



HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA IN THE OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND IN THE PROJECTS OF SELECTED CZECH NGOS

by Katarína Šrámková for FoRS – Czech Forum for Development Co-operation

1. Human rights agenda in the official development cooperation of the Czech Republic

The following summary of the Czech official development cooperation (ODA) from the perspective of human rights and reduction of global poverty is based on an analysis of current policy documents of the ODA: the new Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid and Amending Related Laws from July 2010 (Act 151/2010, further mentioned as *Act on ODA and HA*); the new Development Cooperation Strategy of the Czech Republic for 2010 – 2017 (further mentioned as *ODA Strategy*) the new Transition Promotion Strategy and Description of Transition Promotion Program (TRANS) (further mentioned as *Concept of Transition Policy*) from July 2010. The key highlights are the following:

- The Act on ODA and HA, Transition Promotion Strategy as well as the ODA Strategy for 2010 – 2017 **explicitly mention human rights.**
- The current policy documents of the Czech ODA and also the respective actors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (Department of Development Cooperation – DDC and Department of Human Rights & Transition Policy– DHR) **reflect the interrelation and interdependence of development activities with human rights promotion, civil society, democracy and good governance of public affairs.**
- **The main departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whose agenda relates most to the area of human rights (i.e. DDC and DHR) are aware of the indivisibility and interdependence of the so-called first (i.e. political and civic rights) and second generation (i.e. economic, social and cultural rights) of human rights.**
- The ODA Strategy states that “[t]he strategic objective of Czech development policy is to eradicate poverty and promote security and prosperity through effective partnership, enabling poor and undeveloped nations to realize their development goals.”
- The Concept of ODA for 2010-2017 reflects the participation and accountability of both the partner government and local people: “the Czech Republic will accentuate, more than ever, the **involvement of local people** (governments, elected representatives, civil society organizations) at **all stages of the project cycle in order to strengthen ownership**, and thus the effectiveness, of cooperation.”
- Many approaches to the issue of human rights in development (such as the Human Rights-Based Approach, HRBA) share the view that **human rights should not only be goals, but also tools for development.** It is therefore significant that **human rights are defined as one of the cross-cutting principles in the ODA Strategy.** In practice, the **perception of each generation of human rights is different.** It can be inferred from the analysis of the policy documents that neither DDC nor DHR perceive economic, social and cultural rights as a specific tool of development cooperation and see their fulfillment rather as a goal of the ODA activities. In this respect, it can be questioned whether the **political commitments of the Czech Republic in the area of development cooperation will be adequately reflected in the context of its existing legislative commitments in the field of human rights.** According to the ODA Strategy, the Czech Republic “manifests *solidarity* with people in poor, underdeveloped countries, and understands that it should share *responsibility in addressing global problems largely related to poverty.*” From the human rights approach, the elimination of global poverty is indeed an **obligation of all developed countries**, including the Czech Republic.
- **The ODA Strategy is to a certain degree incoherent** in perceiving the human rights concept itself. When defining human rights as a cross-cutting topic, the document mentions “*basic human, economic, social and labour rights.*” The ODA documents should however clearly reflect that economic and social rights are also “*basic human rights.*”
- As opposed to the ODA Strategy, the **Transition Promotion Strategy refers to the human rights conventions ratified by the Czech Republic.** The Strategy mentions the importance and interrelation of all human rights generations. In practice, however, the Department of Human Rights is only active **in areas of**



political and civic rights. This narrow understanding of human rights in the world is **mainly based on the specific Czech experience** in the process of social, political and economic transformation.

- The Czech transition experience can represent a major advantage for the Czech Republic compared to other countries, taking into account the **importance of local context, needs of local people and their ownership.** In this respect, the focus of the Czech transition policy on the capacity building of the (local) civic society in authoritarian countries can be viewed as beneficial.
- **It is positive that the Czech Development Agency regards human rights as a cross-cutting topic/principle within its proposal assessment procedure.**

The above listed facts show that the ODA has a **basic political framework theoretically reflecting the connection between human rights and development cooperation.** However, a higher degree of integration of human rights in Czech foreign policy is missing.

Mid-term evaluation can be seen as a good opportunity for introducing the guiding principles of a human rights-based approach (emancipation, participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment) and other suitable tools **into the Czech ODA.** This also applies in connection with the MDG revision which will officially start in 2012.

