HOW TO COMMUNICATE OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE?

The Czech Republic case

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Introduction: without communication there is no cooperation

Professional development cooperation naturally needs pressure to communicate these commitments effectively. That is the rule not only for the recipient countries but for the donor countries as well. Without building awareness of the significant development of cooperation, it is impossible to promote its further continuation and even possible increase. In donor countries, there is a clear need to see official development assistance (ODA) as a natural part of the country's foreign policy.

We can describe not only the historical development of aid but also the development of communication. Current aims of development communication could be defined with these words:

"Our understanding of development communication emerges from our understanding of development as empowerment and communication as shared meaning. It involves issues at all levels of consideration: the grassroots, large communities, regional, national, and global levels." [1]

This text analyzes the communication situation in the Czech Republic, which has experienced a transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one in the last three decades. Therefore, it has a unique transformational know-how that is trying to promote world development cooperation.

Rise and stagnation of awareness of development cooperation in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic’s interest in active development aid is declared within ODA’s framework as a “full-fledged part of foreign policy”. [2] The Czech Republic’s development cooperation strategy for 2018-2030 sets out five thematic priorities:

1. Building a stable and democratic institution
2. Sustainable management of natural resources
3. Agriculture and rural development
4. Inclusive social development
5. Economic growth

This policy identifies the Czech Republic partner countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Moldova, and Zambia. The Czech Republic places special emphasis on ensuring coherence between development cooperation and humanitarian activities (development-humanitarian nexus).[3]

Czech development aid is also supported by international cooperation - especially the UN Millennium Development Goals and the subsequent UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Czech Republic is a partner in development aid under the Czech-UNDP Partnership for SDGs.[4] Further development obligations are connected with membership in the European Union.

The Czech Republic’s ODA should be illustrated with an increasing amount of money for this purpose. According to official numbers from the Czech state, ODA amounted to 6,639 billion CZK (305.53 million USD) in 2018 and amounted to 0.13% of GNI.[5] Unfortunately, it is well below the EU plan (0.7% of GNI). However, in absolute amounts, it is still an increase in allocated money.


[6] OECD. Development Co-operation Profiles – Czech Republic. Oecd-ilibrary.org. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4e4c3092-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623_en&csp_+b14d4f60550d057b456d1730d8fcea3&itemID0=oeoecd&itemContentType=chapter
However, the media interest and awareness of the Czech ODA does not copy this increasing trend. We can confirm it with a quantitative analysis of media content. In a graph, we can see the stagnation of media interest in the Czech ODA subject since the middle of the last decade.

From this simple quantitative analysis, we can describe not only the stagnation of media coverage of development cooperation. We can see strong coverage only in online media (blue), very little in print media (purple), and lack of audiovisual media coverage. In 2019 there were 87 online articles about the subject, 18 pieces in the press, only three on television, and none on the radio. It does not mean that we can not find development issues in other media content. We can discover resonating human stories or coverage of non-governmental humanitarian and development organizations' activities, such as People in Need or ADRA. Nevertheless, there are not very often explicitly stated that these activities are supported by official development assistance. Another significant result of the analysis shows that online media information is very often from official sources and does not flow further into the mass media. We can mention the Czech Trade Promotion Agency’s robust media activity without any significant influence on the mass media.

A thematic composition of media texts is also interesting for the overall picture of reporting on development cooperation. Without the surprise, we have found robust reporting about main partners in development cooperation (EU, UN), political heavyweights in this area (Tomáš Petříček, CSSD), and some priority countries of the Czech ODA.

[7] Quantitative analysis through the media database Monitora.cz in the period from 1.1.2010 to 1.8.2020 according to the keywords “development cooperation Czechia.” The analysis of similar keywords, such as “development aid,” shows the same trend of stagnation of media coverage. Blue indicates online resources; purple print, radio, and television are minimally represented.

[8] Quantitative analysis of the most frequent publishers and the most frequent sources through the media database Monitora.cz from 1.1.2010 to 1.8.2020 according to the keywords “development cooperation Czechia.”
We can conclude that the communication of Czech official development assistance has some shortcomings.

