

Project Title: The Baltic Conference on Development Cooperation

Implementing Organisation: Latvian NGDO Platform (LAPAS)

Project Manager: Ingrid Skuja

Total Budget: 20 653 euros

Total Request from the Fund: 20 653 euros

Project Scenario

The accession to the EU in May 2004 created a challenge for Latvia not only to participate in Development Cooperation but to also face up to its new role as a donor. As a member of the EU, Latvian Development Cooperation policy must follow the principles of the EU Development Policy.

The *Basic Principles for the Development Cooperation Policy of the Republic of Latvia* were issued in February 2003. Following this, *Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2005* was approved on 31 August 2004 and was the first step toward formulating Latvia's Development Cooperation Policy. In January 2005 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) established the Department of Development Cooperation Policy. *The Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2006* has set out clear priorities for the implementation of bilateral and trilateral development cooperation projects as well as creating public awareness on the objectives, priorities and projects to build a national consensus supporting the development cooperation policy and its implementation. In January 2006 two important policy documents are due to be reviewed by government: *Development Cooperation Policy Program 2006 – 2010* and *Financing from state budget for Development Cooperation Policy implementation 2006 – 2010*.

Although basic structures for Development Policy are set, the situation in Latvia can be characterised by lack of political goodwill, adequate knowledge or experience and low public awareness on Development Cooperation issues. Research conducted in 2005 on the *Public Attitude towards Development Cooperation* indicates that public understanding on Development Cooperation has not changed dramatically, despite public awareness initiatives. 44% of total respondents agreed that Latvia should provide assistance to poorer and less developed countries (in the year 2004 it was 38 %). 44 % of respondents do not agree that assistance should be provided to these countries (in year 2004 it was 51 %) as they felt that Latvia itself being a poor country required the government to focus on the welfare of its own population in the first place.

Latvian NGOs are increasingly interested in playing a role in the implementation of Development Cooperation activities. However, the opportunities for this are very limited as a result of the following:

1. With the lowering of the ODA allocation, the budget for Development Cooperation projects is only 150 000 LVL
2. There is insufficient capacity to participate in the EU Calls for Proposals. Capacity in the case of all stakeholders- the government lacks sufficient expertise in its understanding of development cooperation and NGOs lack relevant professional and practical experience as well as funding opportunities.

Latvian NGDO Platform, established in 2004, promotes Development Cooperation not only among its member organisations but also lobbies for formulation of Development Policy. The upcoming Parliament elections at the end of 2006 is a good opportunity to raise public awareness and encourage Development Cooperation issues higher on the political agenda at the national and regional levels.

The proposed project for the Presidency Fund will help to build the capacity of Latvian NGDO Platform and help in establishing its role and profile as a professional and fully-fledged partner in dialog between the key stakeholders in Latvia and the stakeholders at the EU level.

This project will serve as a preparatory phase for the planned *Baltic conference on the Development Cooperation*. It will address the key capacity building needs that have been identified by Latvian NGDO Platform and its members. These include the following:

1. Acquiring knowledge on the level of participation of Latvian civil society in the Development Cooperation activities
2. Highlighting the role of coherent Development Cooperation policy at national level and
3. Building partnerships at the international level in order to engage more effectively in the EU Development Cooperation Policy implementation.

The main goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity of Latvian NGDO to be able to put Development Cooperation policy issues high on the political agenda within Latvia and the region and to contribute to the formulation of a comprehensive Development Cooperation Policy in Latvia.

Research and Building a Latvian NGDO Database

To achieve this, LAPAS will begin with conducting research on the level of expertise and participation of Latvian civil society in Development Cooperation activities in order to map the lobbying capacity of Latvian NGDO Platform. This research will also generate information that will direct future activities of the National Platform as well as help in updating its database.

As a lobbying body, Latvian NGDO Platform represents the expertise of its members at the national and international level in the implementation of the EU Development Policy. The Latvian NGDO Platform has created a database with 23 member organisations. The information available on this database does not adequately describe the expertise of its members. Furthermore, there is limited information about other Latvian NGOs' level of participation in Development Cooperation activities. These gaps in available information weakens the lobbying capacity of the Latvian NGDO Platform at national level as government officials are sceptical about the expertise of NGOs. The research results will also be available for public consumption, helping to raise public awareness on development cooperation issues.

Roundtables

In order to promote dialogue between all relevant stakeholders to highlight the importance of a coherent Development Cooperation Policy in Latvia and across the Baltic region, Round table discussions will be organised.

