief for Sudan was 1,270 million Slovak Crowns (approx. 44,156 mil. USD calculated at the average exchange rate) in the reported period. We can see that for 2008 the support to both Sudan and Afghanistan was reduced several fold if not counting the debt relief. In 2008, the bilateral aid to LDCs was increased by debt relief for Liberia (whole stated amount of 25.07 mil. USD in constant prices for 2008). After debt relief, there is no space to maintain the amount of bilateral aid to LDCs, resulting in an expected significant drop in the high proportion of support to LDCs. This unsustainability became clearer with the Hungarian and Polish examples. Unlike Slovakia, these two countries did not divide bigger debt reliefs over several years. For example, in 2006 Poland made a record one-time increase in its development aid because of its debt relief for Angola.

In the case of Afghanistan the considerable increase in reported amounts of development assistance was prompted by the foreign policy commitments stemming from membership of V4 countries in NATO (see also Box 3). Although the objectives of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have been to promote development, their operation has been covered from various budget items. This situation thus raised questions as to whether such use of funds meets their original designation (as development cooperation) or if there might be compromises that are unacceptable from the perspective of aid effectiveness. The major problem linked with PRTs has thus been low transparency of the process surrounding reporting the costs within ODA.

The majority of ODA in V4 countries is channelled through multilateral means. Data regarding the allocations of V4 contributions to LDCs are not available since it is not possible to track the assignment of particular contribution to a specific beneficiary country. However, there are several voluntary contributions of V4 countries to funds, which often support LDCs (e.g. various specific funds within the UN structure, such as World Health Organization's African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control – APOC, and similar). These contributions usually amount to tens of thousands of USD, which is a small share of the overall multilateral ODA (thousandths rather than hundredths). Thus, the political will of a contributor to support LDCs through multilateral institutions cannot be expressed by the volume of assistance given to LDCs. Rather the willingness is expressed by participation of a contributing country in shaping of ODA policies of multilateral institutions in favour of LDCs.

COORDINATION AND CONSISTENCY OF ODA POLICY TOWARDS LDCS

There are significant differences among V4 countries in terms of ODA policy consistency and coordination. Consistency of ODA policies towards LDCs depends on shared logic and foundations of policy documents at all levels. Long-term and mid-term policies define broader aims and priorities often based on terminology used in international agreements and commitments. For internal consistency of ODA policy, short-term policies and operational level documents are of key importance (see Table 4), since they should reconcile the general principles with concrete needs and developments in beneficiary countries.

BOX 3: INVOLVEMENT OF V4 COUNTRIES IN AFGHANISTAN

Overall, development aid provided to Afghanistan from V4 countries creates almost a quarter of all aid provided to LDCs by them between 2004 and 2008, which was 104,91 from 444,99 constant prices 2008 USD millions.

TABLE: DEVELOPMENT AID PROVIDED BY V4 COUNTRIES TO AFGHANISTAN
(BASED ON OECD, 2010). IN CONSTANT PRICES FOR 2008 IN MILLIONS OF USD

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
CZ	9,55	2,88	5,75	12,64	42,1	72,92
HU	2,19	0,09	0,51	8,16	4,07	15,02
PL	0,35	0,47	0,75	2,11	1,89	5,57
SK	0,62	6,77	2,19	1,56	0,26	11,4
Total						104,91

In case of the Czech Republic the increase in funds allocated to LDCs in 2007 and 2008 was caused by including the costs for the Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Afghan province of Logar into the ODA. Similarly, in 2005, Slovakia reported as part of its ODA a one-time amount used for reconstruction of a civilian airport performed partially by the Slovak Army unit in Afghanistan.

For Hungary, Afghanistan is strictly speaking not a priority country of the Hungarian International Development Cooperation Policy, and there is no specific mid-term country strategy paper for the development cooperation regarding Afghanistan. Despite that, Afghanistan is the country where the highest Hungarian bilateral aid volume flows. Although due to budget cuts the bilateral side of the Hungarian development cooperation was decreased (see also Chart 2), the aid flow to Afghanistan suffered only roughly a 10% decrease, as opposed to other budget lines being cut by half or by two thirds within the bilateral segment.