From a simple quantitative analysis, it is clear that:

1. The number of media texts on official development assistance has stagnated since the middle of the decade.
2. Media texts on official development assistance are overwhelmingly in the online media.
3. Online media texts are primarily represented by the official government media and do not penetrate the mass media; therefore, they do not reach a broad audience.

**How to effectively support media visibility**

The described communication problem consists of not only an imperfect relationship with the media but also insufficient use of own communication channels. Therefore, in this chapter, it is necessary to describe today's media's typology and specifically of mass media.

In 2014, marketing expert Gini Dietrich came up with a new media typology for marketing professionals.[10] Her PESO model identifies four types of media.

- **Paid:** Exchanging money for distribution
- **Earned:** Trading valuable content for an established authority's audience
- **Shared:** Amplifying content through your own audience
- **Owned:** Aggregating an audience that seeks you

[9] Quantitative analysis of the most common terms through the media database Monitora.cz in the period from 1.1.2010 to 1.8.2020 according to the keywords "development cooperation Czechia."

The shared media needs more substantial support within the PESO concept with a clear digital strategy on social networks. Better cooperation with the mass media can increase the impact on the earned media. Therefore, it is better to consider the news criteria more carefully. Fulfilling both content and formal criteria can promote the development cooperation agenda more effectively.

The Czech republic uses all four types of media to communicate development cooperation, but not effectively and synergistically. The owned media itself are represented by the Czech Trade Promotion Agency’s online production, the government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or by print production as the magazine Moderní ekonomická diplomacie.

Paid media as advertisements or supplements to periodicals can sometimes be useful, but it is definitely not the main communication channel.

On the other hand, shared and earned media need a strong incentive. The content of development cooperation projects is often elusive and surprising. Therefore, it could be a good material for the digital world of social networks.

Even more important is the support of the earned media, especially the space in the mass media. This channel is not working now because of a lack of content from owned media into earned media, from government websites to print or audiovisual mass media.

In addition to the PESO model, it is necessary to describe the second communication concept, and these are the so-called news values. They explain why only some events become news and why only some stories attract mass media. The reason is that the media routine clearly favors only some criteria such as unambiguity, surprise, and many others.

One of the latest research on news values comes from experts Tony Harcup and Deidre O’Neill, who highlighted the following values in today’s world: [12] Exclusivity, Bad news, Conflict, Surprise, Audiovisuals, Shareability, Entertainment, Drama, Follow-up, The power elite, Relevance, Magnitude, Celebrity, Good news, and News organization’s agenda.

Researchers added several new criteria reflecting current technological and social developments. For example, audiovisual content and social media efficiency are becoming rapidly crucial for mass media. Development cooperation agendas can satisfy many of these content and formal criteria: There are exclusive and often surprising cooperation projects in touch with many conflicts. Stories are relevant because of the Czech state’s participation, and if they have good audiovisual content, they can quickly become a media agenda. Or in Dietrich’s terminology, they can succeed in the earned media.

The right mix to support the visibility of the development aid agenda should, therefore, include:

1. The shared media needs more substantial support within the PESO concept with a clear digital strategy on social networks.
2. Better cooperation with the mass media can increase the impact on the earned media.
3. Therefore, it is better to consider the news criteria more carefully. Fulfilling both content and formal criteria can promote the development cooperation agenda more effectively.


Case study: effective communication of SDGs

There are many examples where more intensive development cooperation communication could be suggested. One of them may be the domestic communication of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the Czech Republic.

The overall media awareness of SDGs in the Czech Republic is gradually increasing. In 2019, a record 370 texts on SDGs were produced in the Czech media.

![Graph showing media mentions of SDGs](image)

However, the subsequent analysis of the most frequently used terms suggests that the goals themselves are not mentioned very often, but rather personified into people (Greta Thunberg), institutions (UN), or companies (Tesco).

None of the 17 long-term visions appears in the Czech media as a priority for the Czech Republic or Czech development cooperation.

That leads to the hypothesis that SDGs’ communication - or at least some goals - can be better targeted in the Czech media landscape.