During discussion(s) priority topics for upcoming Baltic conference will be identified. One of the issues will be establishing clear collaboration mechanisms among all relevant stakeholders formulating and implementing national Development Cooperation Policy. It is important to understand the expectations, the role and possible input of each stakeholder involved in Development Cooperation Policy implementation (NGOs, government officials, Members of Saeima (Latvian Parliament), Members of European Parliament, representative of municipality as well as of academicians, private sector and media) in order to create effective collaboration. Another urgent issue is financial possibilities for Development Cooperation projects especially for NGOs. In year 2005 only 100 000 LVL of the State ODA budget were available for Development Cooperation projects. Only 0,67 % (6650 LVL) of this amount was contributed to activities of NGOs due to lack of co-financing mechanisms for NGOs. It is expected that in the beginning of this year a grant scheme with total available amount of 150 000 LVL for Development Cooperation projects will be established by MFA. First Calls for Proposals will be

launched for all interested institutions, including private organisations and municipalities. It is obvious that amount available within this grant scheme limits the creation and implementation of Development Cooperation activities by NGOs. Possible solutions of this problem will have to be considered during round table discussions.

The content and the results of the round table discussions will be available on-line through the most popular policy Internet resource in Latvia, the non-profit non-governmental public policy website www.politika.lv. The website is run by Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS. This website has already published many resources (interviews, articles, policy documents) on development cooperation and is a popular and credible source for the target audiences of this project (politicians, civil servants, policy analysts, students, teachers, and journalists). Publishing the discussion transcripts on www.politika.lv has several advantages- a large, engaged audience, opportunities for interactive discussions and possibility to draw attention to other policy documents/papers related to the development cooperation topic through links to resources in Latvia and internationally.

Study Visits

An important condition for strengthening NGOs role in the implementation of the Development Cooperation Policy is through entering into partnerships with counterparts in old member states. Eligibility criteria set out in EU Calls for Proposals in most of cases allow NGOs based in new member states to participate only as partners in Development Cooperation or Public Awareness raising projects. Traditionally, Latvia has good relations in different fields with the neighbouring Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden and Denmark. Therefore the Latvian NGO Platform is planning to carry out experience exchange and study visits to national Platforms in Nordic countries. This Exchange of experience is hoped to raise professional and lobbying capacity of Latvian NGO Platform, but also open opportunities for members of the Platform to engage more effectively in the EU Development Cooperation Policy implementation.

The objective of the study visits is also to get acquainted with members of Platforms in Nordic countries, to discuss potential future co-operation topics, project development and with this to become a player ourselves on the scene on Development Cooperation Policy implementation. Specific objectives are:

- To get an overview on the activities and different ways of lobby work of Platforms in Nordic countries,
- To introduce the work of Latvian NGO Platform to the hosting organisations,
- To give them an overview on Development cooperation policy and “hot topics” in Latvia

One of the topics discussed will be the common position with regard to Development Cooperation Policy formulation and slow implementation as well as identification of priority topics for the Baltic Conference on Development Cooperation and to agree the role of Nordic countries counterparts in this conference.

Project Sustainability

By the year 2010 Latvia has committed itself to 0,17 % of its Gross National Income (GNI) towards Official Development Aid (ODA). The ODA index in Latvia in 2004 was 0,06 % of GNI and 0,061 % of GNI in the year 2005. Official Latvian ODA commitment for the year 2006 is even less than the year before – 0,057 % of GNI. In order to implement *Development Cooperation Policy Program 2006 –2010 a Concept of Financing from state budget for Development Cooperation Policy implementation 2006 – 2010* has been developed by MFA. Currently this document is under consideration for approval. It proposes 3 models for financing Development Cooperation Policy implementation till year 2010 – 0,1 %, 0,13 % or 0,17 % of GNI. Amendments of this Concept reveals that the government is considering approval of the model 0,1 % of GNI justified by a limited national budget and lack of Development Cooperation experience in comparison to other EU states. It is known that Estonia, for example, has already made the same commitment - 0,1 % of GNI for Development Cooperation policy implementation

by the year 2010. This again proves that Development Cooperation Policy issues need to be highlighted and put regularly on the political agenda not only at national levels but also at regional levels. That is one of the main reasons why Latvian NGDO Platform is planning to organise the *Baltic conference on Development Cooperation* in autumn 2006 bringing together all key actors concerning Development Cooperation from Baltic states with the support of the MFA and other donors. This conference will gather key stakeholders including Members of Parliament (MPs), Academicians, Civil Servants and key figures from Civil Society Institutions from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and from experienced Nordic countries where Development Cooperation Policy has been successfully formulated and implemented. The first Baltic Conference will address the key issues and serve as a platform to establish the future direction of advocacy activities for NGOs and their National Platforms in the Baltic regions towards strengthening the National Development Policy in line with the EU Development Policy.