

**TRANSPARENCY IN DEVELOPMENT  
COMMUNICATION**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The aim of this study is to present an understanding of the role of openness and transparency in communication processes in the field of development cooperation. The study illustrates the value of transparency in development communication practices from many perspectives and applies it to models for transparency in government communications.</p> <p>The empirical part of the study consists of a qualitative case study focusing on transparency in the online development communication of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). It was collected through nine semi-structured interviews of development cooperation professionals from partner NGOs of the MFA. The objective of the empirical part was to clarify the perceptions of the partner NGOs regarding transparency and openness of the MFA's online development communication as well as to receive suggestions for more transparent communication.</p> <p>The results show that transparency has a significant role in development communication and that development cooperation professionals recognize its importance. The results of the study illustrate factors that improve and hinder transparency in the development communication of the MFA.</p>	
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<p><b>Tiivistelmä</b></p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää avoimuuden ja läpinäkyvyyden merkitystä kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvässä viestinnässä. Tutkimus tarkastelee läpinäkyvyyden roolia kehitysviestinnässä monista näkökulmista ja reflektoi sitä aikaisempiin teorioihin sekä malleihin, jotka käsittelevät julkishallinnon viestinnän läpinäkyvyyttä.</p> <p>Empiirinen osa toteutettiin laadullisena tapaustutkimuksena, jonka aiheena oli ulkoministeriön kehitysviestinnän läpinäkyvyys, erityisesti verkkoviestinnän osalta. Tutkimusaineisto koottiin yhdeksän puoli-strukturoidun haastattelun avulla, haastatellen ulkoministeriön kumppanuusjärjestöjä. Empiirisen osan tavoitteena oli selvittää kumppanuusjärjestöjen näkemyksiä ulkoministeriön kehitysviestinnästä, erityisesti verkkoviestinnän osalta, sekä saada parannusehdotuksia läpinäkyvämpään viestintään.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että läpinäkyvyydellä on merkittävä rooli kehitysviestinnässä, ja että kehitysyhteistyön ammattilaiset pitävät sitä tärkeänä. Tuloksissa kuvataan, mitkä tekijät hankaloittavat ja edistävät läpinäkyvyyttä ulkoministeriön kehitysviestinnässä.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

International development efforts have taken an accountability turn in recent years. During the past decade, transparency has been part of the political agenda in countries and organizations in all parts of the world. Citizens expect to be able to know where their money is going and to hold their governments accountable (Fairbanks et al., 2007, 23).

Technology has given rise to various open government initiatives, which focus on enhancing openness and transparency. Since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), final documents from some of the most important High Level Forums in international development field, "accountability" and "transparency" have received much more attention in the discourse of international development agencies.

According to Piotrowski (2007, 6), governmental transparency provides a clearer picture of what is happening inside a government to the public. Thus, people can evaluate the performance of governmental agencies and the management of public resources. Since publics are affected by decisions made by governmental agencies, they have a right to know how the decisions were made. It is also about a matter of trust; when publics feel that they have the necessary information about agency decisions, they are more trusting in the actions of the agency (Heise 1985).

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) coordinates Finland's development policy and manages most of Finland's official development assistance (ODA). Openness and transparency are central principles of Finland's development cooperation. According to Finland's Development Policy Programme 2012,



effective and responsible development policy and development cooperation require openness from both the donor countries and their partner countries. Since the official development cooperation funds consist of taxpayers' money, communication on the use of funds must be transparent. The results of the development cooperation must be communicated openly, and stakeholders must have access to this information. Transparency of aid flows is also critical to good aid delivery. Proper tracking of all donor money should be ensured so that citizens, parliamentarians, and experts can hold both governments and donors to account.

Online communication has provided new opportunities to improve transparency and plays a central role in this research. Access to information is a core precondition for the public to be informed. Online communication and social media have opened new and innovative methods for interaction between citizens and governments and have extended the possibilities for transparent communication beyond the capabilities of traditional media. They provide a platform for two-way communication, enabling citizens to communicate back to the government.

## **1.1 Justifications for the Study**

Academics note that there is an essential relationship between providing quality government information to the public and a healthy society (Bertot et al. 2012; Fairbanks et al. 2007; Garnett 1997; Graber 2003). Governments are "obligated" to communicate with their citizens (Viteritti 1997; Graber 1991; Garnett 1992; Lee 1999; Paluszek 2002). A healthy democracy requires that governments provide information to the public about decisions, policies, and actions—creating an informed public. Transparency plays a key role in government actions and in decision-making processes to create an informed public (Fairbanks et al. 2007, 26).

Florini (2007, 3) highlights the importance of transparency to democratic values: "The essence of representative democracy is informed consent, which requires that information about government practices and policies be disclosed. And in democracies, by definition, information about government belongs to the people, not the government." According to the author, public access to government information can be seen as a "right to know." Citizens can hold governments accountable only if they know what the government is

doing, what the government is supposed to do, and what their own rights are. Taxpayers have a particular interest in holding their governments accountable for the use of considerable amounts of public funds.

Transparency and accountability are also necessary for aid effectiveness. The number of both donors and development activities has increased dramatically during last decades, while the average size of the projects has shrunk. This has made aid more fragmented. Transparency is needed regarding the coordination of the activities between the growing number of donors.

There is also academic justification for this study. Governmental transparency is a relatively new subfield of study in public affairs, but there are published academic books and articles that help to define and measure governmental transparency (e.g., Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins 2007; Florini 2007; Hood & Heald 2006; Piotrowski 2007; Roberts 2006). In comparison to the private sector, the field of public sector communications has received limited professional attention. However, the consequences of inefficient government communications can be harmful. Citizens can lose their trust in the government if they feel that the government is not transparent in its actions. This, in turn, can threaten the health of a democracy. Governments often deal with confidential issues and matters of great sensitivity, which makes the communication processes challenging (Garnett 1996, 666).

The focus on transparency in development communication is specifically relevant due to the many international aid transparency initiatives, such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and Open Aid Partnership. At a time when aid budgets are under pressure and scrutiny, there is a need to improve transparency and accountability. In spite of the worsening economic situation in recent years, many donors have increased the amount of development assistance. Today more than ever, maintaining development commitments requires increasing efforts in terms of communication, accountability, and transparency in development activities and finance.

## **1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to clarify transparency as an important criterion in government communications, especially in the field of development com-

munication, and to find ways in which development communication could be improved and made more transparent at the MFA of Finland. The research intends to identify areas for integration and collaboration between the studies of transparency in governmental communications and development cooperation.

This research intends to clarify how the Finnish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) perceive the transparency in online development communication of the MFA. Since the beginning of 2003, the MFA has supported Finnish NGOs via a Partnership Agreement Scheme. Today, over a half of the financial support for organizations' development cooperation has been channeled to the partner organizations. In this study, the goal is to find out how this important stakeholder group perceives transparency in development communication, especially in the online development communication of the MFA. This topic is investigated through semi-structured interviews.

One of the objectives of the research is to find suitable theories to support and explain governmental communication, transparency, and accountability as a phenomenon and concept and to implement these theories in the fields of development cooperation and development communication. The intention is to define what kind of characteristics transparency includes in the field of development cooperation and what requirements this sets for communication. Once these characteristics are clarified, it becomes easier to provide suggestions for how Finland could improve its transparency and what this requires.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

Although government transparency is an often-used concept, in terms of communication, it is not clear. The aim of this thesis is to clarify the concept of transparency in government communications and its role in development communication. Online communication and social media have significantly increased the potential and possibilities to provide transparent data, and citizens expect to have access to data from their governments. This study intends to find out how online communication can contribute to government transparency, especially in the field of development cooperation. The research problem is relevant for the case organization, the MFA, but also for the field of development communication in general.

## **1.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The theoretical part of the study is based on the literature about transparency in public sector communication, transparency in development communication, and on studies that discuss the role of online communication in promoting transparency.

There are two communication frameworks that have been specifically created to theorize on the importance of transparency in public sector communication. In 1985, J. Arthur Heise developed the Public Communication Model as a guide to help communicators increase confidence between the government and its citizens through transparent and open communication. The model gives five suggestions: that governments should communicate in more open and transparent ways; that agencies need to use a variety of channels to disseminate information; that government communicators need to develop better channels to gather perspectives and feedback from all of its relevant audiences; that politics should not play a role in the communication process; and that top administrators need to take the lead in creating a culture of communication within their agencies.

Later Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins (2007) continued Heise's work by developing the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication. The model can be visualized as a three-dimensional triangle or as a tetrahedron. The base of the model is a commitment to transparent communication processes, and the three sides, or key elements of the model, are communication practices, organizational support, and the provision of resources (Fairbanks et al. 2007). These models will be further explained in section 2.4.

## **1.5 Research Structure**

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The following chapter, chapter two, explores the treatment of transparency in government communications literature. Chapter three presents an introduction to development cooperation and development communication. Following this, in chapter four, development communication in Finland is discussed. In chapter five, the findings collected through nine semi-structured qualitative interviews with the

MFA's partner NGOs are presented. Subsequently, chapter six analyzes the findings of the interviews and the answers to the research questions. The final chapter concludes the study with recommendations for future academic research and professional applications.

## 2 TRANSPARENCY AND GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the existing government communications literature. The chapter is divided into four sections. First, transparency as a concept and its role in communication is discussed. Then, the literature on government transparency and communications is reviewed, discussing the concepts of government transparency and accountability and focusing on the responsibilities of a government in communicating with its stakeholders. Following this, government communications and government online communications are discussed. Moreover, the role of social media in government communications is discussed. In the last section, two public sector communications models that contribute to transparency are represented.

### 2.1 Concept of Transparency

Transparency has attracted attention in recent years, but a commonly agreed upon definition of transparency still does not exist in the academic literature. Transparency is a broad concept (Hood 2006).

Notions of transparency are often built on the concept of openness and on access to information. Government transparency can be defined as the ability of public groups to find out what is going on inside government. In other words, it is the degree of access to government information. According to Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007, 308), "access to information is a central component of governmental transparency, and governmental transparency is

one tool to achieve accountability.” As Fairbanks et al. (2007, 25) cite Cotterrell (1999, 414), “transparency is the availability of information on matters of public concern, the ability of citizens to participate in political decisions, and the accountability of government to public opinion or legal processes.” Florini (2007, 341) follows in the same direction, stating that people who are affected by decisions should be enabled to participate in the decision-making process.

Rawlins (2009, 75, 79) summarized elements found in the transparency literature, developing the following comprehensive definition: “Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies and practices . . . to be transparent, organizations should voluntarily share information that is inclusive, auditable (verifiable), complete, relevant, accurate, neutral, comparable, clear, timely, accessible, reliable, honest, and holds organization accountable .”

According to Transparency International, an influential anti-corruption NGO, transparency is “. . . about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. It is about knowing why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members and businessmen act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the general public can hold them to account. It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.”

However, according to Fairbanks et al. (2007, 26), sharing information openly is not considered enough to be completely transparent; organizations also need to understand and be responsive to their publics. The two-way symmetrical model of communication of Grunig and Hunt (1984, 22) shows that organizations with the most effective communication practices try to fully understand and involve their publics in the decision-making process. Stakeholders in this study are understood as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, 46). According to Freeman’s stakeholder management theory, organizations that are able to identify their stakeholders and recognize stakeholders’ needs are better equipped to take appropriate actions.

Balkin (1999, 393) identified three types of transparency, which “work together but are analytically distinct”: informational, participatory, and accountability. In order to build and maintain trust with stakeholders, all three qualities are needed. Thus, his definition includes three important elements: 1) information has to be truthful and useful; 2) stakeholders need to participate in identifying the information they need; and 3) reporting of an organization’s activities needs to be objective and balanced, holding the organization accountable (Balkin 1999, 393).

Thus, there are several definitions of transparency. Some of them define transparency simply as access to information. Most scholars relate the concept of transparency to openness, accountability, and trust. However, some authors go beyond access to information and include participation or involvement in public. In this thesis, the definition of Fairbanks et al. (2007) is followed, emphasizing access to information and the possibility for participatory communication.

## **2.2 Governmental Transparency**

The ideal of governmental transparency is generally treated as a prerequisite for a healthy democracy. However, the discussion about governmental transparency is fragmented, and strong definitions are lacking (Meijer, 2012).

Many scholars have pointed out how crucial public trust is to a government and tied the concept of transparency to building trust. Scholars have suggested that good communication and interaction with the public can increase trust since open and transparent access to information will increase the public’s knowledge of government activities. According to Piotrowski (2009, 21), there is a fundamental link between transparency and trust in government.

Trust in institutions of democratic governance is critical for social and economic progress for a many reasons. Trust helps reach efficiencies in public sector administration and reduce complexities (Raab 1998). It also makes citizens more willingly and voluntarily obey the regulations and demands so that the government doesn’t need to use costly control mechanisms (Tyler 1998, 290). Without trust, the public may not be willing to obey governmental demands and regulations or may even actively resist governmental poli-



cies (Nye and Zelikow 1997, 277; Levi 1998, 88). This, in turn, can hinder the government in performing the tasks required of it (Nye and Zelikow 1997, 276).

Government transparency is also required to prevent corrupt behavior. According to Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes (2012, 80), the lack of transparency can, among other things, make corruption more attractive and reduce the level of risk. It can also encourage people to opportunism and weaken cooperation in organizations. Lack of transparency can create informational advantages for privileged groups and strengthen their control over resources. Moreover, in public sector positions, it can limit the ability to make selections honestly and efficiently.

These all, in turn, tend to weaken social trust. This is the case especially in highly corrupted countries, where corruption erases trust in governmental agencies. According to Transparency International, transparency is “the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.”

The analysis of Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007, 306) suggests that there are differences between the levels of demand for transparency between individuals. Some people don't find access to government information very important, whereas others have a strong need for it. Publics also differ in terms of the type of government information they want to access. There are several factors that have an impact on the public's demand for transparency: political ideology, age, trust in government leaders, frequency of contacting the government, and especially the perception of the current access to government information. Therefore, to be able to meet the transparency needs of the stakeholders, the organization has to know what publics want and need to know. Stakeholders need to be included in identifying the information they need to make correct decisions.

### **2.3 Government Communication**

Successful communication between government and citizens is critical for the effective implementation of governance. Despite the clear relevance of

government communication for society as a whole, there is a lack of analyses of government communication (Heinze et al. 2013, 2).