In the current long-term concept of development cooperation, the Czech government explicitly mentions several SDGs. The priority of Good Democratic Governance includes SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The importance of Sustainable management of natural resources includes SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 13 Climate Action. The priority of Economic transformation and growth includes SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy and SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. And the focus of Agriculture and rural development includes SDG 2 Zero Hunger and SDG 15 Life On Land.[14]

However, not all SDGs are perceived by the Czech Republic’s inhabitants equally urgently and under the priorities of the Czech government and development aid. A 2019 survey by the IPSOS agency shows that only 3 out of 10 Czechs had heard of SDGs. It is already clear that awareness should be raised.

The Czechs declared that the most important goal for them is Health and Quality of Life (SDG 3), followed by Drinking Water and Sewerage (SDG 6) and Decent Work and Economic Development (SDG 8).

According to the public, the Czech government’s priority should be the Drinking Water and Sewerage (SDG 6), Health and Quality of Life (SDG 3), and Climate Action (SDG 13) goals. We should also mention that the Drinking Water and Sewerage and Climate Action targets’ importance has increased significantly in the last two years.

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[13] Quantitative analysis of the number of articles through the Monitora.cz media base in the period from 1 January 2015 to 1 August 2020 according to the keywords ‘Sustainable Development Goals.’

Based on a simple comparison of the state’s priorities in development cooperation and the population’s preferences, the hypothesis is that media strategy for communication of SDG 6 Drinking Water and Sewerage could gain adequate visibility in the media very quickly. That issue is strongly perceived as necessary in the Czech Republic and is one of the Czech foreign cooperation priorities.


**Conclusion: effective media coverage for effective help**

Communication on development cooperation in the Czech Republic has reached a crossroads. Years of increasing media attention to this topic have stopped and have been stagnant. It turns out that the distribution of information sources is not appropriate either - government and other institutional media are very active. Still, the content does not penetrate the earned media, nor does it encourage sharing the content. Official media texts are not attractive to today's media: they lack exclusivity, often without audiovisual offers. It is necessary to change it. Considering the media criteria appropriately, it is not hard to promote the content to the mass media very attractively.

Vast issues of development cooperation must also be prioritized in terms of communication. That is already partly done through the official selection of countries to which development cooperation is primarily directed. But it is also necessary to reflect the domestic sentiment in the Czech Republic and, for example, choose from the SDGs some goals and related projects that will be positively evaluated by the majority of the population. An example in the Czech context should be SDG 6.

To further develop Czech development cooperation, it would be appropriate to acquire the following **ten communication recommendations:**

1. Regularly monitor and evaluate the media coverage of development cooperation. If the cooperation resources are increasing and the media attention is not, it is a reason to change the communication strategy.
2. If the vast majority of texts on development cooperation are from the official media, likely, the content is not attractive to the mass media. That needs to be changed.
3. Specific development cooperation projects are exciting with audiovisual material. Therefore, it is appropriate to have a digital strategy for social networks and promote the content on the shared media.
4. Specific development cooperation projects are also engaging with suitable content and formal offer according to the needs of the mass media.
5. The mass media like exclusivity. If some news material exists, it smart to start with an offer only to one medium exclusively.
6. Official development assistance must be broad, but the communication strategy must be narrow and with clear and longer-lasting priorities.
7. In the case of the Czech SDGs, the development aid policy and the domestic population's preferences intersect in the SDG 6, so water should have a communication priority. This intersection is naturally different in each state.
8. All complex problems can be appropriately personalized and simplified. An example of a complexly damaged ecosystem in a remote country should be illustrated in the media by a specific person or community without access to drinking water, who should receive development cooperation.
9. Every communication strategy needs a proper media mix according to the type of media. An official dry description of the implemented cooperation can fit the government website, but the mass media needs a personal story and social networks a half-minute video.
10. Every communication strategy needs a timeline. Even before starting the cooperation project, it is appropriate to think when the results can be communicated in media and what types of media are proper to effectively reach the population as a whole or only selected target groups.
Resources


OECD. Development Co-operation Profiles – Czech Republic. Oecd-ilibrary.org. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4e4c3092-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623-en&_csp_=b14d4f60505d057b456dd1730d8fcea3&itemigo=oecd&itemContentType=chapter.


Other sources:
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