TABLE: ODA BUDGET WITHIN THE HUNGARIAN MFA BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR 2010
IN MILLIONS OF HUF (BASED ON KISS, 2010)

Title	Sum (2008) (million HUF)	Sum (2010) (million HUF)	Difference of ys 2010/2008 (%)
Intl Dev Co	300	141	47,0
Afghanistan PRT	500	459	91,8
Humanitarian Aid	30	10	33,3
Total	830	610	73,5

TABLE 4: LEVELS OF POLICY DOCUMENTS IN ODA POLICIES

Policy	Document	Usual time span
Long-term	Law on ODA Principles, Concept of ODA	7+ years
Mid-term	Strategy document	5 – 7 years
Short-term	(Bi-)Annual programmes and budgets Country strategy papers	1 – 3 years
Operational level	Terms of reference Calls for proposals Position papers	
Implementation level	Projects, Contracts Political decisions, Transfers	

Operationalization of broad aims and concepts

Evaluation/feedback

In the Czech Republic, planned transformation of ODA policy led to formulation of a full range of policy documents, from the adoption of a new law to setting concrete sectorial priorities in country strategy papers. These are operationalized mainly through tenders and also calls for project proposals or programmes run by line ministries. While being quite consistent and precise, narrow and concrete formulation of priorities (especially on the level of short-term documents) leads to certain blurring of the border between donor and implementer. It may increase the coherence and significance of planning but at the same time it may create more rigid translation of plans into implementation projects and thus lose the creative and corrective dynamic of the relationship between a donor and implementer. The impact of this model is not visible yet since the changes are recent and it ought to be properly evaluated. Slovakia is also gradually building the full range of policy documents. It has formulated country strategies for its three top priority countries just recently (in 2010). In the case of other V4 countries, the consistency has so far been hampered by a weaker policy framework. Poland and Hungary lack both the legal framework provided by law and have gaps in short-term documents since there are no country strategies for priority countries.

The number of LDCs among the top territorial priorities is limited (as shown in Table 1) and attention paid to other LDCs in formulation of policy focus of the aid usually remains rather general (e.g. by defining only basic sectorial priorities). Narrowly defined policy priorities do not however necessarily mean better positive impacts of ODA. The complex and dynamically changing situation in many LDCs may be targeted better by emerging strategies and flexible projects than predefined long-term interventions. The level of narrowing down the policies must be learnt from evaluations as part of specific donor know-how.

Coordination of ODA policies towards LDCs in all V4 countries is the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, there are significant differences in the level of integration of decision-making about territorial and sectorial priorities and budgetary issues. It varies from the Czech model of strong competencies integrated in the hands of an agency established by MFA to the rather decentralized Hungarian and Polish models without an agency with competencies and budgets scattered around in various ministries.

It seems that if decision-making about priorities and budgets is separated it is difficult to maintain coordination and coherence among ministries and other actors. Proof of this can be seen in the diverse scope of financial flows accounted as ODA, which go beyond priorities set by MFA in the budgets of all V4 countries but the Czech Republic. In such situations cross-ministerial coordinating bodies (with only consultative status) seem to be too weak to prevent deviation from the set policy. Too loose ties and limited communication between actors (mainly ministries) lead to a tendency to give up on efforts to formulate a shared coherent policy in advance and to count ODA eligible costs *ex post facto*.

LDCS AND PUBLIC OPINION

In all V4 countries, public opinion polls regarding the development assistance have been organized by the governments or some other actors over the past years.

The Czech MFA finances public opinion polls about ODA every second year and makes the results public. Other stakeholders are invited to discuss the results. In Poland there have been annual opinion polls since 2004. In Slovakia two polls were conducted in 2005 and 2009 (FOCUS, 2009). In Hungary research based on in-depth qualitative interviews was carried out at Corvinus University and published in 2007 (Vári, 2007). There have also been several Eurobarometer polls carried out: e.g. *Citizens of the new EU Member States and Development Aid* (Eurobarometer, 2007), *Europeans and Development Aid* (Eurobarometer, 2007b), or *Europeans, development aid and the Millennium Development Goals* (Eurobarometer, 2010), which provide comparable data for V4 countries. None of the public opinion polls however addressed the issues of LDCs explicitly nor its relationship to existing policies of a particular country.

As a result, its findings showed inconsistency between general public interests and practical policies. In answering the question “In what part of the world is, in your opinion, the need for European Development Assistance the greatest? (max. 3 answers)”, the majority of the public clearly preferred Sub-Saharan Africa, which received 55% to 60% of support in individual V4 countries (see Table 5).