What is exactly meant by the term “government communication” varies from author to author. First of all, there seem to be differing ideas regarding the public and private sectors’ communications from one to another. The majority of current public relations models do not distinguish between the public and private sectors; instead, the same models are applied to both sectors. There are also differing views, however, according to which the public sector organizations have unique characteristics that differentiate them from private companies. Therefore, also communication should be treated differently (Liu & Horsley 2007, 378).

One of the key factors that fundamentally differentiates government communication from private sector communication is the fundamental right to receive information on the authorities’ public decisions. As stated in the recommendations on governmental communication by the Prime Minister’s Office, the most fundamental right regarding central government communication is the right to receive information on the authorities’ public decisions and the preparation of them (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2010, 11). This means, in practice, that there is a principle of right of access and an obligation of the authorities to disseminate information. Furthermore, official communication faces many norms and administrative principles that it needs to follow.

Heinze et al. (2013, 2–4) divide the academic literature on government communication into three categories: 1) government communication in specific contexts, 2) online government communication literature that tends to emphasize its dialogical orientation, and 3) articles that focus on the planning, implementation, evaluation, and success of public campaigns. In the case of the present study, the focus is on the literature from the first two categories.

### **2.3.1 Government Online Communication**

Online communication channels, such as websites and social media, have become a popular communications tool for many governments. Often the advanced communication technologies are speculated to enhance public trust in government by facilitating government transparency and government-citizen interactions, both of which are a central foundation of democracy. The government is expected to better fulfill its transparency responsibili-

ties because of the opportunities the online media provides. In particular, previous studies have highlighted the role of online communication in terms of government transparency and interactivity (Harris et al., 2009; Sadeghi, 2012; Searson & Johnson, 2010).

Citizens and businesses increasingly use digital channels to interact with governments. The online provision of public services increases access and provides greater convenience for users while reducing costs for all involved, including governments (OECD, 2011). The interactive nature of the Internet allows citizens to take a more active role in the citizen–government relationship. It is not surprising that the academic literature on online government communication tends to emphasize its dialogical orientation (Heinze et al. 2013, 3).

A democracy requires continuous examination of the stakeholders in society. Governments today are facing an increasing amount of new demands from stakeholders for successful communication. First of all, the significance of communication in society has grown, and this has created new expectations for central government communication (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2010, 11). Citizens have grown more autonomous with the assistance of newer forms of online communication. In addition, younger citizens take part in online dialogue. Online dialogue has replaced the one-way information flow dictated by political organizations as sources of information (Schneider 2010, in Heinze et al. 2013, 2). The study by Heinze et al. (2013, 1) suggests that successful government communication demands considerable proximity to citizens, interactive feedback channels, and systematic participation by citizens in political processes.

Dialogical communication can improve stakeholders' possibilities for participating, understanding, and involvement. Moreover, dialogue-oriented approaches to government communication have the potential to increase stakeholders' trust in political institutions and participation because "This new paradigm makes government more transparent, more accountable, and more trustworthy, since the citizens, government officials, and other stakeholders participate in policymaking, content creation, data collection, knowledge sharing and structuring, and collaborative decision making" (Chun et al. 2010, 5).

However, although many governments tend to be moving toward transaction-based and interaction-based services, it has been criticized that the current online applications still remain mainly as one-way communication (Norris & Reddick, 2013; Welch & Hinnant, 2003).

Also, stakeholders confront the threat of information overload and disorientation. One of government's basic tasks is, naturally, to direct public attention and ensure consent with its policies (Fairbanks et al. 2007). This becomes harder in the middle of a growing amount of information.

### **2.3.2 Role of Social Media in Governmental Transparency**

The use of social media has increased in public agencies in recent years. Because social media are based on the connectedness of users through their direct and immediate communication or sharing of information, ideas and opinions, government communication through social media have greater chances to be interactive and dialogic. Typical social media channels include blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), multimedia sharing services (e.g., YouTube and Flickr) and wikis (e.g., Wikipedia) (Bertot et al. 2012; Sadeghi, 2012; Scott, 2006).

The purposes and approaches of these tools vary. Some of them are better for disseminating information from the government to citizens (e.g., blogs), whereas others require active participation from both the government and public (social networking services, discussion forums, etc.). However, these all allow users to communicate, share content, and interact in a social environment (Bertot et al. 2012, 81–84).

With prevalent expectations for the two-way interaction, compared with traditional websites, social media have been defined as “a collection of Internet-based tools that enhance communication through openness and interactive capabilities” (Sadeghi, 2012, p. 126).

Bertot et al. (2012, 86) indicate that government use of social media offer three major opportunities for information communication technologies (ICTs) in re-shaping the relationship between the government and the public: 1) promoting democratic participation and engagement; 2) facilitating the pro-

duction of materials between governments and members of the public; and 3) crowdsourcing innovations and solutions.

Social media facilitate users' participation in conversations and in the sharing of information with each other. It also empowers publics in the sense that anyone having Internet access and the necessary related skills can publish or broadcast information through social media technologies (Bertot et al. 2010, 266). In addition, as Kavanaugh et al. (2012, 481) note, critical events of interest and issues of concern can be identified as spikes in the social media volume and streams. Monitoring the important themes and patterns over long periods of time can provide officials valuable insights into the perceptions and behavior of the community that wouldn't be possible to collect through traditional methods.

Despite the several opportunities social media provide for government communication, they also bring challenges. The problems relate to social inclusion, accessibility, usability, and technology literacy. Not all households have access to the Internet; this should be taken into account when planning the use of social media. There are also other barriers to access, such as disabilities. Adaptive technologies are required to enable access to everyone.

There is a need for users to be able to understand and use the technologies. Technology literacy refers to the ability to understand and use technologies. Usability, in turn, refers to how well users can learn and use technology to achieve their goals and how satisfied they are with that process. The success of social media also depends on education and culture (Bertot et al. 2010, 268).

In low-income countries, such preconditions often are not met. In chapter three, the opportunities and challenges are discussed in the context of development cooperation.

In addition, despite its highly interactive nature, the interactivity on social media is sometimes suspected in government communication. For example, by analyzing 1800 postings on Twitter accounts of 60 government agencies, Waters and Williams (2011) came to a conclusion that the updates were often used to provide information and share multimedia resources (e.g., video clips), rather than engaging in discussion with stakeholders. However, Waters and Williams (2011) did not underestimate the value of one-way communication on Twitter, but stated that one-way communication between

government and citizens is often necessary. According to the scholars, a one-way model and a two-way model are not exclusive in government communication. Nevertheless, they stated that government communicators should not to be “overly promotional” on the social media site (Waters & Williams, 2011).

## **2.4 Public Sector Communications Models for Transparency**

Two public sector communications models are presented in this research. In 1985, Heise created the Public Communication Model to facilitate the role of communicators in responding to the lack of trust in government. Following this and highlighting the significance of and necessity for transparent communications, Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins (2007) conducted a study to build on Heise’s Public Communication Model.

### **2.4.1 Public Communication Model**

Heise (1985) created the public communication model to help government communicators to communicate more effectively with all stakeholders. The model consists of the following five elements:

- Openness: communicating transparently and openly about all positive and negative information;
- Reaching out to citizens through a variety of alternative communications channels;
- Soliciting accurate, comprehensive, and timely feedback on public policy issues;
- Separating politics and government communications; and
- Empowering top management, and eventually all employees, in their role as communicators.

According to Heise (1985, 209), the most important part of the public communication model is that “governments officials would make available publicly all releasable information – whether they consider it positive or negative in nature – in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal.”

### **2.4.2 Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication**

The aim of the research of Fairbanks et al. (2007) is to explore perspectives on the role of transparency in government communication and factors influencing the level of it. It builds upon the public communication model developed by Heise (1985). The study was based on 18 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with professional communicators working across various departments in the United States federal public service. The study established that the federal public sector communicators strongly value transparency. They described positive results as “increased public support, increased understanding by the public of agency actions, increased trust, increased compliance with agency rules and regulations, an increased ability for the agency to accomplish its purpose and a stronger democracy” (Fairbanks et al. 2007, 33).

Based on the results of the interviews, Fairbanks et al. (2007) developed the Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication (Figure 1), visualized as a tetrahedron. The tetrahedron is composed of four triangular faces that describe the factors of transparency. The base of the model is communicators' commitment to transparency as a value. The three other faces, or key elements of the model, are 1) communication practices, 2) organizational support, and 3) provision of resources (Fairbanks et al. 2007, 33).

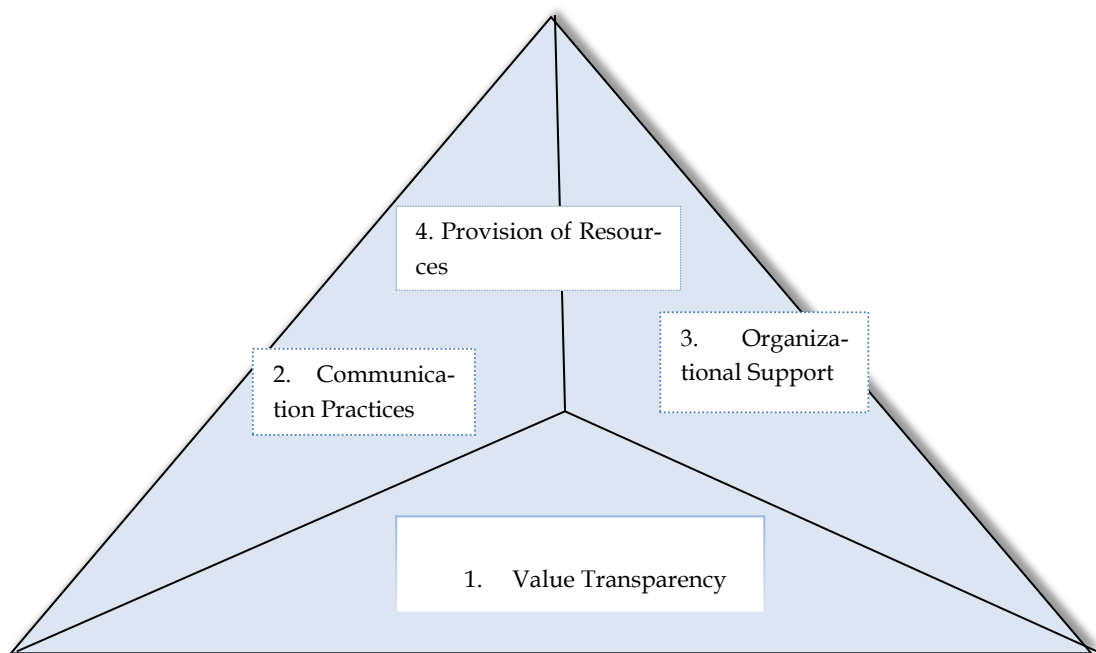


FIGURE 1 Three-dimensional Model for Transparency in Government Communication

First, the base of the tetrahedron, "Value Transparency", is the commitment of the communicators to transparent communication processes. Communicators that participated to the study related their belief that transparency in government is essential to a democratic society. The personal convictions impacted organizational transparency as evidenced by communicators' discussion of their individual efforts to get information out to the publics they serve. When communicators value transparency and understand the importance of it, the other elements of the model impact the level to which transparency is reached (Fairbanks et al., 2007, 29-33).

Second, the model illustrates the importance of transparent communication practices. In order to reach transparency, communicators need to adopt practices that allow open information sharing. These include working to improve agency relationships with the publics they serve through responding to public needs, seeking and incorporating feedback and providing information out to the public through a variety of channels. Traditionally, governments have been seen to be one-way distributors of information, informing publics only about issues they are willing to share. In their study, Fairbanks et al. (2007, 33) refer to the two-way symmetrical model of communication, strategic man-



agement, and stakeholder management practices as ways to improve the agencies' understanding of segmented publics and to share understandable information with the publics. They highlight the importance of two-way communication, which stresses the importance of listening to the public and gathering feedback from it, which is also stressed by various other authors (Grunig 1997; Freeman 1984; Heise 1985; Garnett 1992).

The third element of the model is the organizational support. Fairbanks et al. (2007) describe organizational support as administrations understanding the importance of transparency and ensuring that is communicated to all staff. The attitude administrators and managers have towards transparency determines "the tone for how transparent an agency will be." Together they can create an organizational culture that supports transparency. The communication structure of the agency also affects the level of transparency because a communicator can only share information to which he or she has access (Fairbanks et al. 2007, 30–34).

According to Fairbanks et al. (2007, 31), politics is another factor that has an impact on the organizational support for transparency. Although public sector communications should follow the principle of political neutrality, scholars agree that politics is inseparable from government communications. In government agencies, many positions are politically appointed. Political appointees have an incentive to present the information, naturally, according to their political interests instead of political neutrality. Fairbanks et al. (2007, 31) argue that, ideally, politics would not have an impact on what information is shared with the public.

The final element of the model is the provision of resources. This element underscores that communicators should have sufficient time and human and fiscal resources to be able to communicate transparently (Fairbanks et al., 2007, 34).

The views of the respondents in the study of Fairbanks et al. (2007) showed that the communication processes Heise suggested, as well as the models of public relations and principles of stakeholder management, are necessary for transparent communication. In addition, the respondents' insights went further in this study, providing more a comprehensive picture of factors that influence government transparency. The respondents also pointed to agency mission, to resource needs, to communication structure, and to administra-

tors' influence on communication as the organizational factors that have an important role in communication practices and in determining the level of transparency.

## **3 COMMUNICATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the role of communications in the fields of development policy and development cooperation. The chapter is divided into four sections. First, the field of development cooperation is introduced. Chapter two presents stakeholders in the field of development cooperation. Next, transparency in development communication is discussed. The last section presents the role of online communication in promoting transparency.

### **3.1 Introduction to Development Cooperation**

Development cooperation or development assistance is financial aid given by governments and other agencies to support the economic, environmental, social, and political development of developing countries. The terms development aid, international aid, and foreign aid are widely used, too. In this study, the focus is on official development assistance (ODA), which is a measure of government-contributed aid compiled by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

#### **3.1.1 Millennium Development Goals**

One of the major goals of development co-operation continues to be the reduction of poverty - an objective mentioned even in the Millennium Devel-

opment Goals (MDGs). The MDGs provide the agreed upon overall aims of development policy. Alston (2005, 755) argues that, for development communication, the MDGs are the most prominent initiative on the global development agenda. According to Giffard and van Leuven (2006, 2), they are “the first truly global effort to eradicate poverty.” The MDGs derive from the Millennium Declaration, a statement adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 at a special meeting attended by 147 heads of state or government.

