

“STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY AND PARTNERSHIPS OF NON-STATE NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS AND NON-STATE ACTORS PLATFORMS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE PERIOD 2017-2019” - EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of evaluation

The evaluation of the Czech Republic's Foreign Development Cooperation Programme “Strengthening the Capacity and Partnerships of Non-State Non-Profit Organisations and Non-State Actors Platforms for Development Cooperation in the period 2017-2019” (hereinafter the Programme) was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (MoFA), Department of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DCHA), to "obtain independent, objectively based and consistent conclusions, findings and recommendations for the use in decision-making by the MoFA in cooperation with the Czech Development Agency (CDA) and other actors on the future targeting of the evaluated Programme with regard to the overall implementation of the Czech Republic's SDGs, taking into account the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Strategy for Foreign Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic for the period 2018-2030". The tender documentation posed evaluation questions linked to the evaluation criteria according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development /Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), namely criteria relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and some other aspects (presentation/visibility of the Programme and application of the cross-cutting principles of the Foreign Development Cooperation). The task of the evaluation was to assess 20 main evaluation questions.

Brief description of the evaluated Program

The objective of the evaluated Programme in the period 2017-2019 was to support the building and strengthening of the basic and professional capacities of non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs) operating in the field of foreign development cooperation of the Czech Republic (hereinafter FDC CR), and of NGO umbrella organisations and other eligible entities, to support the formation and strengthening of partnerships between relevant actors of the FDC CR, and to support the coordination and strengthening of the capacities of member organisations, i.e. entities operating in the field of the FDC CR. With respect to this targeting, the Programme was internally divided into the following support areas: Platforms, Basic Capacities, Professional Capacities and the sub-area Partnerships. The Programme supported eligible entities based in the Czech Republic without further territorial specification. In addition to the MoFA, the main actors of the Programme are the CDA as a provider and administrator of the Programme support and the eligible applicants, which were NGOs and platforms bringing together organisations active in the field of the FDC CR. The annual allocation of the Programme was in the range of CZK 4.35 million to CZK 6 million. The amount of the subsidy could reach a maximum of 90% of project budget (80% in 2019), on average CZK 477 thousand was devoted by Programme per project. The grant procedure was implemented through an annual call for proposals, under which, as a rule, one-year projects could be submitted (except for the Platform area in 2017 and 2018). In the period under review, the Programme supported 33 projects (submitted by 20 different entities, 1 project was ultimately not realized), for which CZK 15.3 million was drawn from the Programme and sources devoted to the FDC CR. In total, the projects with a budget of CZK 24 million were realized in the framework of the evaluated Programme (i.e., including co-financing from the beneficiaries).

Methodology of evaluation research

The evaluation methodology was designed with regard to the requirements of the contracting authority expressed primarily through the evaluation questions and to a tight schedule for evaluation process. The methodology was based on a non-experimental mixed evaluation design, combining mainly qualitative but also quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Both primary and secondary data were used, adhering to the principles of triangulation of methods and sources wherever possible. The key methods of data collection were desk research (incl. in-depth desk research of final documentation of all supported projects), evaluation interviews with the representatives of practically all supported organizations, implementation structure, thematic experts and the representatives of other Czech donors (35 informants in total) and the examples of good practice processed through mini-case studies. The outcome mapping method was applied more intensively than planned on the expense of the concept of theory of change. As a complementary method of data collection, a questionnaire survey was conducted among unsuccessful applicants from the period 2017-2019. Selected preliminary conclusions and proposed recommendations for some topics were discussed with the representatives of the implementation structure and a thematic expert during online workshop.

Main findings and conclusions in relation to evaluation criteria and questions

In terms of strategic goals of the Czech Development Cooperation, the Programme is relevant, useful and necessary. It generates disseminable results that can have the nature of good practice and simultaneously create valuable internal solutions for supported organizations. These results are largely sustainable. **The relevance of the Programme** was evaluated as high in terms of the overall strategic objectives of the Czech Development Cooperation, and for 2019 as rather high. The shift in the assessment rate was caused by changes in the setting of the conditions of the Programme (e.g., only annual projects were allowed, an enlargement of the range of eligible applicants without an adequate increase in the allocation for the Program). The relevance of the Programme from the point of view of the needs of the individual actors involved proved to be heterogeneous due to the diversity of the actors involved and the particular areas on which the Programme was focused. The areas of Basic Capacities and Professional Capacities were assessed together and their relevance proved to be rather high. The relevance of the Platform area was initially high, but for 2019 (due to changes in the Programme) it decreased to be rather high. The Partnership sub-area was highly relevant.