TABLE 5: REGIONS WITH THE GREATEST NEED OF ASSISTANCE AS PERCEIVED BY THE V4 PUBLIC*In what part of the world is, in your opinion, the need for European Development Assistance the greatest?*

(max. 3 answers)

	CZ	HU	PL	SK	Average
Sub-Saharan Africa	55%	57%	57%	60%	57%
Indian sub–continent (India, Bangladesh, etc.)	35%	37%	21%	43%	34%
The Middle East and North Africa	36%	27%	30%	34%	32%
South East Asia (Cambodia, Vietnam, etc.)	21%	35%	31%	37%	31%
Latin America (South and Central America)	9%	9%	17%	13%	12%
The Caribbean (Haiti, Dominican Republic, etc.)	9%	7%	4%	9%	7%
The Pacific and Oceania (Papua New Guinea, etc.)	13%	18%	8%	23%	16%

SOURCE: EUROBAROMETER, 2007B P. 10

This perception relates to the preferences for goals which respondents believe should be addressed. Most respondents believe that from among MDGs, the main priorities are to reduce extreme poverty and hunger (CZ – 67%, HU – 72%, PL – 66%, SK – 75%), to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (CZ – 53%, HU – 50%, PL – 55%, SK – 49%), and to achieve universal primary education (CZ – 39%, HU – 30%, PL – 27%, SK – 38%) (Eurobarometer, 2007b p. 18). This trend has also been confirmed by other polls at the national level in which respondents preferred from a wide scale of possible goals (not just MDGs) poverty reduction, health care topics and education – for example in Slovakia (FOCUS, 2009).

Nevertheless, respondents have not been idealistic in terms of motivations of the development assistance. When asked: “Development aid means giving grants or loans to developing countries which aim to promote economic development and human welfare. We are not talking here about humanitarian aid (that is assistance provided in emergency situations like war, natural disaster, famine, etc.), but about development aid. What in your opinion are the two main motivations for richer countries to provide development aid to poor countries? (max. 2 answers)”, they answered:

- » Self-interest, for example helping poor countries with trade will enable them to buy more products from rich countries (CZ – 29%, HU – 28%, PL – 31%, SK – 32%)
- » Contribute to global stability (CZ – 33%, HU – 15%, PL – 26%, SK – 34%)
- » Deter citizens of these countries from emigrating to rich countries (CZ – 31%, HU – 30%, PL – 24%, SK – 24%)
- » To have a clear conscience was a reason for 9 % to 15% (CZ – 9%, HU – 15%, PL – 14%, SK – 9%) and to help people who are in need was a reason for 6% to 22% (CZ – 8%, HU – 22%, PL – 6%, SK – 10%) (Eurobarometer, 2007b p. 7)

The polls rather uncovered a lack of knowledge about the existing policies that could be matched with general understanding of development assistance in terms of aid to those regions and countries most stricken by poverty. On a general level, it has highlighted the lack of dialogue about development issues with the broader public.

In a way, public campaigns organized by NGOs and other interested actors tried to involve the public in dialogue in regards to the issues of poverty eradication and assistance to the poorest countries. The closest to the topic of LDCs have been national campaigns following up on the Global Call for Action against Poverty. For example, the Czech Republic has had a good track record regarding this campaign since 2005. In other V4 countries the campaigns have limited impact or are not organized at all. In any case, such campaigns also focused primarily on bringing the attention of the public to issues linked with poverty eradication, without contextualizing it with the existing ODA national policies.

The new Eurobarometer poll published in September 2010, called Europeans, development aid and the Millennium Development Goals, shows that despite the economic crisis the support of respondents for development aid remains high. To the question “In your opinion, is it very important, fairly important, not very important or not at all important to help people in developing countries?” the respondents in V4 countries answered:

- » Very important (CZ – 30%, HU – 29%, PL – 38%, SK – 31%)
- » Fairly important (CZ – 58%, HU – 58%, PL – 52%, SK – 56%)
- » Not very important (CZ – 8%, HU – 8%, PL – 5%, SK – 8%)
- » Not at all important (CZ – 2%, HU – 3%, PL – 1%, SK – 2%)
- » Don't know (CZ – 2%, HU – 2%, PL – 4%, SK – 3%)

In spite of the proclaimed support for development aid, people in V4 countries remain among the least involved in it (either by giving money or contributing as a volunteer). As a conclusion the Eurobarometer report states the nature of public opinion on development aid as “it is morally right to help people in need and therefore it is a valuable goal per se but this does not imply concrete actions at a personal level” (Eurobarometer, 2010).