The first seven goals focus on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and ensuring environmental sustainability. The eighth goal calls for the creation of a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade, and debt relief.

Every goal has been specified by its own set of targets so that implementation can be measured. The MDGs set a mandate for wealthy countries to increase development assistance, relieve debt, and allow poor countries fair access to their markets and technology, whereas developing countries are supposed to improve policies and make their own governance stronger (Giffard & van Leuven 2006, 2).

### 3.1.2 Official Development Assistance

Development cooperation is usually measured on the basis of the Official Development Assistance, ODA. By official definition, ODA flows are flows of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective. It is the public funding provided to developing countries through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) – Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Since ODA is taxpayer-funded, the donor country needs to justify using the people's money. It is one of the most important instruments of cooperation between rich and poor nations. In 2012, the net disbursements of the ODA were \$126 billion, representing 0.29% of donors’ combined gross national income (OECD DAC Statistics).

The aid agencies comprise bilateral and multilateral agencies. Multilateral aid is delivered through international organizations such as the various agencies of the United Nations, the World Bank, and international development banks. Bilateral transactions are those undertaken by a donor country directly with an aid recipient. They also include transactions with national and international non-government organizations. The majority of the main donors are members of the DAC, a forum of major bilateral donors established to promote the volume and effectiveness of aid.

The DAC records all resource and official development assistance flows to developing countries in line with common criteria. Members of the DAC report detailed information on their aid activities to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database annually.

An increasing part of development country cash flows are from other sources of funding. For instance, for some countries, migrant remittances are a major source of foreign exchange. However, in this study, the focus is on official flows of development assistance because it is the only reliable source of internationally comparable data on aid.

## **3.2 Stakeholders in Development Cooperation**

Accountability in development cooperation is a complex issue because multiple stakeholders, who are often accountable to many different actors, are involved. Donor agencies are accountable to their governments, parliaments and citizens, but also to partner country governments, recipient countries and to their citizens.

### **3.2.1 Major Stakeholders**

According to Ghosh and Kharas (2011, 4), greater transparency affects all major stakeholders in development assistance programs:

1. Taxpayers in the donor country: ODA is a voluntary transfer that ultimately consists of donor country taxpayers' money. As in all sectors

where taxpayers' money is used, they have a right to access appropriate and transparent information on how the money has been used.

2. Donor country governments: Greater transparency helps donor countries to plan, organize, and evaluate their development assistance programs better. Particularly the countries that provide aid through multiple agencies have a greater need to coordinate their activities to avoid overlapping and duplication.
3. Recipient country citizens: To be able to hold their governments accountable over any inconsistencies between aid received and aid spent recipient country citizens need to know what kind of aid has been received and how it has been used. A lack of transparency can cause confusion in recipient countries about the amounts and the intent of aid. This can result the donors being held responsible for weak results.
4. Recipient country governments: A large part of development assistance is provided to, and spent by, the governments of the recipient countries. This can be channeled either in the form of budget support, projects or other modalities of aid. The greater the transparency, the easier it is for governments to plan and organize their budgets. There are countries that are highly dependent on aid and in which ODA forms a large part of the budget. In many recipient countries, governments are facing problems in getting finding out how much aid is invested in their country, from whom, and how it is being spent. As Moon and Williamson (2010, 2) state, "poor information on aid means that recipient governments must make budgetary decisions based on partial, inaccurate, or unreliable information. This undermines the entire budget cycle, from budget formulation to delivery of services and later accounting, audit and assessment of the results of spending."

It is important to note some fundamental differences between general governmental services and development cooperation. In general, the government agencies have an incentive to provide the services to the intended beneficiaries, because the beneficiaries are also the ones who have the power to elect their politicians. In the field of development cooperation the situation is different. The beneficiaries of the actions of aid agencies are not the voters but the citizens in developing countries. Their ability to give feedback is weak and they do not have much power to influence the actions of the agen-

cies (Easterly & Pfutze 2008, 32). As a solution to the feedback problem, Easterly and Pfutze (2008, 32) suggest making “the operations of the aid agency as transparent as possible, so that any voters of high-income countries who care about the intended beneficiaries could pass judgment on what it does.”

In addition to the stakeholder groups that Ghosh and Kharas (2011, 4) list, there are other important stakeholders that need transparent information, such as other government agencies, parliament, civil society, and international partners. In this study, the focus is on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the donor country.

### **3.2.2 Civil Society**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are vital implementing partners in development cooperation. Domestic CSOs represent a significant constituency behind ODA, not to mention their role in public awareness-raising that can contribute to facilitating public debate in donor countries and build a sense of global citizenship (Tomlinson, 2012, 9).

Donors allocate a significant share of ODA with their domestic CSOs which generally support CSO work with developing country partners (OECD, 2011a, 19-20). Capacity building of developing country civil society partners is usually an explicit element of donors’ partnership agreements with their domestic CSOs.

For donors, one of the rationales for channeling a large part of their CSO flows through domestic partners have tended to relate to their track record in programme delivery and experience with donor priorities, such as rights-based approach, gender equality, etc. (Nilsson et. al., 2012). CSOs’ intermediary and capacity development role can also allow for a perceived neutral relationship to developing country CSOs that is sometimes preferable in conflict and post-conflict contexts, or when CSOs implement activities that might be interpreted as ‘political’, such as human rights. (Watson et. al., 2012, 25).

## **3.3 Transparency in Development Communication**

According to Ghosh and Kharas (2011, 4), complete transparency in development cooperation means that everyone can see how much aid is being giv-

en by each donor, to whom, for what projects, and when. It also means providing information about the impact of an aid project or program. Without comparable, timely and accessible information, it is impossible to know whose money is going where, for what purpose, and with what results.

There is a strong need for transparency in the field of development cooperation for various reasons. The field of development cooperation is very complex and broad, and it is often criticized for weak results. It is a challenging field to work in for various reasons. The reasons for weak performance are numerous, but as Linders (2012, 56) lists, four major factors are:

1. High complexity of the aid system
2. Enormous transaction costs
3. Lack of holistic and strategic approach
4. Lack of country-ownership

High complexity of the system refers to the number of donors and activities. First of all, there are a growing number of donors. In addition to bilateral donors, there are more than 150 multilateral agencies and an evergrowing number of NGOs. This increases fragmentation, which in turn creates high transaction costs. It's difficult, if not impossible, to coordinate between all the actors. By lack of holistic approach Linders refers to the project-focused style of planning in development aid; it's rather about the lifespans of individual projects than about longer-term strategic planning. Country-ownership refers to recipient governments' ownership over development policies and aid activities in their country. As Stiglitz argues, "social and organizational capital cannot be handed over to a country from the outside" (Linders 2012, 156). The needs of the recipients and national development strategies should always be implemented in development cooperation.

In addition, developing countries are usually among the most corrupted ones in the world, and the risk for being a target of corrupt behavior is high in development cooperation.

### **3.3.1 Development Communication**

Although the discipline of development communication has enjoyed a growing amount of recognition, its nature and full range of functions are still not fully known. There has been a shift in the development paradigm from one-way to two-way communication, which has broadened the discipline's theo-



retical body of knowledge and its practical applications. There is a vast literature about planning, production, and the strategic use of media in development, but there is significantly less material about the “dialogic” use of communication in development projects and programs (Mefalopulos 2010, 17).

Mefalopulos (2010, 11) makes a distinction between “communication *about* development operations and results” and “communication *for* development operations and results.” In the former case, the aim of communication is to inform audiences about development activities, initiatives, and results by disseminating information. In the latter case, communication is used to engage stakeholders, evaluate the situation, and formulate effective strategies, resulting in better development initiatives. It is more than disseminating information; it is about using communication to generate new knowledge and consensus in order to facilitate change. Both are important in the field of development cooperation (Mefalopulos 2010, 11). In the present study, the concept of development communication includes both “communication *about* and *for* development.”

Successful communication in development cooperation is about getting information out to particular audiences, receiving feedback, and responding appropriately. The idea is to build consensus through raising public understanding and creating well-informed dialogue among stakeholders, whether discussing an individual development project or broader economic reforms and from health, education- or rural development projects to financial or judicial reforms.

In addition, while providing the inputs for better and more sustainable design of development initiatives, development communication enhances the application of the rights-based approach, which is a factor increasingly embraced by major national and international organizations as a key element for development. Development communication facilitates people empowerment and supports democracy, transparency, and accountability – key elements of good governance (Mefalopulos 2010, 66–67).

The number of stakeholders is large in the field of development cooperation, and they are widely dispersed geographically. Thus, the communication activities are also dispersed among many locations and various stakeholder groups in donor countries, recipient countries, and among the international

donor community. In this study, the focus is on the communication processes of the donor agencies; however, listening to voices of different stakeholder groups, including those in the recipient countries, is crucial for the effective overall design of the project as well as for that of the communication strategy.

### **3.3.2 Accra Agenda for Action – A Starting Point for Transparency**

Incomplete information limits coordination, predictability, and accountability in development cooperation. The attempts towards a more systematic, transparent, coherent, and strategic approach to aid delivery were first stated in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, the outcome of the third High Level Forum (Linders 2012, 155).

To tackle the data and transparency challenges, the Accra Agenda for Action commits the donors to “better co-ordinate and link the various sources of information, including national statistical systems, budgeting, planning, monitoring and country-led evaluations of policy performance” and to “support, and invest in strengthening, developing countries’ national statistical capacity and information systems, including those for managing aid.” To improve predictability, it also commits the aid community to “provide full and timely information” on both actual and future aid flows. Accra includes an explicit commitment to make aid more transparent. More specifically, donors commit to “publicly disclose regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and, when available, results of development expenditure.”

### **3.3.3 Accountability in Development Cooperation**

According to Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), a major priority for partner countries and donors is to enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources. Mutual accountability is a process by which two or multiple partners agree to be held responsible for the commitments that they have voluntarily made to each other. It relies on trust and partnership around shared agendas to encourage the behavior change needed to meet commitments. Mutual accountability is very important in development cooperation because the relationship between providers and programme countries is inherently uneven. However, both par-

ties are equally accountable for the use of development resources as well as for development results.

Mutual accountability is also supposed to clarify and strengthen domestic accountability relationships between citizens and the state. Thus, according to it, donors and partner countries should join together to become accountable to their constituents, which are taxpayers in donor countries on the one hand and beneficiaries of ODA in partner countries on the other hand. The main focus in this study is on donors' accountability to the taxpayers, but the concept of mutual accountability is always important when discussing development cooperation.

A basic requirement for mutual accountability is transparency. If a receiver government knows about the external resources that are being added to its domestic resources, it can better plan and budget. Also, if a government transparently includes its parliament and citizens in development decisions, it can achieve better development results and in turn provide donors with the confidence that resources are being used effectively.

#### **3.3.4 Positive Effects of Transparent Development Communication**

Transparent development communication has various positive effects, both in the donor and recipient countries. First of all, it makes it easier to plan the use of money in recipient countries. Ghosh and Kharas (2011, 4) point to the Pearson Commission report from 1969 that at that early point identified the problem: "the present multiplicity of agencies and their lack of coordination lead to much unnecessary duplication of effort" (1969, 28). Now, more than 40 years later, the need for coordination is greater than ever before. The number of both donors and development projects has increased dramatically over the last decades. The average size of the individual projects has shrunk and in turn made the aid more fragmented. Fragmentation makes it very challenging to coordinate the activities between the donors and increases the risk of duplication and waste. It is simply impossible to coordinate the efforts without transparency.

Christensen et al. (2011, 1) have listed some positive effects on outcomes of transparency in development cooperation:

- Enables better coordination among donors.
- Makes greater specialization between aid agencies possible.

- Enhances the ability of recipient governments to effectively plan their budget expenditures.
- Allows stakeholders in both donor and recipient countries to engage the aid process more efficiently.
- Facilitates learning based on the accumulation of research, shared evaluations, and best practices.
- Permits citizens, the media, and watchdog groups to hold governments and their contractors accountable for how the aid is used.

Transparency is also an important tool against corruption. As discussed in section 3.3, many developing countries rank among the most corrupt ones in the world. Development assistance is less effective at reducing poverty, naturally, if it ends up going towards corrupted purposes (Easterly & Pfufze 2008, 41). Research suggests that more transparent aid is correlated to lower levels of corruption in recipient countries (Christensen et al. 2011).

### **3.4 Online Development Communication**

The need for improved transparency, coordination, and accountability has begun to drive the adoption of online communication within the management processes of the aid systems. There are several transparency initiatives that promote transparency and follow the principles of openness.

Linders (2012, 157) divides the technological opportunities into three categories: 1) open data; 2) open standards; and 3) web 2.0 interactivity. Open data includes data portals and information management systems. The idea of open standards is to create one common standard for all reporters that can be used for multiple systems. Web 2.0 interactivity means the use of social media (Linders 2012, 157–159).

Data platforms can help make public the essential components of development data. Many governments already publish large amounts of data, but they aren't necessarily useable. Data platforms have many advantages, especially in improving the possibilities for analyzing data. They can make data more accessible, discoverable, useable, disaggregatable, and machine readable (Linders 2012, 157). The most traditional database for development coop-

eration is the OECD's standardized Creditor Reporting System. The aim of the portals is to provide easier, more comprehensive access to aid data.

However, although the emerging data portals provide more data on development assistance, this information is not necessarily useable for all stakeholders. In addition, there is often a lack of consistency in terms and standards used, which makes the use of data challenging. One single database doesn't fulfill the needs of all stakeholders, but double-reporting should be avoided.

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was created to respond to these challenges. It was launched in Accra at the high level forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2008 and is currently the leading international standard for publishing foreign aid data. It is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to categorize and publish detailed information about development assistance. The aim of the IATI is to provide one common data standard that improves consistency among donors' reporting. It enables donors to publish data once to a common standard in a common format that can be used by many different systems. It intends to make aid information easier to access, use, understand, and compare.

