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The Internationalization of Solidarity: A View from the NGO Sector

The seminal role that civil society played in overturning the communist system and the impact of foreign assistance on the development of the NGO sector, especially after 1989, have been acknowledged by researchers. However, the international activity of Polish civil society has been addressed less often. The internationalization of the concept and practice of solidarity can be traced back to the Solidarity Trade Union's activity in the 1980s. After 1989 newly established NGOs started sharing their experiences with NGOs from other post-communist countries. Poland's NGO sector capitalized on this experience and started sharing the know-how acquired during its transformation with other countries to the east. The first secular NGO providing humanitarian aid was also established in the early 1990s, thus complementing the missions run by the Catholic Church in the Global South. Polish NGOs engaged abroad were involved from the start in the development of the bilateral government aid program. Polish NGOs emerged as natural partners for the Polish aid program due to their prior hands-on experience and know-how in international cooperation. Over the last 12 years, Poland has moved from being an emerging donor to an OECD-DAC member, while Polish NGOs engaged in development cooperation, humanitarian aid, and global education are continually increasing their capacity to practice solidarity by supporting communities in the Majority World and raising awareness about the interconnectedness of our world at home.

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