Still, the public in all V4 countries expressed their readiness to assist people in the poorest countries via donations to both emergency funds and long-term initiatives promoting sustainable development in the last few years, which needs to be nurtured further.

KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis of ODA policies of Visegrad countries towards LDCs has brought into focus opportunities for improvement in leveraging aid effectiveness for LDCs on both the national level and by cooperation among V4 countries. Key challenges along with practical recommendations are summarized below.

TARGETING ODA – DIALOGUE OF KEY ACTORS

Targeting of V4 countries' ODA policies to LDCs cannot be done without broader agreement of key actors, who have to adapt their policies and capacities accordingly.

Even though there are examples of exchange between Ministries of Foreign Affairs of V4 countries and other actors of ODA, the stable structures and mechanisms for dialogue are present just partially. Positive examples are the Czech thorough process of ODA transformation (as an inclusive process attempting to discuss issues in the long-term perspective, not just immediate decisions) and the Slovak Memorandum of Understanding signed between the MFA and Slovak NGOs Platform in 2010, which assures the Platform's role as a partner in the phase of formulation of future ODA policies.

Translating broad development goals into concrete policies and implementation programmes demands regular structures that would be able to provide a forum for debating the long-term vision of ODA accommodating both international commitments and realities on the national levels in a transparent way. If the dialogue comes in the later stage of decision-making process, the format of commenting on existing drafts allows just for (rather critical) comments, which does not open the space for shared strategic thinking and long-term consensus building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Set up and support regular structures and mechanisms for strategic dialogue among key actors about ODA policy priorities and principles that would allow for achieving broad consensus on the ODA framework.
- » Look for positive examples and inspiration from how the ODA focus, including the commitment to assist LDCs, was set up among existing donors. Support policy research in this area.
- » Open dialogue among key ODA actors (conferences, seminars, round tables, working groups) about support of the least developed and low income countries in the long-term perspective. Focus specifically on necessary capacity requirements, which cannot be built quickly.

TARGETING ODA – TERRITORIAL AND SECTORIAL PRIORITIES AND THEIR COORDINATION

Discourse in V4 countries indicates that there is a perceived dilemma between channelling ODA resources to those seen as “most in need of help” or to those who have “similar transition experience” to that of V4 countries (mostly post-communist countries or those with political and economic ties with V4 countries from the past). Policies of experienced donors do not show this either-or approach but rather a both-and strategy. As the European Consensus on Development states, poverty focus should be the overarching aim of ODA policy⁴. Historical predispositions and experience do not relieve V4 countries automatically from focusing on global poverty issues by referring to division of labour among European donors. A comparably smaller volume of V4 countries’ ODA should also not preclude the governments from targeting LDCs in their ODA policies. Good strategies and cooperation of V4 countries may increase their impact even with smaller funds. Membership of V4 countries in the EU as well as involvement in various international initiatives aiming at poverty eradication and

4 Joint Statement by the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on European Union Development Policy: “The European Consensus”, 22 November 2005

effective assistance to LDCs should therefore serve as an invitation for policymakers to rethink and define the proper role and potential value added of V4 countries in poverty reduction on a global scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Stick to poverty reduction as the main priority for ODA policy as stated in European Consensus on Development and define the exact role and value added of V4 countries in it as well as reasonable limits within ODA policy.
- » Reduce the tension of perceived choice between least developed/poor countries and those with so-called similar transition experience by increasing ODA progressively as committed (0.17% ODA/GNI in 2010), which would allow for reasonable support in both directions.
- » Find out about and compare how the support to LDCs is implemented by established donors comparable to V4 countries (according to various aspects such as the amount of aid, similarity of approach and understanding of development, etc.).
- » Promote coherence of development policies with other policies, which allows for achieving greater impact even with limited funds dedicated directly to development cooperation.
- » Create positive examples of donor coordination in priorities of V4 countries (where it is possible and feasible). The opportunities are wide, from supporting cooperation of implementation agencies in V4 countries, through coordinated definition of aid priorities in shared target countries, to – for example – possible creation of joint funds. Such initiatives have their precursors e.g. in efforts to establish joint embassies of several countries, or in the joint International Visegrad Fund.
- » Prepare together as V4 countries for the Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs that will take place in Turkey in the first half of 2011. Slovakia as the current V4 Presidency holder could take a lead regarding this issue.