However, contributing to more transparent development information is not a simple task. There are many donors that would be willing to provide more transparent data, but it isn't possible because of lack of resources. Improving transparency requires time, money, personnel, and organizational changes from donors. Adapting IT and reporting systems to global standards is usually the most challenging part of transparency processes. But once the reporting systems are in place, it saves money and time.

In addition to technical challenges, many organizations also face resistance against transparency efforts. According to Florini (2007, 3), "fear of how newly released information might be used or misused" and "entrenched habits" can hinder efforts to increase transparency and openness.

Transparency on development cooperation has been measured through various methods and transparency indexes. Indexes can be used to rank or benchmark donors according to their performance. According to Ghosh and Kharas (2011, 9), a transparency index can incentivize donors to carry out reforms in certain areas to improve their performance relative to other donors.



## **4 DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN FINLAND**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss development communication and cooperation in Finland. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, development policy in Finland will be introduced. The following section discusses the development communication at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the importance of communications to improve transparency. The last section discusses what has been done at the ministry to improve aid transparency.

### **4.1 Finland's Development Cooperation**

The majority of Finland's ODA is channeled through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). Development policy is an important part of Finland's foreign and security policy. Finland's development policy is based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations, with the primary aim of eradicating extreme poverty. In addition to reducing poverty and inequality, Finland supports the long-term goal of setting developing countries free from their dependency on development assistance by empowering their own capacities and strengthening their resources (Finland's Development Policy Programme 2012, 5).

Finland adopted a new development policy in 2012. Finland's development policy is founded on a human rights-based approach. This means that the implementation of development cooperation is based on human rights con-

ventions, promoting the core human rights principles such as equality, universality, self-determination, and non-discrimination. The approach is in line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. People who live in extreme poverty have equal rights, and support should be given to strengthening their resources and to improving their quality of lives ([www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi)).

The Development Policy and the Government Programme, together with related strategies, are the most important guiding instruments for Finland's development cooperation. The government guides the Finnish development policy through the Government Programme and the Government Resolution in Development Policy. The Parliament sets the financial framework for development assistance annually.

#### **4.1.1 Ministry for Foreign Affairs – Responsible for Development Policy**

The MFA has the overall responsibility for implementing development policy in Finland. Development policy is an integral part of the Finnish foreign policy. The MFA also has a coordinating role between key implementing parties, including other government agencies, ministries, and institutions as well as NGOs and the private sector.

The tasks of the ministry are divided between eight departments, and each department is subdivided into units. Three of them are responsible for policy coordination: 1) The Political Department, 2) the Department for External Economic Relations, and 3) the Department for Development Policy. Regional foreign and security policy, trade, development, the EU-related issues, and other affairs are handled by four regional departments: the Department for Europe; the Department for the Americas and Asia; the Department for Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia; and the Department for Africa and the Middle East. In addition, the Finnish Embassies are under the general guidance of the Regional Departments. The Department for Communications and Culture is the eighth department. All departments are at an equal level in the organization.



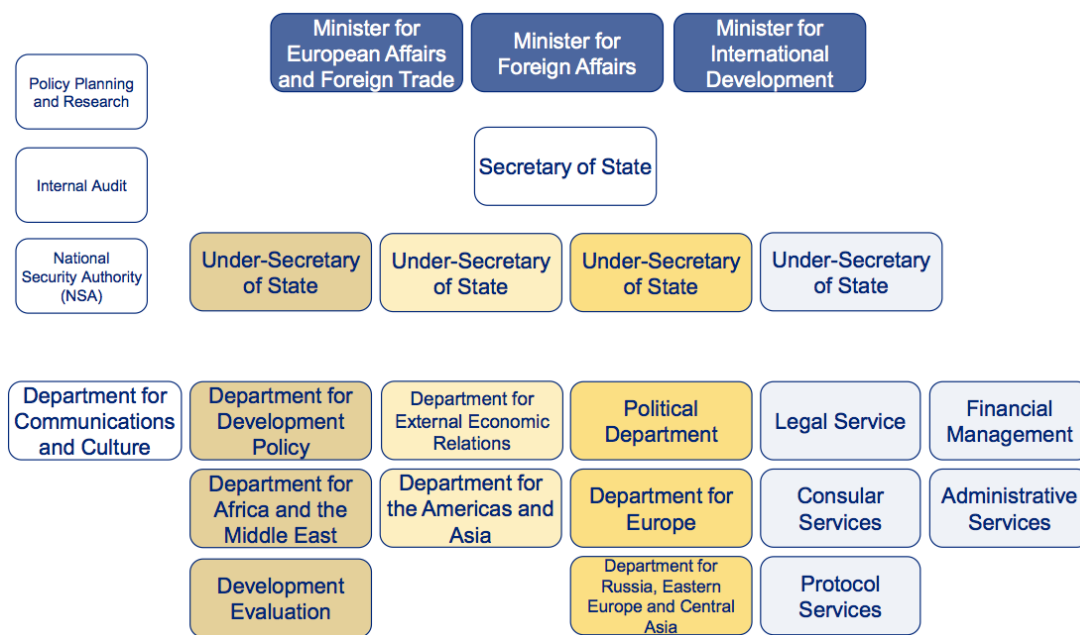


FIGURE 2 Organization Chart of the MFA

The Department for Development Policy has the overall responsibility for the planning, monitoring, and budgeting of Finnish development policy. It gives guidance related to development cooperation, including new methodologies, regulations, and instructions. Furthermore, it is responsible for the development of policy issues in the EU and the OECD-DAC. The department is also responsible for cooperating with UN agencies, international financial institutions, and NGOs.

The Regional Departments are in charge of the planning and implementing of development policy as part of geographic foreign policies in their respective regions. The departments are divided into sub-regional units. The personnel is divided into country teams that also include relevant personnel from the embassies.

#### 4.1.2 Transparency as a Central Principle of Development Policy

Openness and transparency are central principles of Finland's development cooperation, set out in the Development Policy Programme. According to the programme, effective and responsible development policy and development cooperation require openness from both donor countries and their partner countries.

The program refers directly to development communication in various parts:

*“Ministry for Foreign Affairs provides comprehensive information about the use of Finland’s development cooperation funding and the results achieved. In its reporting, Finland adheres to the criteria and definitions of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, which guarantees the comparability of data internationally. Development co-operation information systems will be made more user-friendly so that high quality and easily usable information is available both domestically and internationally. There are good examples, such as the World Bank’s Open Aid Initiative and IATI (the International Aid Transparency Initiative) which improve the international comparability of data.”*

*“Openness and transparency are also central principles of multilateral cooperation and cooperation carried out with civil society organizations. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland will communicate the objectives and results of development policy and cooperation and advocate for global development issues. Good interaction between the authorities, civil society and private sector as well as open and regular dialogue on development policy and cooperation will be enhanced” (Finland’s Development Policy Programme 2012, 13–19).*

These statements show that the importance of transparency and openness has been recognized at the policy level. In the Development Policy Programme 2012, the role of communication and transparency has been linked to various contexts.

#### **4.1.3 Finland's Diverse Forms of Development Cooperation**

The MFA is responsible for managing almost 80% of all ODA - eligible funds in Finland. These funds include Finland’s contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF), contributions to multilateral organisations, NGOs, humanitarian aid and country and region-specific development co-operation. The remaining 20 % of funds that qualify as ODA include Finland’s contribution to the EU’s Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI), which is managed by the Ministry of Finance, and other flows such as refugee costs and the Finnish development finance company’s (Finnfund) loans and equities. Table 1 represents the Finland's ODA from 2013, administered by the MFA and other state departments.

TABLE 1 ODA Administered by the MFA and by Other State Departments in 2013, MEUR and Percentage

<b>ODA administered by the MFA and by other state departments, 2013, MEUR and percentage</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Multilateral development cooperation</i>	278,2	25,7
<i>Country- and region-specific development cooperation</i>	247,3	22,9
<i>European Development Fund (EDF)</i>	47,1	4,4
<i>Non-country specific development cooperation</i>	62,1	5,7
<i>Humanitarian aid</i>	96,4	8,9
<i>Planning, support functions and evaluation</i>	11,5	1,1
<i>Support to NGO development cooperation</i>	105,3	9,7
<i>Concessional credits</i>	14,2	1,3
<b><i>In total, MEUR</i></b>	<b>861,9</b>	
<b>ODA flows non-administrated by the MFA, 2013, MEUR and percentage</b>		
<i>Finnfund loans and equities</i>	20,2	1,9
<i>Share of the EU development budget</i>	102,3	9,5
<i>MFA admin costs</i>	53,0	4,9
<i>Refugee costs</i>	15,7	1,5
<i>Civilian crisis management</i>	17,4	1,6
<i>Other ODA-eligible costs</i>	10,6	1,0
<b><i>In total, MEUR</i></b>	<b>219,2</b>	
<b>Official Development Assistance in total, MEUR</b>	<b>1081,1</b>	

Source: Based on data from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

As it can be seen from the table, the largest shares of aid are channeled through multilateral institutions and through country- and region-specific bilateral development cooperation. As a small donor, it is natural that Finland engages in partnerships with other bilateral and multilateral partners as well as with NGOs.

#### 4.1.4 Role of the Finnish NGOs in Development Cooperation

The MFA is the governing body that defines the rules of the NGO development co-operation projects in Finland. The manual The Development Cooperation of the Civil Society Organisations – Project Guidelines (2012) comprises the MFA’s conditions and instructions on development co-operation

projects by non-governmental organisations or, to use the more recently adopted term, by civil society organisations (CSOs).

Finland channeled around 10 % of the total development assistance through NGOs in 2013. Support for NGOs totalled more than 103 million euros. NGOs are active development partners in Finland; the MFA has close relations with NGOs and consults them on a regular basis. About three hundred Finnish civil society organisations participate in development cooperation activities either by implementing projects or by disseminating information about development policy and development issues.

At the national level, the 2010 guidelines for civil society highlight that it is important that as many Finnish actors as possible take part or have contact with development co-operation, as this contributes to raising public awareness and support for development and contributes to transparency in Finnish aid (OECD DAC Peer Review 2012).

Civil society organizations are an integral and essential part of Finnish development cooperation in its entirety. The activities of civil society actors make it possible to achieve results in areas and regions and among groups of people that the resources and tools of public development cooperation do not always reach. The extra value of development cooperation implemented by civil society organizations lies in the direct links between the Finnish civil society and that in the partner countries. Also, with help of the civil society actors, Finns' awareness of conditions in developing countries can be increased and public support for all development cooperation can be strengthened (Guidelines for Civil Society in Development Policy, MFA, 2010).

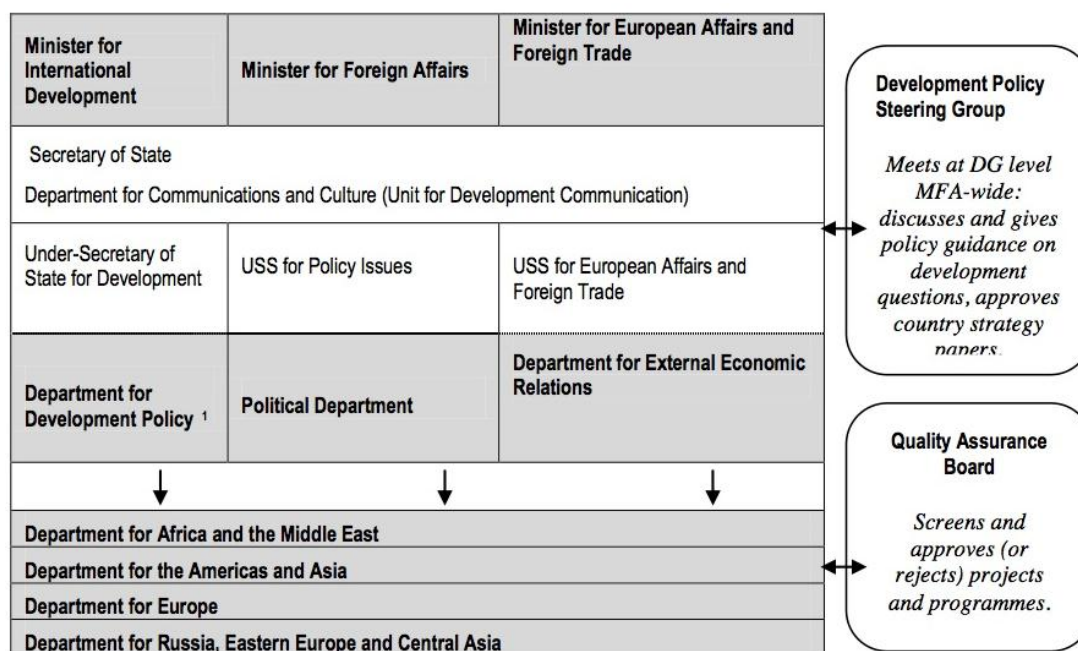
MFA's support to NGO projects is significant as a total sum, but it is even more significant for individual NGOs. If an NGO's project qualifies for the funding, the financial support from the MFA is substantial; the MFA may provide 85% of the funding or, in the case of projects for the disabled, even 92.5% of the funding of qualified development co-operation projects (MFA, Department for Development Policy, 2012a, 1). The remaining share is self-financing from the organization.

The sponsoring has various models such as the Partnership Agreement Scheme (MFA, 2012b) and support to non-governmental organisations for conference visits (MFA, 2010d). In this study, the main focus is on organiza-

tions of the Partnership Agreement. The MFA grants government support for partnership organizations to implement their development cooperation programmes. The organization is responsible for specific programme content and its implementation in accordance with these instructions issued by the MFA. In its programme plan, the organization presents its strategy, long-term development cooperation goals, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation methods, and timetable. The amount and use of support in respect of each partnership organization are defined in the programme plan and the decision on financing the programme. The partner organizations are further discussed in section 5.2.3.

## **4.2 Development Communication of the MFA**

The Unit for Development Communications within the Department of Communication and Culture is the main department responsible for raising public awareness on development cooperation. It communicates matters concerning development policy and development cooperation to the citizens, to the media, and to other stakeholders. It also provides global education information and materials to educational institutions and society at large and provides customer service related to development policy and development cooperation. It has a central role in improving transparency. The Unit for Development Communications collaborates closely with the other units of the Department for Communications and Culture as well as with other departments and units that implement development policy, especially the Unit for Development Policy. Figure 3 shows all the MFA departments with a role in development.