The Czech Republic has the potential not only to become an EU member countries with a progressive development policy reflecting the factual interrelation of the human rights agenda and development (such as Denmark or Sweden), but also to **be actively engaged in the process of strengthening the role of human rights in EU development policies.** This potential position would be **in line with the recommendations of CONCORD** towards the EU to adopt the human rights-based approach to development in its efforts to reduce global poverty.

2. Human rights in the projects of selected Czech development NGOs

The following section summarizes four development cooperation projects implemented by four various Czech NGOs which are members of FoRS. The objective of the analysis was to find out to what extent the respective development NGOs consider human rights and the human rights-based approach in their projects. The evaluation focused on the reflection of five key aspects of the human rights-based approach to development: **emancipation, participation, non-discrimination and empowerment, local government accountability.**

The case studies were prepared by the organizations themselves in cooperation with the author of this analysis. The selected organizations differ in size, capacity and target countries in which they operate. Caritas Czech Republic and People in Need are large organizations and often operate in priority countries of the Czech Republic. SIRIRI and OnEarth – Society for Fair Trade are on the other hand small organizations whose projects are focused on non-priority countries of the Czech Republic. The role of the organizations within the projects and the focus of the projects also vary. The **Caritas Czech Republic** project “*Support of prevention and early detection of female cancer in Samegrelo and Shida Kartli, Georgia*” was a 9-month pilot project, publicly tendered by the Czech Development Agency. It was followed by “*Support of prevention and early detection of breast and cervical cancer in women in Samegrelo and Shida Kartli regions II*” in the years 2011 – 2013. The **People in Need** project “*Prevention of child trafficking in Armenia*” is a long-term (27 months) project which is in line with the European neighborhood policy and the Armenian Action Plan (especially in chapters “Prevention of trading of minors” and “Enforcement of judicial power”). The project of **SIRIRI** “*The School*” is the organization’s own project and it is a reaction to an initiative of the central African mission of the Discalced Carmelite order to support an existing elementary school in the central African city of Bozoum. The project of **OnEarth – Society for Fair Trade** “*Do you know what you’re playing with*” is a 3-year European campaign aiming at the improvement of working conditions in the globalized toy industry.

It should also be noted that some of the projects had not been finalized at the time of writing of this analysis and their evaluation could therefore not be included.

- **All the analyzed projects can be viewed in the international human rights framework.**



- **In two projects (SIRIRI and Caritas CR), human rights did not play an explicit role** within the project cycle, however they were reflected implicitly during the identification of the objective and strategy of the project. Furthermore, Caritas CR **reflects human rights in its ethical codex** which is part of the mission manual.
- The project of People in Need was led by the Section of Humanitarian and Development Aid where **human rights are one of the cross-cutting principles**; active support of human rights is explicitly mentioned in the vision and mission of People in Need.
- The project of OnEarth – Society for Fair Trade **explicitly refers to human rights and requests their adherence to by corporations**.
- All the analyzed projects emphasized the principles of **participation and non-discrimination of vulnerable groups and individuals**. This approach spontaneously leads to considering human rights principles and human rights themselves during implementation.
- All four NGOs are **aware of the practical indivisibility of human rights**. The pragmatic approach to development prevails over the explicit accent of all human rights obligations and demands for their immediate fulfillment, the NGOs prefer **gradual socioeconomic strengthening of the vulnerable groups and individuals** and gradual support of abilities of poor individuals or communities to escape poverty.
- In their projects, Caritas CR and SIRIRI do not challenge the government as the duty-bearer towards its citizens who are right-holders. These two NGOs **focus on building capacities and abilities of citizens** to claim their rights.
- In the projects of OnEarth – Society for Fair Trade and People in Need, there is an explicit reference to the accountability- aspect. In the former case, it is above all the **responsibility of corporations**, in the latter case it is the **cooperation with the government to strengthen its capacity to deliver its human rights obligations** – attention is given to good governance and law enforcement.
- **In all the case studies, the awareness-building and dissemination of information not only towards the primary target group, but also to broader public played an important role**. This helped to build awareness about global poverty issues in a global context.
- *A weakness* of the analyzed projects is the **low participation of the target groups (especially the vulnerable groups) in the decision-making process and project implementation** – in this respect the target groups maintained a role of passive recipients of development aid instead of becoming active partners in development cooperation.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the **NGOs in this analysis are aware of the interrelation between human rights and development; to a certain extent they also apply the principles of the human rights-based approach to development in their practice. This is however done mostly in an implicit way and not as a specific objective.**

The analysis has revealed that the NGOs have difficulties in approaching the human rights principle of government accountability; NGOs focus in their projects on capacity building of right-holders without emphasizing the responsibility of the respective partner countries.