STRUCTURES FOR LDCS SUPPORT

For a topic to become part of wider discourse for a longer time at the policy level, more solid structures and networking are needed. So far, regular structures (working groups, umbrella organisations, committees) which would provide a basis for coordination of activities, and which would build a knowledge base with specific focus on particular LDCs, have not been established. Institutions conducting projects in LDCs or studying their situation often work separately without having closer contacts with other ODA actors or motivation to participate in the process of national ODA policy transformation. Campaigns focusing on poverty eradication fail to link the theme with the existing ODA policies. It's not just campaigns and structures that are lacking but also leading personalities and organizations that would be able to bring an ODA vision for LDCs and secure support across the political and public spectrum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Support networking and mutual learning/reflection among those involved in development assistance to the least developed countries (either specific countries or LDCs in general) and support their involvement in the process of ODA policy transformation.
- » Support activities aimed at gradual building of a consensus on national ODA policies across the political and public spectrum (through initiating debates of the role of ODA within foreign policy in general, carrying out public opinion polls regarding the existing ODA policies, and supporting programmes aimed at involvement of opinion- and decision-makers in promoting public debate).
- » Support development of expertise on LDCs relevant for ODA policies in V4 countries by supporting relevant research and evaluation of the development interventions in these countries.

INFLUENCE ON USE OF MULTILATERAL AID

The majority of ODA of V4 countries is allocated via multilateral channels. Nevertheless, in none of the V4 countries has the portfolio of multilateral assistance reported as part of ODA yet been discussed as a whole by key actors in the field of development assistance. This seems to be caused mainly by a relatively weak position of V4 countries in the area of development in the international settings, and by limited capacities to address or influence these policies. On the national level the fact that the allocation remains to be spread among different ministries according to the sector has been important.

Multilateral ODA provides a great opportunity to balance the relatively low potential of V4 countries to participate in fulfilling the international commitments with regard to LDCs by means of bilateral aid. Initiating a review of multilateral donations on national levels as well as coordination among V4 countries in this respect might give credence to proclaimed ODA objectives in regards to poverty eradication in major policy documents and improve the image of ODA policies among the public and politicians. This in turn could support the aim to achieve broad and long-term consensus of various actors involved in the design and implementation of ODA policies and help to find the proper and realistic place for LDC support within the national programming.

On the international level, involvement in improving the effectiveness of multilateral/supra-national funds implementing programmes in LDCs (such as EDF) might increase the prestige of V4 countries and serve as an example that countries with decent ODA budgets and no past colonial power can contribute to achieving goals aiming at poverty eradication. For example, budget support is a tool of development assistance, which is used and promoted by some of the multilateral institutions. The experience of V4 countries with the limits of this tool posed by totalitarian governance and later experience in V4 countries with the fight against corruption may help refine this tool and better set its criteria for use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » **Initiate a review of multilateral contributions within national ODA policies and debate about its effective administration.**
- » **Identify and promote topics through which V4 countries may contribute to discourse and policy-making of multilateral institutions.**

LEARNING FROM EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

The monitoring and evaluation of ODA plays an important role in improvement of ODA policy as shown in the process of ODA system transformation in the Czech Republic. Publicly available evaluation reports are crucial for creating a transparent environment where key actors can reflect on and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the policies. Such discourse creates healthy pressure for improvements both at the policy level as well as at the level of implementation and contributes to the consistency of ODA policies in terms of its ability to accommodate both international commitments towards LDCs and other interests.

Evaluation is not only about efficiency and effectiveness measured from the donor's point of view. The lack of feedback from beneficiaries about the impacts of the assistance sets a weak basis for making good decisions about future policies. V4 countries should follow positive experience with partial evaluations that were already made. Broader and more systematic evaluation with publicly available outputs is a prerequisite of further policy improvements.

Improved policies need broader support of decision-makers to become approved and brought to life. It requires decision-makers' understanding of development issues and their motivation to deal with these issues among competing political agendas that they are facing on a daily basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Earmark specific budget lines in ODA annual budgets for evaluation (if not done already).
- » Strengthen and increase the amount of evaluation of ODA projects and programmes; make the evaluation reports available to key actors involved in ODA policies and to the public.
- » Increase involvement of experts and beneficiaries from target countries as important stakeholders in policymaking. Adapt systems and mechanisms of policymaking in order to provide these stakeholders with a stable voice.
- » Focus on education and awareness raising not only among the broad public, but also among key decision makers, MPs and leading political parties' experts and think-tanks to draw their attention to development as a whole, and the least developed countries in particular.

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Least but not Last?

Least Developed Countries
in Official Development
Assistance of Visegrad Four
Countries

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