Source: Based on MFA (2012a), *Memorandum for the Peer Review of Finland*, MFA, Helsinki.

FIGURE 3 MFA Departments with a Role in Development Policy

The main tools of development communication are publications, reports, periodicals, and speeches. The MFA has two websites in which it communicates on development cooperation and development policy: 1) The ministry's official website at [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) and 2) [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi), which focuses on global development issues and development education. The MFA also organizes public information campaigns, events, and exhibitions.

The opinion polls on Finns' attitudes about development cooperation and development policy conducted by the MFA show that citizens have fairly positive views on development cooperation. In the MFA's 2012 development cooperation public opinion poll, 79% of Finnish people surveyed said they thought development cooperation was very important or important. However, only about one-fifth of the Finnish public is familiar with the MDGs. The Finnish public's trust in official information has been traditionally high. In the MFA's opinion poll, 83% of people thought that official information on development cooperation is either trustworthy or very trustworthy (Ulkoasiainministeriö. Suomalaisten mielipiteet kehitysyhteistyöstä 2012).

The MFA raises public knowledge on development cooperation in various ways. There is an annual scheme to support development information and education by NGOs. The Unit for Development Communications interacts

with the media by providing background information and responses to queries, supporting journalists' field trips, and giving assistance to media productions dealing with development issues and conditions in developing countries. The Unit obtains factual information from MFA headquarters colleagues and the flow of information from embassies for use in public awareness work.

### **4.3 What does the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland do to Increase Aid Transparency?**

There has been an effort towards greater transparency at the MFA. All policy documents and evaluations are publicly available on the Internet or upon request. However, it has been criticized that Finland could improve its culture of debate and that transparency does not result enough in public discussion.

As a member of the OECD, Finland has reported its Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows to the DAC since the 1970s. This is done through the Creditor Reporting System (CRS), which is one of the key sources of information on global development assistance flows. CRS collects and publishes a wide range of detailed statistical data on the development assistance.

Finland has been a signatory of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) since 2008, when it was first launched. As discussed in section 3.4., the aim of the initiative is to encourage all donors to provide comprehensive information in a comparable, useable, and timely manner. There are still some technical challenges ahead at the MFA before being able to report fully according to the IATI standard. Implementation is an iterative process involving staff from finance, technology, and statistics and may mean updating implementation schedules as a living document. In 2012, the MFA initiated a sizeable reform process for streamlining the internal data management systems and building a house-information system. The aim of the project is to automatize reporting and to provide easy and efficient access to data to users online.





## 5 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the methodology chapter is to describe and argue for the research design of the study. Silverman (2005, 99) defines methodology as “the choices one makes about cases to study, methods of gathering data, forms of data analysis and interpretation in planning and executing a research study.” The following chapters include a description of the case study approach and the underlying qualitative research tradition.

The purpose of this study is to highlight transparency as an important criterion in the field of development communication and find ways in which development communication could be improved and made more transparent at the MFA of Finland. This will be addressed in the theoretical section and reflected on based on the findings presented in the empirical section of the final chapter, Discussion and Conclusions.

For the empirical section of the study, a selected group of stakeholders was interviewed in order to collect information about their views on transparency of development communication and their perceptions of the current stage of the MFA’s online development communication.

To meet the previously outlined objectives, this study poses three research questions:

1. How do the partner NGOs perceive the transparency of the MFA’s online development communication?
2. What are the barriers to transparency in development communication?
3. What are the enablers of transparency in development communication?

The first research question aimed at clarifying perceptions about the transparency of the MFA's online development communication from many perspectives. First, the goal was to obtain a general evaluation of the current level of transparency, that is, how satisfied the interviewees were with it. Second, the interviewees were asked about the various contents and qualities of the MFA's online development communication in order to be able to clarify their satisfaction with the different elements of transparency.

The aim of the next two research questions was to discover various enablers of and barriers to transparency in development communication. By identifying these elements, it becomes possible to give suggestions on how transparency could be improved in the development communication of the MFA. The results to the research questions are presented in chapter 6.

The research questions serve as the foundation of the research design and methodology. According to Silverman (2005, 6), a good researcher chooses a method that is appropriate to what he/she is trying to find out. In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method because the aim of the empirical section was to obtain partner NGOs' views on the transparency and openness of the MFA's online development communication.

The following sections include an introduction to the case study approach and describe the underlying qualitative research tradition. The course of the empirical section is explained by describing the data collection through nine semi-structured interviews and then presenting the data analysis based on qualitative content analysis. In the last section, a short description of validity and reliability in qualitative research is presented.

## **5.1 Qualitative Case Study Approach**

This study is based on a case study approach. Yin (2003, 13) defines case study as a study that investigates contemporary events in the real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident. The case study method allows the researcher to retain the comprehensive characteristics of real-life events (Yin 2003, 2).

Qualitative research methods are often contrasted with their quantitative counterparts. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 13), the qualitative

method pictures the non-numerical nature of the phenomenon. The goal of qualitative research is to find out how the social world is understood, interpreted, or produced. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the analysis and measurement of causal relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, 8). Thus, a qualitative approach is better suited to this study, which is focused on the perceptions of the stakeholders.

Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 15) define the qualitative material as material that is often textual in nature. The text can be interviews, diaries, letters, or other literary material. In the case of the present study, the qualitative materials are the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Some form of quantification was used, but statistical analysis did not play a central role. The main focus is on the perceptions of the people studied.

Qualitative studies are often based on small number of cases (Silverman, 2005, 9). This is also the case in the present study where a small group of key stakeholders was chosen as informants for the interviews. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to delve deeper into the research problem, providing a more profound understanding of the social phenomenon investigated (Silverman 2005, 10). Denzin and Lincoln (2008, 9) refer to the concern of “capturing the individual’s point of view” or to the “actor’s perspective,” arguing that by detailed interviewing the individual’s point of view can be better captured. The qualitative approach was chosen in order to get closer to the actors’ perspectives and in this way generate a more detailed view of the situation.

## **5.2 Data Collection Method – Qualitative Interviewing**

### **5.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

In this study, the method used for collecting data was semi-structured interviews. The purpose was to obtain an understanding of the interviewees’ perceptions of transparency in development communication, focusing on the online communication of the MFA. Interviews were seen as a suitable method for the study because the topic is complex and the answers often needed to be clarified. Nine interviews were conducted in total.

In the simplest terms, an interview is a situation where the interviewer poses questions to the interviewee. Nowadays, the interview is seen as more of a conversation or a discussion, guided by a researcher (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 86). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 35) stress the role of the interviewee; the interview gives the interviewee an active role and considers him/her a subject who is given freedom to express things as freely as possible. The objective of the interviews in the present study was to allow flexibility and to create a natural flow of discussion.

A qualitative interview has many advantages as a data collection method. It is appropriate for situations in which the interviewer wants to ask open-ended questions, aiming for a deeper level of information from relatively few people. The interviewer has the possibility to go deeper into the answers or clarify them by asking more questions. It is useful in situations where the topic of the study is complicated and needs clarity. However, it is also time consuming. It's not only the phase of actually conducting the interviews but also the preparation for the interviews and transcribing the material afterwards that take time. Furthermore, analyzing and interpreting the data can be challenging because ready-made models usually don't exist (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 35).

In this study, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the method. Interviews can be divided into structured and unstructured interviews according to the extent to which questions are formulated and fixed. In a fully structured interview, all questions are fixed in advance and all questions are asked in the same order as designated in the plan. In an unstructured interview, the approach is more like an open conversation and develops based on the interest of the subject and the researcher. A semi-structured interview is somewhere between the two. According to Yin (2003, 89), interviews in case studies are more like guided discussions than structured queries. This is also the case in this study where the interviews were conducted as half-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the questions are somewhat planned, but they are not necessarily asked in the same order as they are listed. In the present study, a questionnaire with a set of questions was used as a framework by the interviewer in the interviews. The approach was not fully structured because the interviewer had the option of asking extra questions and delving deeper into the answers. The key questions were planned before the interviews, but the interviews were conversational in nature, with additional questions flowing from previous responses when possible.

## 5.2.2 Interview Structure

The interview themes of this study were built around the three research questions and the theory. The interview consisted of 17 questions (see the appendix) and was divided to four sections, A–D. Section A was dedicated to background information. The interviewees were asked about their age, profession, and their familiarity with the websites of the MFA ([www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) and [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi)). To introduce the participants to the topic, in the next question the interviewees were asked about their personal views on the importance of transparency in development communication.

The intention of section B was to find out what kind of information the participants search on the websites and how easily they are able to find it. They were also asked to clarify whether they have had problems in finding information.

Section C focused on the quality and contents of the websites in more detail. The objective was to find out the interviewees' views on the quality of the websites, their preferred content, their information needs, and their experience as users.

Section D was dedicated to the use of social media. The interviewees were asked from which social media channels they found information about the development cooperation provided by the MFA. They were also asked if there are some channels that the MFA should use more in its development communication.

Finally, at the end of the interview the participants were asked two general questions about their ideas regarding how the websites could be improved and how they would grade the transparency of the MFA's online development communication. These were thought to be easier to answer at the end of the interview as the many components of transparency and online communication would have been discussed in the course of interview.

Questions were formulated prior to the interviews with the purpose of posing more or less the same questions to all interviewees. The form of the questions, however, was not strictly obeyed in the actual interview situation as

the purpose was to create a natural, conversation-like situation where the participants could feel comfortable and express their opinions freely. So instead, the interviewer used her own words to ask and explain the questions but in such a way that the content of each question would remain the same for all interviewees. In addition, some extra questions were added if there was a need for further explanation. The informants were allowed to express themselves freely; that is to say, they were not interrupted even if the answers were sometimes sidetracked or meandered from the actual question. Such answers were seen as valuable material for the study by providing important perspectives on the topics covered in the interview.

### 5.2.3 Interviewees

The interviewees, who were altogether nine, were selected from the MFA's partner NGOs.

The Partnership Agreement Scheme (PAS) was established in 2003. At the time of interviews, the MFA had 11 Finnish Partnership Organisations (POs): the Finnish Red Cross, Plan Finland, Finn Church Aid, The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the International Solidarity Foundation, the Finnish Trade Unions' Solidarity Centre, FIDA, Frikyrklig Samverkan, the Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association, Save the Children Finland, and World Vision Finland.

Partner NGOs were chosen as the target group of the study because of their central role in development policy in Finland. They are one of the most important stakeholder groups in development policy and collaborate closely with the MFA. At the national level, the MFA's guidelines for civil society (2010) stress that it is important that as many Finnish civil society professionals as possible take part or have contact with development cooperation as this helps raise public awareness and support for development and contributes to transparency in Finnish aid. The importance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in development policy is also stressed in the development policy program. As partner NGOs are also implementers of development cooperation themselves, they are familiar with the importance of transparency and openness in development communication.

The partner NGOs were chosen on the basis that each of them was an expert in development cooperation and had been in a close collaboration with the

MFA. According to Silverman (2005, 129), the process of selecting a limited number of interviewees is referred to as purposive sampling.

A Senior Officer from the MFA, from the Unit for Non-Governmental Organizations, gave suggestions regarding possible participants. In addition, some other MFA personnel were asked for suggestions for possible informants from the chosen organizations. Among the suggested interviewees, the author selected those to be contacted. The identity of the final group of interviewees, thus, remained known only by the interviewer to guarantee the anonymity for the participants. Anonymity was also guaranteed in the actual interview situation. This was important in order to enable participants speaking freely. It was also important to clarify to the participants that their opinions would not have an effect on funding received from the MFA.

Among the interviewees were employees from following partner NGOs: the Finnish Red Cross, Plan Finland, Finn Church Aid, The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the International Solidarity Foundation, the Finnish Trade Unions' solidarity Centre, the Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association, Save the Children Finland, and World Vision Finland.

#### 5.2.4 Interviews

The interviews were conducted October 1-10, 2013. The questionnaire, which included the questions to discuss with the interviewees, was tested before the actual interviews to make sure that the questions were understandable and to see how much time one interview would approximately take. The test-questionnaire provided many ideas for improvement, including ideas about the order and content of the questions.

The candidates selected as possible informants for the actual interviews were contacted by email and/or phone in the last week of September and the first week of October. Eleven candidates were initially contacted. The responses for participating in the study were mainly positive, followed by an agreement on the time and place for interview. In one case where the person contacted was on a work trip, the interview could not be organized. In another case, the person contacted suggested another person from the same organization. Moreover, one person did not reply to the email request.

The interviewees could choose the place for the interview providing that the place would be peaceful and quiet enough. After the initial contact, the interviewees were sent an email confirming their participation in the study and the agreed upon appointment for the interview. The questionnaire was attached to the email so that the participants could familiarize themselves with the questions before the actual interview.

The interviews were executed face-to-face in Helsinki. In eight cases the interviews took places on the premises of the organizations concerned, either in the interviewee's own office or in a meeting room. In one case the interview was conducted in a local coffee shop. The interviews lasted from approximately half an hour to one hour. In order to allow the researcher to reflect on the dialogue with the interviewees, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. This ensured exact documentation and the largest possible amount of data for later processing. Some notes were also taken during the interviews to highlight the main points of the answers.

The language of the interviews was Finnish. Translations to English were made once the citations were chosen for the Findings section. The original texts are presented in the appendix. Careful attention was paid to the language use of the interviewer and the interviewees. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008, 49) emphasize that the interviewer aims at finding out the meanings within the answers the interviewee gives to certain objects or matters. This can be done only through using language as a tool.

### **5.3 Data Analysis – Qualitative Content Analysis**

The purpose of analyzing qualitative data is to organize and clarify the data in order to produce new information about the studied phenomenon. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 137), the aim is to compress the data without losing any relevant information and to increase the informational value by bringing sense and clarity into the otherwise diffuse and fragmented data.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, 103-104), in qualitative content analysis contents can be themed, typed, or classified. In this way, the data can be analyzed as systematically and objectively as possible. The focus is on the meanings of the research content.



Metsämuuronen (2006, 124) divides content analysis into seven stages. First, the researcher must become thoroughly familiar with the data and know the central concepts based on theory. Then the researcher theorizes and internalizes the data, after which it should be possible to roughly classify the data into main categories and/or themes. After the rough categorization, the researcher once again needs to clarify and specify the research tasks and concepts, allowing a view into how often different phenomena and concepts have occurred. At this point, the researcher might also need to make a cross-validation to test the categories. When all this is done, the researcher may further interpret the data and draw conclusions (Metsämuuronen 2006, 124). In addition, Metsämuuronen (2006, 125) recommends making mind maps or concept maps to help in the data sorting process. These make it easier to see the “big picture” and all its parts at the same time.