The overall coherence of the Programme was assessed as rather low. Coherence according to the set evaluation questions was viewed from the two perspectives. Internal coherence, i.e., coherence, coordination and cooperation within the supported roofing entities, was assessed as rather high. This success of the Programme is evidenced, among other, by the formation of functioning groups within sector platforms interested in the field of development cooperation of the Czech Republic, the creation of a product catalog, the ability to create and present common positions of the platform, etc. However, the coherence between the particular actors of the FDC CR proved to be low (especially the coherence and cooperation among the non-profit, private and public sectors), and the Programme has contributed to a very low extent to it. The short-term positive effect of the Programme was demonstrated in the area of involving the private sector in the implementation of the Czech Development Cooperation through the support of business and sector platforms. In the longer term, however, these effects are much less visible. As it turned out, the issue of cooperation and coordination of the non-governmental non-profit and private sector is a very complex issue. One of the main obstacles lies in the lack of mutual information about the needs, goals and results of particular sectors in the field of development cooperation, in the mutual misunderstanding and distrust. However, the Programme has a significant potential with this respect, however, it needs an active involvement of the MoFA and the CDA in facilitating and cultivating relations between the actors of the Czech Development Cooperation in order to strengthen coherence and cooperation between individual sectors.

The effectiveness of the Programme was assessed as rather low. The Programme has many shortcomings in this respect, but these are remediable. For this purpose, examples of domestic and international practice are presented in the evaluation report. The main shortcomings of the Programme,

which reduce the effectiveness of the spent resources and lead to a reduction of the overall effects of the Programme, include in particular the lack of a Programme strategy, the fragmentation of support and non-conceptual changes in the Programme (and its related unpredictability), the short-term nature of support, the low financial allocation of the Programme, the procedures that may imply non-transparency in the appraisal process of project applications, unsystematic cuts of the subsidy for the selected projects, and the lack of systematic work with the outputs and results of projects at the level of the whole Programme.

The efficiency of the Programme was assessed as rather low. Although many positive results were achieved at the project level (e.g. the increased quality of management of the supported entities, the developed professional capacities of NGOs and platform members, supported entities used the support for better promotion and more effective fundraising activities, the produced outputs could be applied more widely beyond the supported entity, new partnerships were created, and much more), at the programme level the overall efficiency is low due to the shortcomings described above (i.e., the fragmentation of support, its short-term nature and the lack of usage of project outputs and results at the programme level).

With a few exceptions, **the impact criterion** could not be fully assessed during the evaluation research. The Programme has the potential to contribute to some long-term effects, but this potential was not fully exploited in the evaluation period 2017-2019. In the same time, the evaluation period is short for assessing the impacts of the Programme, as is the time lag since the end of the intervention. In order for the Programme to generate the intended impacts, a number of assumptions would have to be met (e.g. the reflection of the needs of the applicants, clear and strong roles of the particular links within the implementation structure, the limitation of negative externalities) and the main shortcomings in the Programme set-up (see above) would have to be addressed.

Sustainability was assessed at two levels. Sustainability in terms of fulfilment of the Programme's key parameters for the sustainability of project effects was assessed as rather low, due to the lack of fulfilment of these parameters (which are again related to the shortcomings outlined under the effectiveness criterion, but also include cooperation and partnership approach between the MoFA, CRA and NGOs and low political support for their activities; facilitation of cooperation between different sectors of actors relevant to the FDC CR and support for enabling environment for mutual cooperation). The sustainability of effects at the project level was assessed as rather high.