The research question and research problem give direction to the analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 94) state that one important step of the analysis is to determine which parts of the data actually are relevant for the research concern in question. Then, the data need to be organized. In the present study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and the structure and themes of the interview provided a good starting point for organizing the data.

In content analysis, there is a choice between starting from the actual data or starting from the categories extracted from previous literature—that is, between an inductive and a deductive approach. Using an interview theme structure to codify data would indicate a deductive approach as themes in semi-structured interviews are often based on previous theoretical knowledge. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2007, 108-111), however, the inductive and deductive approaches can also be combined, which was the case in the present study. The analysis matrix for coding the data by content does not need to be strictly structured. Instead, after gathering the data by content, they can be analyzed following the principles of an inductive content analysis grouping and categorizing. The end product of this kind of analysis is often concepts or categories that explain the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 108–111).

For the present study, all the interviews were recorded digitally in October 2013. All collected data, consisting of approximately six hours of audio mate-

rial, were transcribed word by word on the computer after the interviews. Words or parts that were unclear were marked with brackets. In addition, some non-verbal signals, such as sighs and laughter, were marked down whenever they seemed significant. However, in the final data analysis, the focus was on verbal communication.

After the transcription of the data, all the material was printed out and read through. The purpose of the first reading round was to create an overall picture of the data. In the second step, all the data were filtered according to the interview themes. This was done according to the principles of deductive content analysis since there were some existing theoretical perspectives behind the themes. Every interview was rearranged according to themes by collecting all the relevant data under each theme. The expressions that were considered valuable for the research focus were marked and collected in a separate file on the computer. The parts of the data that were considered irrelevant with regard to the research questions were left out.

The material was read through again once all the relevant parts of the interview material were filtered according to the themes. Some of the parts that seemed irrelevant were eliminated and some were moved from one part to another. Following this, a new file was created for each theme by bringing together the answers to each theme from different interviews.

The following step in processing the data for the final analysis consisted of summarizing the data under each theme. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 111), this process can also be referred to as “reducing” the data. The summaries were written in such way that the words and terms used by the interviewees were preserved as well as possible. Sentences that seemed relevant and illustrative were underlined for possible citations for the reporting. Once the data had been summarized under each theme, they were brought together in a new file, printed out, and read through again. The similarities and differences between the answers were marked down for the final step of the analysis—grouping and categorizing according to the principles of an inductive content analysis.

## **5.4 Reliability and Validity of the Method**

Reliability and validity are essential components of a credible research study (Silverman 2005, 6). Quality or trustworthiness is often explained in terms of

reliability and validity. Traditionally, reliability implies that the research could be repeated and similar outcomes would be founded; in another words, reliability implies repeatability. It also means that the research aims at accuracy. Again, validity means that the research has focused on what it was intended to focus on. The concepts were first used in quantitative research and are based on an assumption that there is an objective reality. Therefore, they cannot be directly applied to qualitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133).

Although conventional forms of reliability and validity aren't directly applicable to qualitative research, they cannot be ignored. Instead of focusing on these two concepts, it is more beneficial for qualitative research to focus on evaluating the trustworthiness and some kind of generalizability (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 135). It is important is to note that, even as early as in the data collection phase, the researcher has an effect on the type of data he/she will obtain. Taking this into consideration, Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 189) propose that structural validity plays an important role in qualitative research. This means that the researcher must be able to explain all the phases of the research process and the choices being made: the purpose of the study, data collection, selection of informants, data analysis, and possible personal biases.

The matter of reliability in qualitative research, on the contrary, is concerned mostly the quality of the data and their analysis—for instance, whether all the material and data have been taken into account, whether the data were documented correctly, and if the results reflect the respondents' way of thinking. With regard to data collection, it is useful that the interviews are carefully planned, recorded, and transcribed in order to enhance reliability (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185, 189).

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 138), "the researcher should give the readers sufficient information on how the study has been carried out, in order for them to be able to evaluate the findings of it." The authors suggest that the following points can be evaluated: the object and purpose of the study; the personal commitment as a researcher in the process; the data collection; the informants in the study; the relationship between the researcher and the informants; the duration of the study; the reliability of the study; the data analysis; and the reporting of the process (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 135-138). The evaluation of the reliability and validity of the present study is included in the final chapter, Discussion and Conclusions.

## 6 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study. In section 6.1, background information on the interviewees is presented. Section 6.2 presents the participants' personal views on transparency in development communication. Section 6.3 explains what kind of information the interviewees look for on the websites and how easily they find it. Section 6.4 presents in more detail how the interviewees rate various qualities of the websites. The next section, 6.5, discusses the importance of the different contents for the participants. Consequently, section 6.6 focuses on the role of social media in the online development communication of the MFA. Section 6.7 presents the participants' overall rating of the transparency of development communications and presents suggestions for more transparent development communication. Finally, section 6.8 summarizes the results of the empirical part of the study. It seeks to answer the research questions: "How do the partner NGOs perceive the transparency and openness of the MFA's online development communication?" 2. "What are the barriers to transparency in development communication?" and 3. "What are the enablers of transparency in development communication?" The perceptions of transparency are evaluated in light of the experiences that the interviewed stakeholders had in dealing with the various qualities and elements of the MFA's online communication, as discussed in sections 6.3–6.7.

## 6.1 Background Information and Personal Views on Transparency

The interviewees held a variety of positions in their respective organizations. These included: Executive Director, Area Manager for International Programmes, Director for Development Cooperation, Business Development Manager, Communications Manager, Head of Unit for Programme Planning and Coordination, Communications Delegate, and two Program Managers. Seven of the participants were women and two were men. Three of the participants were 30–39 years old, four participants were 40–49, and two were 50–59.

First, the participants were questioned as to how often they visit the MFA’s websites, both [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) and [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi). Two of the interviewees visit [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) on a daily basis, one weekly, three monthly, and three less than monthly. None of the interviewees visited [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) daily, but four of them visited the site on a weekly basis. Two respondents visited the site monthly and three less than monthly. Table 2 presents how often the interviewees visit the MFA’s websites.

TABLE 2 Frequency of Visits

Frequency of Visits					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
<a href="http://www.formin.fi">www.formin.fi</a>	2	1	3	3	
<a href="http://www.global.finland.fi">www.global.finland.fi</a>		4	2	3	

There were various reasons for not visiting the websites more regularly. Some participants, especially those from bigger NGOs, referred to good information sources within their own organizations.

For most of the participants, the websites of the MFA were not a primary source of information on development cooperation—only two of the interviewees visited [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) on a daily basis. This was mainly because of the large number of information sources in general, the information provided inside of the interviewees’ own organizations, and the difficulties in finding the information on the MFA’s pages.

To prepare the participants for the topic, the interviewees were asked about their personal views about the importance of transparency in development communication. Eight of the participants responded that transparency is very important and one participant responded that it is quite important.

*"Transparency in development cooperation is very important to me. It is one of those things that interests me very much and that feels intuitively very important." (P1, quote 1)*

One interviewee expressed the obligation of an official agency to inform citizens about what has been done with the taxes they pay.

*"Well it is very important. Absolutely the money flows, etc. need to be open, publicly available information. Because they are public information." (P7, quote 2)*

The results show that transparency is important to the development cooperation professionals for many reasons, from an intuitive feeling to the obligation of reporting on the use of public funds.

## **6.2 Type of Information on Development Cooperation Searched on the MFA's Websites**

The intention of section B was to find out what kind of information the participants primarily search on the MFA's websites and how easily they were able to find it. They were also asked to clarify whether they have had problems in finding information. In addition, the section presents the respondents' wishes for additional information on the web pages.

### **6.2.1 Content Preferences**

The interviewees were asked what kind of information on development cooperation they primarily look for from the MFA's websites. They were given a list of some of the main current contents of the development policy and cooperation-related information on the MFA's websites. The topics mentioned most often were publications and material, information about different themes of development cooperation, and current affairs.

Most of the respondents, eight of them, mentioned publications and material as something that they look for from the websites. These include different kinds of strategy papers, reports, evaluations, policies, guidelines, etc. Some interviewees mentioned publications as an important source of information when filling in certain applications, for example. Another interviewee mentioned the additional need for delivering the guidelines and other material to relevant stakeholders in the field.

Seven participants mentioned that they look for information about the main themes related to development cooperation, such as human rights, climate change, education, etc. Some of the partner organizations have a focus in a particular area, such as children’s rights or the rights of people with disabilities, and this had a clear impact on the answers.

Many of the interviewees, six of them, also mentioned current affairs as something that they look for from the MFA’s websites. Accessing this information has been made easier with help of the MFA’s weekly newsletter, “kehitysverkot”. It includes current news about development policy and also includes links to the MFA’s websites. Three interviewees mentioned the newsletter as an important source of information on current issues related to development cooperation. Table 3 summarizes which topics respondents search on the MFA’s websites.

TABLE 3 Type of Information Searched

Type of Information Searched	Number of Responses
Publications and material	8
Information about different themes of development cooperation, such as human rights, climate change, education, etc.	7
Current affairs	6
Information about subsidies and funding to stakeholders (NGOs, education institutions, international organizations, governmental institutions, etc.)	4
Implementation guidelines	4
Principles of development policy	3
Information about appropriations and their use (to which countries and which sectors they are allocated)	3
Information about the results of development cooperation	2
Information about subsidies and other funding	2
Information about partner countries and regions	2
Information about global education	2

In addition to the contents on the list, four interviewees mentioned travel documents as something they look for often on the pages. Many of the participants travel regularly to developing countries because of their work, so travel documents are particularly important for them. Furthermore, some respondents mentioned [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) as a source for factual data on development cooperation.

To summarize, the interviewees searched for many kinds of information from the MFA's pages. The most commonly mentioned types of information were those that the participants need for their work: publications, guidelines, information related to different themes of development cooperation (especially the ones that their organization works for), and current affairs in development cooperation.

## 6.2.2 Findability of Information

Related to findability of information, most interviewees had had some problems in finding the information they needed from the MFA's websites. First they were asked how often they find the information they need from [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), which is the main channel for official communication from the MFA. Most of the participants, six of them, answered that they find the needed information quite often. Two of the respondents answered "often" and one "seldom." Table 4 summarizes how often the interviewees found the information they were looking for.

TABLE 4 Findability of Information

Frequency of Finding the Needed Information	
Always	
Often	2
Quite often	6
Seldom	1
Never	

Although the interviewees eventually found the information they were looking for, they had faced plenty of problems in finding it.



*"This is maybe the wrong way to ask. Maybe you should rather ask how much effort is needed. (. . .) well usually I do find it, but it's difficult. And sometimes I actually don't find it so that then I need to ask if someone remembers the path how to get to that information, and usually someone knows it. (. . .) Then there's something that I just don't find. (. . .) And I go to the email someone sent and I waste a lot of time in finding it." (P9, quote 3)*

This citation sums up well the general tone of the answers regarding findability. Most of the interviewees had faced some kind of problems when searching for information from the websites of the MFA.

The respondents had faced many kinds of problems when looking for information from the MFA's websites. According to many of the interviewees, the structure of the websites was problematic, especially [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi). The difficult, illogical structure was mentioned by five participants.

Respondents had different ways to deal with the structure problems; one mentioned having learned certain paths by heart, another had added the important contents to their "favorites" bar. Three interviewees mentioned that they have needed the help of MFA officials to find the information on the pages.

*"The structure of [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) is difficult. [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) is easier. But global I use more for surfing and looking for current issues, whereas from formin I usually search something specific. (. . .) I have needed to learn by heart the structures of the pages so that I know where to look for information and that I know the paths." (P2, quote 4)*

*"These things need to be added to the favorites. (. . .) You need to search them every time. (. . .) . . . the paths are not logical and the page is messy. (. . .) [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) is more relevant for us; there the information can be found more quickly and easily. But probably it has the same history; it starts to be kind of too full of all kinds of stuff. Many times it's easier to call to an official and ask when you don't feel like hunting it from the website." (P4, quote 5)*

Of the two sites, [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) was mentioned more often when talking about the difficulties in finding the needed information.

One interviewee felt that the structure of the page is outdated and that there is just too much information in the pages.

*"As a professional in web communications, I see that they are so loaded with information, that they are about to burst." (P8, quote 6)*

Many respondents expressed their frustration in trying to find the information they need, especially from [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi). One interviewee gave strong critical feedback about the findability and usability of some basic guidelines for NGOs, which are often needed and should be easy to find.

*"There are the guidelines on how the NGOs should implement the cross-cutting themes of development policy and there are the indicators for this, etc. These I was searching for for a long time. I found them finally, they were there, but . . . then you need to jump from one link to another and click this and go to the next and then you might find some PDF-file at some point. . . (. . .) I think these are things that should be found easily. They are not easy to find, nor are they easy to manage." (P9, quote 7)*

Participants mentioned that they have had problems finding the following contents:

- certain publications
- tools for planning development cooperation
- the catalogue that contains all NGO development cooperation projects
- the Guidelines for Civil Society in Development Policy (English version)
- evaluation guidelines
- different language versions of certain documents

In addition, five interviewees gave strong critical feedback about missing contact information on the MFA's personnel pages. They were hoping for improvements in adding contact information, adding the titles of the MFA personnel, and an organizational chart to the pages.

To summarize, most of the interviewees had faced problems in finding the information they needed from the MFA's websites. Many kinds of content were mentioned as being problematic to find. The structure of the pages was mentioned as a main reason for the difficulties. The interviewees told about different ways to deal with the structure issues: learning the necessary paths by heart, adding the important pages to their favorites bar, asking the MFA officials directly where to find the information from the pages, etc. However,

participants usually do find the needed information from the pages—it just takes time and effort to find it.

### 6.3 Importance of the Current Contents to the Interviewees

The interviewees were asked to rate the importance of certain contents of the MFA’s websites concerning development cooperation. Again, they were given a list of some of the main current contents that are included under the development policy and cooperation section of the MFA’s websites. The options varied from 1=very important to 5=not important.

Table 5 shows how many participants chose each option from a scale of 1 to 5, from very important to not important.

TABLE 5 Importance of the Contents to the Interviewees

Type of Contents	1=Very important	2=Quite important	3=Somewhat important	4=Slightly important	5=Not important
Current affairs	5	2	2		
Principles of development policy	6	2			1
Information about appropriations and their use (to which countries and which sectors they are allocated)	6	1		1	1
Information about subsidies and funding to stakeholders (NGOs, education, institutions, international organizations, governmental institutions, etc.)	6		1	1	1
Information about the results of development cooperation	6		2	1	
Publications and material	7	2			
Implementation guidelines	6	2	1		
Information about subsidies and other funding	5	1	2	1	
Information about partner countries	4		4		1
Information about different themes of development cooperation, such as human rights, climate change, education, etc.	6	2	1		
Information about global education	2	3	1	1	2

As can be clearly seen from the table, most of the participants found the contents listed either "very important" or "quite important."

There were differences between the answers of the small NGOs versus the larger NGOs that are part of bigger international umbrella organizations. The larger ones receive much of information and guidelines from their umbrella organizations. For example, when planning a project in a new country, they can contact a local office in the country in question and receive information from there directly. Their own organizational networks also play a central role when analyzing the results, and thus this reduces the need for receiving information from the MFA. For smaller organizations, then, the information that the MFA provides plays a bigger role.

However, there are certain contents that are also very important for the bigger organizations, such as general information about the development policy program and cross-cutting themes in Finland's development cooperation.

*"Cross-cutting issues are under constant analysis in our development policy program. (. . .) we take it seriously what they (MFA) write in their implementing guidelines. And in this sense, it's important to support the different communication channels, to genuinely implement the development policy program." (P8, quote 8)*

The structure of the pages was also an issue that was underscored when describing the importance of the contents.

*"Of course the results, principles, appropriations are crucial, but the critical issue is the way they are presented." (P8, quote 9)*

In addition to being asked about the importance of the websites' current contents, the interviewees were asked if there is something specific that they would like to have more information about on the websites. Many kinds of content, from very specific themes to more general issues, appeared among the answers. The following contents were mentioned (among others):

- Information about public–private cooperation in development policy; how Finnish companies and the state could participate jointly in interesting development cooperation projects
- More information about the possibilities of information technology in development cooperation; how to contribute to development by using tablets, mobile phones, etc.

- Information about minorities and minority groups among minorities; different kind of sensitive, ethnic and sexual minorities; and what the MFA does within this sector
- Basic information about what has been done with the money and what the results are
- Budget information, evaluation reports, and inspection reports about the units of the MFA
- The contact information of the personnel of the MFA

Furthermore, one interviewee wished that if a specific topic receives sudden visibility or criticism in media, the MFA would react and include its views and arguments on their websites. This would allow NGOs and other stakeholders to use “official arguments” when needed to respond to the criticism.

One participant expressed a wish for knowing more about ministers’ travels—when and where they travel. This way, the NGOs could promote their interests to ministers before they travel through briefings.

Another interviewee was hoping for critical development cooperation discussion on the websites. The participant was concerned that the professionals are afraid to discuss development cooperation critically, leading to other people who are not so familiar with development cooperation getting false, incomplete information. According to the interviewee, there should be an open discussion about improvement possibilities in development cooperation.

To sum up, although the importance of the contents was related to the size of the organization, most of the current contents were thought to be very important or quite important. The crucial issue here was how the data are presented on the pages. There was also a long list of wishes for additional information. Many kinds of content, from specific pieces of information to more general discussions, appeared among the answers.

## **6.4 Views on Various Qualities of the Online Development Communication**

Section C focused on various qualities of the websites in more detail. The objective was to obtain information on the experiences of the users regarding

the timeliness of the content, the understandability of the information, the appearance and structure of the websites, the usability and usefulness of the pages, and the appeal of the contents.

First, the interviewees were given a list of certain qualities of [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), which they were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5, Excellent to Poor.

Table 6 summarizes how the participants rated the qualities.

TABLE 6 Views on Various Qualities of Development Communication on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi)

	1=Excellent	2=Very good	3=Good	4=Fair	5=Poor
Timeliness of contents	1	1	4	2	
Understandability of the information		3	4	1	
Appeal of the contents	1	1	5	1	
Pictures			3	2	1
Structure of the website			1	3	4
Appearance of the website		1	2	4	1
Usability of the website		1	1	4	2
Usefulness	1	3	3	1	
<b>Total</b>	3	10	23	18	8

The "Total" row shows that only three qualities received an "excellent" rating: timeliness, appeal, and usefulness of the website. "Good" was the most common rating overall. Understandability of the information and usability of the website were mainly rated as "very good" or "good." Appeal of the contents was also mainly rated as "good." The structure of the website got the most "poor" ratings. Appearance and usability were mostly rated as "fair."

One participant didn't want to answer this question and so instead gave a general verbal comment about the pages.

*"I have to say that in general I haven't found the websites difficult ([www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi)); I don't have such a view or feeling about them. This is a typical governmental website, not particularly appealing. Ministers shaking hands, etc. (. . .) maybe this [global.finland.fi](http://global.finland.fi) presents things in more interesting, more diverse and colorful way." (P1, quote 10)*

In addition, two interviewees said that they couldn't evaluate the pictures because they hadn't paid attention to them.

Opinions on the various qualities will be further explained below. It should be taken into consideration, however, that the boundaries between the qualities are not always clear-cut, and one quality can have an impact on others.

#### 6.4.1 Appearance

The appearance of the websites divided opinions between the participants. Many of the participants mentioned that the appearance of [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) is very official, even too official. Some of the interviewees took the official look for granted—the website of an authority is allowed and expected to be official looking. Some of the respondents, however, were hoping for a fresher appearance.

Many interviewees preferred the appearance of [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) over the [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) because of its clarity and more colorful look.

However, according to some interviewees also [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) is a little bit outdated and needs some improvements.

[Www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), in turn, received mainly negative feedback for its appearance. It was criticized for the font being too small and for having too much information on a page.

*“. . . formin.fi is somehow very tedious to use, it has a pathetically small font. It's eight or something — one would need binoculars to read it. Very hard to read, I would say the page is not pleasant.” (P4, quote 11)*

One participant had a contrary opinion about the appearance of the pages, preferring the official-looking [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi).

*“And appearance. . . In my opinion, the formin.fi page is quite nice looking and functional but global is not.” (P9, quote 12)*

With regard to the pictures on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), the interviewees hadn't paid attention to them, didn't remember them, or were not too interested in them. Two respondents mentioned pictures where ministers are shaking hands.

*"I don't remember any pictures. . .the web-layout is quite nice and the colors are beautiful." (P3, quote 13)*

*"Pictures, I have never paid attention to them (in [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi))." (P4, quote 14)*

*"They are not very appealing. Ministers shaking hands, etc." (P1, quote 15)*

The answers show that the pictures don't play a central role for the interviewees on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi).

#### 6.4.2 Usability

Many interviewees related usability to the problematic structure of [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), and it got mainly negative feedback. If the information is hard to find, it reduces usability.

*"Sometimes the way the contents are structured on the pages reduces the usability because they are fragmented or in many places, or you just simply don't find them." (P9, quote 16)*

As an example, one participant wanted to point out some usability and appearance issues on [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi). For example, when clicking the link "News" on the main page, a list of headlines with dates appears. It is just a long list without any pictures or any introductions to the articles.

*" . . .is it even possible to present (the news) in a less interesting way? ( . . . ) It seems that people today wouldn't bother to stop to read these." (P8, quote 17)*

Related to the usability of the websites, one interviewee wished that all the PDF-files would also be in Word format so that they would be readable by reading devices for the visually impaired. Understanding how and why people use aid information is necessary in order to improve the usability. For instance, publishing data in PDF format is more transparent than not pub-



lishing them at all, but it's not ideal for using the data, and it makes the data less useful.

Another interviewee raised a question about the way the evaluations and other important reports are currently published. According to the participant, the current way doesn't draw the public's attention. If they are published only as reports somewhere on the pages, it is unlikely that anyone reads them. It is important to highlight the most important parts and to make them easily readable so that the readers can get the main points of the content without too much effort.

To sum up, usability plays a central role in the interviewees' perceptions. It can be questioned whether a user-friendly way to present data should also be included in the concept of transparency. No matter how much data are available, they are not of much use if they are not in a user-friendly format.

In order to improve usability, an understanding how and why people use aid information is needed. On the part of the MFA, this requires working closely with diverse stakeholders to understand their needs. For instance, publishing data in PDF format is more transparent than not publishing it at all, but it's not ideal for using the data. In other words, it makes the data less useable. In addition, publishing evaluations without highlighting the main points doesn't make the data appealing to anyone. It should be ensured that the information is as usable as possible.

### 6.4.3 Understandability

The understandability of the information was mostly rated as "very good" or "good." However, it should be taken into consideration that all the interviewees were experts in development cooperation, meaning that they were familiar with the development cooperation vocabulary in general.

Language was not separately studied in the interview, but some respondents expressed their opinions about it. One interviewee mentioned development cooperation jargon as something that should be avoided.

Another interviewee found the language of the guidelines too "official" and hard to understand.

*"Some of the contents, including the guidelines for us etc, are not written in a very good language. They are written in such an 'officialese' style, which is hard to understand." (P9, quote 18)*

Furthermore, there were wishes that the MFA would use more direct and clear expressions.

#### **6.4.4 Timeliness**

The timeliness of the contents divided opinions between the interviewees. Some participants had encountered information that was not up-to-date on the web pages, such as travel documents, guidelines, etc. Many respondents, however, were content with the frequency of updates to the pages.

According to one interviewee, there has been progress in updating the guidelines. Before, the guidelines did not include the updating dates, but nowadays they are included. However, one needs to regularly visit the pages in order to notice the updates.

In order for the websites to be credible, it's necessary to have updated information on the pages. Users easily give up on searching for information on the pages if the contents are not up-to-date. It gives off an unprofessional image of the organization.

*"The contents should be updated. You start to feel like 'Whatever, I won't look here,' if the contents were updated the last time in 2009. Like 'Ok, even they themselves don't believe in this thing.'" (P7, quote 19)*

Most of the participants were content with the frequency of page updates, and there has been progress in this area. However, it was pointed out that in order to communicate with credibility, all the contents must be up-to-date.

#### **6.4.5 Interaction Possibilities**

Participants were also asked about interaction possibilities on the pages. Most of the interviewees stated that there aren't any possibilities for interac-

tion on the pages, especially on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi). Communication was perceived generally as one-sided.

*"It's more like the MFA announces and that's it." (P1, quote 20)*

According to one interviewee, the discussion about what MFA publishes takes place elsewhere on the web, for example in the discussion forums of newspapers, rather than on the ministry's own website.

Two interviewees were hoping for feedback channels, advisory services, and discussion forums on the MFA's pages. According to them, more interaction possibilities are needed.

*"Interaction is one thing that could be improved. It would be good to have some separate feedback channels or discussion forums. Global.fi does have FB pages where it is possible to leave comments and 'like,' but it would be good if the websites also contained communication possibilities." (P2, quote 21)*

*"One thing that could be useful is some kind of answering service, advisory service. That would be good type of interaction. And it could be like 'Ask about anything.' Technical advice or about equality in Chile." (P6, quote 22)*

However, not all the participants considered online interaction possibilities important between the MFA and their organizations. Instead, four interviewees highlighted the significance of face-to-face communication with the MFA officials for their work. Some of the participants mentioned that they are in weekly contact with their desk officers at the MFA.

*"Yes, for us they (traditional communication channels) are sufficient. For example, last week there were a couple of things that were unclear. . .so I wrote directly to our contact person in the MFA about it. I didn't need webpages for this." (P3, quote 23)*

However, one participant suggested that there could be a closed discussion online forum for NGOs and the MFA, enabling closer collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

Two participants mentioned that online interaction possibilities are more important for citizens than for NGOs. Interaction possibilities could get the citizens involved and also modernize the ministry that is, according to one interviewee, "shouting from an ivory tower." New, innovative ideas to get citizens to interact with the MFA, would be welcome.

In conclusion, although none of the participants found online interaction possibilities crucial for NGOs, there were wishes for feedback channels and advisory services. Interaction possibilities were seen important especially in order to get citizens involved.

Despite the difficulties in use, most of the respondents find the websites useful because they include important and interesting information for NGOs.

*"However, the usefulness is excellent. I do search for a lot of information from there, and the material I find is very understandable and interesting." (P7, quote 24)*

The usefulness of the websites was rated positively in general; most of the interviewees rated their usefulness as "good," "very good," or "excellent." There were differences between how much and how often interviewees used the pages, but most of them found the pages useful.

## 6.5 Use of Social Media in Development Communication

This chapter presents the answers related to the use of social media in development communication. First, the interviewees were asked from which social media channels they have found information about development cooperation provided by the MFA.

Table 7 presents how many interviewees have found information about development cooperation from each social media channel. Facebook and blogs were mentioned by the most respondents, by five each.

TABLE 7 Use of Social Media Channels in Development Communication

Social Media Channel	Number of Interviewees Who Have Found Information About Development Cooperation from the Channel
Facebook	5
Blogs	5
Twitter	2
YouTube	2
Flickr	1
Vimeo	0

Although Facebook was the most common social media channel for information about development cooperation, not all of the interviewees even knew that the MFA has a Facebook profile.

*"Facebook and the MFA sound like distant friends. I am not MFA's Facebook friend." (P1, quote 25)*

Some interviewees were familiar with the ministers' social media channels but not with the one of the ministry itself:

*"I know that minister Stubb has Twitter. . .no wait, I have visited the Facebook-page of minister Heidi Hautala." (P4, quote 26)*

In contrast, some of the interviewees were very content with the MFA's communication on Facebook. According to one interviewee, MFA's communication style on Facebook is surprisingly fresh and could lead the way for other channels of communication.

*"Taking into consideration the amount of resources and the fact that the pages are outdated and that the communication is conservative in general, the Facebook activities have been surprisingly fresh. This approach could be broadened." (P8, quote 27)*

Interviewees were also queried as to whether there are social media channels that the MFA should use more in its development communication. Many interviewees mentioned YouTube videos as an efficient social media channel that should be used more. One interviewee also suggested that the MFA could encourage NGOs to upload YouTube material to the web.