Overall, it can be summarised that the evaluated Programme is very useful and necessary, especially for some actors of the FDC CR. At the project level, the Programme generates many outputs and results, very diverse in nature, which are not only beneficial for the supported organisations, but can also be used more widely, even with a possible effect for the whole system of the FDC CR. The Programme has thus a great potential, however, not fully used in the reviewed period of 2017-2019. The main shortcomings lie both in some of the content and procedural parameters of the Programme and its overall grasping (in particular in the attempt to sanitise the needs of a wide range of actors of the FDC CR in one way without accepting their differences), but also in the overall environment in which the FDC CR is set up and implemented. There is a lack of sufficient political support for the FDC CR (which is reflected, among other things, in its low financial allocation, including the allocation of the Programme under evaluation), partnership and participatory approaches do not play the necessary role in the whole system of the FDC CR, and the atmosphere for cooperation between the different sectors of the FDC CR is not entirely favourable. In addition, the evaluated Programme is considered by the FDC CR coordinator as marginal, although in practice it plays an irreplaceable role in financial support for some of the key FDC CR actors. All these factors lead to the fact that the Programme as a whole has achieved lower effects than it is its potential and the reality in individual projects.

Main recommendations

The evaluation proposes a number of systemic and procedural recommendations. The main addressee of recommendation and the level of severity (scale 1-3) are given in the brackets for each recommendation:

- To maintain the Programme, but modify it; to prepare a conceptual document/strategy for the Programme, at least in the scope of the vision, goals, intended changes to be achieved, method of implementation, expected outputs, results and impacts, incl. procedures for effective monitoring. Further, to make strategic decisions on the setting of the key parameters of the Programme (MoFA DCHA; 1). The evaluation team suggests, among other things, to introduce support (Programme) through the following three tools/modalities: (i) A tool for conceptual, systematic and long-term support to policy partners - ideally in the form of a multi-annual framework agreement; (ii) A tool to support innovative or pilot approaches/solutions that go beyond the individual needs of the implementer, are applicable to a broader range of actors and can be used eventually for a wider range of entities, or the whole system of FDC CR; (iii) A tool to support the individual capacity needs of NGOs - both basic and professional capacities of NGOs that operate or have the potential to operate in the Czech Development Cooperation. In addition, Partnership should not be singled out as a separate area, but supported (not as a mandatory part) within projects, under all three proposed aid modalities.
- To strengthen by all means the longer-term nature of support (MoFA DCHA/CDA; 1) – To ensure, in negotiations with the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, predictable and multi-year funding that will be reflected in the multi-year programming/concept document of the Programme as well as in the preparation and negotiation of the state budget, to enable support for multi-year projects and continuity of projects.
- To set up an approach to systematically work with outputs and results across projects at the programme level (CDA/MoFA DCHA; 1) – To establish a policy officer position at CDA; to organize various forms of meetings with applicants and beneficiaries to share and discuss outputs and results achieved in projects and experiences from project implementation; to create an interactive library of project outputs, for example in the form of an online database.
- To strengthen the administrative and professional capacity of the Programme Administrator (CDA/ MoFA DCHA; 1) – To strengthen the expertise at the CDA side so the relevant staff are equal partners of the individual applicants/beneficiaries; to strengthen the administrative capacity of the CDA and reduce with appropriate tools the high turnover of the Programme's project managers; to consider a systemic project to support the capacity of the CDA/MoFA to streamline the management of the FDC CR.
- To create and foster an enabling environment for cooperation and partnership across the Programme actors, or more precisely across all actors of the FDC CR (MoFA DCHA and CDA, with cooperation of MoFA Department of Economic Diplomacy; 1) – To promote and cultivate an environment conducive to mutual acceptance of the various actors of the FDC CR as partners, through a variety of meeting and networking formats among applicants/beneficiaries and other actors from the different sectors.
- To revise the project appraisal process and establish compulsory procedures for the appraisal of projects (CDA/ MoFA DCHA; 1) - In particular, to adjust the project appraisal process and the set of appraisal criteria so that they are clearly linked to and reflect the purpose and objectives of the Programme, both in terms of content and the way they are applied; to emphasize the transparency of the appraisal criteria and the whole appraisal process.
- To simplify selected administrative tasks (CDA; 2) - In particular, not to increase the existing administrative burden, but to look for ways to reduce it, mainly to introduce an electronic subsidy system.
- To ensure awareness of the Programme (MoFA DCHA and CDA, cooperation with MoFA Department of Economic Diplomacy and representative offices; 3).

This is a relatively broad set of recommendations, which is not only directed at the Programme itself, but also targets the whole system of the Czech FDC. The evaluation team does not assume all recommendations will be implemented immediately and all at once by the relevant addressees, and that a major step change will take place immediately. However, it is a set of recommendations, the gradual implementation of which will represent small steps towards not only a better set-up of the reviewed Programme, but also towards a more efficient system of the Czech FDC as a whole.