When asked about which social media channels the MFA should use more, interviewees also mentioned Facebook as a good channel, enabling discussion and interaction between users.

Twitter divided opinions among the participants; for many interviewees, it was still a fairly unknown channel. According to one interviewee, Twitter is too complicated, including hashtags, links, etc. Another participant felt that Twitter hasn't found a foothold in Finland as a communication channel yet.

*"Facebook is good, it offers more possibilities because it can include both pictures and a decent amount of text. Twitter is so compact that the messages become often incomprehensible when people need to shorten them. . .and then there are hashtags and*

*links. . .eventually you don't even feel like figuring out the actual meaning of the message." (P2, quote 28)*

In addition, blogs were mentioned as an interesting source of information.

*"I would like to read some blogs. But I don't know if I'm interested in reading the ministers' blogs. I would rather follow some civil society actor's blog discussing development cooperation." (P9, quote 29)*

One interviewee questioned the capability of social media channels to communicate about complicated issues such as development cooperation. According to the interviewee, social media is more suitable for communicating news-like information.

*"..it remains often so superficial. . .but maybe it (social media) can give some people an impulse." (P7, quote 30)*

It was also mentioned that although every channel has its strengths and weaknesses, it's the set of channels and the online communication as a whole that matters.

*"All of these have their own strengths, and it depends what kind of message you want to deliver. But preferably all the material would be on the site, so that the site is kind of a collecting place for the information." (P1, quote 31)*

It is important to clarify for which target groups it is relevant and beneficial to use the social media and which contents should be included. It emerged in the interviews, that although every channel has its strengths and weaknesses, it is the set of channels and the online communication as a whole that matters. One interviewee suggested that the whole social media strategy of MFA should be clarified. Does every embassy have a Facebook page? How much input and resources should be used in social media? What are the language versions? What are the minimum requirements for each page? Are there generic, cross-cutting updates from the headquarters of ministry? There are still many questions to answer when planning an overall social media strategy.

## 6.6 Overall Rating and Development Suggestions for Development Communication

This last section consists of the results of final part of the interview and summarizes the results. In the last section, the interviewees were asked to rate the transparency of the online development communication of the MFA on a scale from 4 to 10. In addition, they could give suggestions regarding how development communication could be improved.

### 6.6.1 Overall rating

In response to the first research question, “How do the partner NGOs perceive the transparency and openness of the MFA’s online development communication?”, the ratings fell between 6 and 9, with an average of 7.3.

None of the interviewees felt that the MFA would try to whitewash or hide information from public. However, there is still room for improvement in transparency in online development communication. This is mainly because of the complicated structure of the websites and the weak findability factor regarding information; it is time consuming to search for information on the pages, especially on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi). Interviewees had different ways to deal with the websites’ structure issues: one mentioned learning certain paths by heart, another had added the important contents to the favorites bar, and several interviewees mentioned that they have asked for help from MFA officials to find the information from the pages.

Furthermore, it was discussed what the ideal amount of information on the pages would be. According to one interviewee, too much information can result in difficulties in finding the most relevant pieces of information and thus, reduce openness. The interviewee suggested that up to certain point the information could be available online, but after that point, the additional information could be available on request.

Another participant highlighted the importance of user-friendliness and targeting. When the communication is user-friendly and reaches the target groups, it also improves openness and transparency. According to the interviewee, the current users of the pages are mostly those who work in the field

of development cooperation. In the name of democracy, it is important to target wider groups of people.

*"Nothing has been attempted to be hidden, but the problematic cases could be openly communicated like the succesful ones. But it's mostly about conseroatism. The communication is just so traditional. . .if it was fresher and more consumer friendly, then it would also be more open and transparent as it would reach new target groups. Now I think that the heavy users are the ones that are interested in these issues to begin with, or the ones who work with them. This is why I only give seven." (P8, quote 34)*

The experiences of the interviewees indicate that the lack of transparency is not intentional but rather caused by the complex structure of the websites, the weak information findability factor, and insufficient targeting.

#### **6.6.2 Enablers and Barriers for Transparency**

With regard to the next two research questions, "What are barriers to transparency in development communication?" and "What are the enablers of transparency in development communication?", participants gave various suggestions. These factors are summarized in table 8.



TABLE 8 Enablers of and Barriers to Transparent Development Communication at the MFA

Current Situation, Factors That Hinder Transparency	Suggestions; Enablers of Transparency
1. Complicated structure of the websites, hard to find information	Need to modernize the structure and information findability factor of the sites.
2. Not enough targeting	Need to target the contents in a way that the messages reach those it was directed towards. Also considered important that the communication attract different stakeholders and younger age groups.
3. Limited communication from the MFA about complex issues, corruption, and failed initiatives	Need to communicate openly about the complex field of development cooperation and about failed initiatives and negative cases as well as about the successful projects. These should also be included in the dialogue with the media.
4. Inactive participation in critical discussion about development cooperation	Need to participate in critical discussion. When aid data are open and transparent, it is easy to show what has been done and the associated results. Transparent data help in the fight against wrong information and make it easier to participate into critical discussion.
5. Lack of numerical analyses and visualizations	Numerical analyses and visualizations should be included on the sites so that the numbers can be further analyzed and explained to the public. Data visualization and geocoding would allow users to quickly analyze larger amounts of information using tools such as maps, graphs, and charts.
6. Lack of communicating about policy coherence in development; current communication doesn't clearly express the integration with other policies that have an impact on development. It gives an unrealistic picture about development cooperation and creates disproportionate expectations from the public.	Give a greater understanding of how Finnish governmental development cooperation is an integral part of Finland's foreign and domestic policies, which also have an impact on developing countries. Policies should be mutually reinforcing and create synergies across government departments and agencies. The interdependence of the policies should be made clear.
7. Lack of combining the communication resources with NGOs	There is room for partnerships in the communication. In particular contexts, MFA could benefit from collaborating on communication with NGOs.
8. Unclear social media strategy	Need to clarify the overall social media strategy.

There are several kinds of factors that currently hinder transparency in the development communication of the MFA. The most often mentioned problem was that information is hard to find on the websites, especially on [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi). The difficult, illogical structure was mentioned by several participants. According to the participants, the current structure is so complicated that it's hard and time consuming to find information. According to the results, there is an urgent need to modernize the structure and improve the information findability factor of the pages.

The interviewees connected the amount of information provided to the findability of it. Some respondents questioned what is the ideal amount of information provided to the public. According to one interviewee, too large an amount of information can result in difficulties to find the most relevant pieces of information and thus, reduce openness. The interviewee suggested that up to a certain point the information could be available online, but after that point the additional information could be available on request. One can drown in information if there is too much of it, and if it is badly organized.

Besides restructuring the websites, there is also a need to target the contents according to many interviewees. It was considered important that the communication is planned in a way that the messages reach those they are directed towards. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the communication should attract new stakeholders and also younger age groups. To become more accountable, it is important to start to engage more with various stakeholders, including stakeholder groups outside of the development cooperation expert circle. This suggestion reflects the perceptions of the relation between transparency and democracy, discussed by various scholars (e.g. Bertot et al. 2012, Fairbanks et al. 2007; Garnett 1997; Graber 2003), according to which a healthy society requires that governments provide information to the public about decisions, policies and actions, creating an informed public. As Fairbanks et al. (2007, 33) highlight, the agencies need to understand their publics and share understandable information with them. In order to ensure maximum impact, the messages and delivery tools must be adapted in a way that ensures they primarily target selected segments.

Third, to make the communication more believable, the MFA should start to communicate openly about the dilemmas and failed initiatives in development cooperation as well as about the successful cases. Besides improving transparency, it could also increase credibility and facilitate debate on the

content. According to one interviewee, both the MFA and NGOs are afraid of openly communicating about the diverse field of development cooperation and about local capacities for fear of losing support from the public. The limited communication about complex issues and failed initiatives can, however, contribute to creating myths about development cooperation and to decreasing support. In order to give a complete picture of the reality and conditions of development cooperation, communicating about diverse sides of it is necessary, including dilemmas and difficult issues. Communicating about diverse sides of development cooperation gives a more nuanced picture of its reality and conditions. By sharing the failures, it is possible to learn from the mistakes and prevent failures from happening in the future. Dilemmas and difficult issues should also be included also in the dialogue with the media.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the MFA should participate more in critical discussion about development policy and cooperation. One interviewee hoped that when a development cooperation issue arises in the media, the MFA would post official arguments on its websites to which other development implementers could then refer. Also, transparent development data enables participating in critical discussions by showing what and where has been done and the associated results. It is an effective way to fight against wrong information. One interviewee was concerned that if the professionals are afraid to critically discuss development cooperation, some other people, that are not so familiar with it will discuss it but with false, incomplete information. According to the interviewee, there should be an open discussion about whether things could be done better in development cooperation.

The role of the media was discussed in many interviews. According to one interviewee, the media generally do not show much interest in development issues, but individual apparent failures of development aid have often become a topic discussed by newspapers and television. The media interest is usually in connection with humanitarian disasters dominated by images of suffering and occasional scandals about failed initiatives and corruption. In contrast, the positive or more successful stories about modern development cooperation receive little attention. Another interviewee raised the general critical comment "Nothing has been achieved with development cooperation." In addition, the Finns Party has been eager to reduce development cooperation funding and heavily criticized the development cooperation in Finland. Transparent data are an effective tool to respond to this kind of criticism.

In addition to findability, data should be understandable. Lack of numerical analyses and visualizations was another issue that was discussed in the interviews. There is plenty of data in the websites, but in order to make it more transparent, it should be presented in a more understandable form. There were wishes that the numbers would be further analyzed and explained to the public on the website. Raw data can be hard to understand, and the more data that are out there, the more complicated it gets, and expertise from experts will be needed. Data visualization and geocoding would allow users to quickly analyze larger amounts of information using tools such as maps, graphs, and charts. These suggestions support the recent considerations and efforts of the MFA regarding starting to visualize data more into maps and different kinds of graphs. In addition, many international aid transparency initiatives promote visualizations of the data in order to show information about aid activities that might otherwise be difficult to comprehend, such as the relationships between aid activity locations. When looking at Heise's theory (1985) from this perspective, "making available publicly all releasable information" is not enough for transparency; it is also about the form in which the data is published. The form in which data is presented can actually make it easy to understand, and, thus, contribute to transparency. The consequences can be contrary if data is poorly presented.

Furthermore, the current development communication was thought to give an unrealistic picture regarding the capabilities of development cooperation and to create disproportionate expectations by the public because the relationship between various policies affecting developing countries is not clearly communicated. Linking development policy to trade policy and other policies was mentioned as something that is currently missing from the websites. The public should also be informed about other factors and policies that have an impact on development, fostering economic growth and reducing poverty. These include, for example, trade, security, energy, climate, migration, taxation, and agriculture. Policies should be mutually reinforcing and create synergies across government departments and agencies. This requires cooperation between different units of the MFA and also cooperation with other ministries in Finland in order to create the cohesion between policies affecting developing countries. It was also questioned whether it's necessary to have two separate websites, [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) and [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi), for development communication or whether it would be more coherent to have everything at one address and linked to the rest of Finland's foreign policy.

In particular contexts, the MFA could also benefit from collaborating on communication with NGOs. The ministry has more resources regarding communication than the NGOs, and joining the resources could be beneficial for both parties. Such a partnership can be an effective instrument when the MFA wishes to reach target groups with which others already have well-established relations and access channels, or when the MFA wishes to enhance communication on a particular aspect of its activities. It has also been stated in the Finland's development Policy Programme, that good interaction between the authorities and civil society as well as open and regular dialogue on development policy and cooperation will be enhanced (Finland's Development Policy Programme, 2012). Cooperation or partnerships haven't been included in the theories discussed in this study, but they can bring additional value and increase the transparency of a government agency.

Finally, it was suggested that the social media strategy should be clarified at the ministry. Some of the participants were more familiar with the MFA's presence in social media than the others, and the use of social media divided opinions between the interviewees, but the general attitude towards the use of social media was positive. Social media can make it possible to establish dialogue and user involvement through which the MFA can maintain and strengthen contact regarding current messages and achieve immediate response from participants in the target groups. However, this requires a sustained presence on social media and the ability and resources to engage in direct dialogue with the users. It is therefore important to make clear which contexts and for which target groups it would be relevant and beneficial to use the social media.

As Bertot et al. (2012, 81-84) state, the purposes and approaches of the social media channels vary. Some of them are better for disseminating information from the government to citizens, whereas others require active participation from both government and public. However, these all allow users to communicate, interact in a social environment, and share content. It emerged in the interviews, that although every channel has its strengths and weaknesses, it is the set of channels and the online communication as a whole that matters.

The focus in this study was on online communication, but the role of mass media in development communication was mentioned also by many interviewees. According to the interviews, there is room to further develop com-

munication through mass media. News media has a central role in the public debate in Finland. The results of the yearly opinion poll about development cooperation showed that Finns have limited knowledge about development cooperation. The results of the poll also showed that most of the Finns receive their knowledge about development cooperation from TV and newspapers (MFA, Suomalaisten mielipiteet kehitysyhteistyöstä, 2013). Thus, the concern of the stakeholders for media visibility of development cooperation is not without importance. The views are in line with the theory of Heise (1985), according to which governmental information should be provided through various channels. The wish for increased media publicity also resonates with the recommendations on government communication of the Prime Minister's Office (2010, 18), according to which the objective is that the public can via the various media receive picture as diverse and wide as possible, concerning the decisions and actions of authorities (Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2010, 18).

As discussed in chapter 2.2., Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007, 306) suggest that there are differences between the levels of demand for transparency between individuals. Perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders were in line with this analysis. First of all, there were differences between the answers of the small NGOs and larger NGOs that are part of a bigger international umbrella organization. The larger ones receive more information and guidelines from their umbrella organization and don't have as big of a need for MFA's information. The smaller ones, in turn, are more dependent on the development data of MFA. In addition, some interviewees mentioned being in regular contact with the MFA officials, even on a weekly basis, and receiving most of the needed information through personal interaction. This decreased the need for transparent online development communication. Some interviewees highlighted the importance of participatory online development communication for citizens; online communication was seen as an important channel to interact with the wider public.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to better understand transparency in development communication. This was pursued through reviewing relevant literature, relating to transparency in government communication and to development communication. In addition, qualitative case study was conducted, focusing on the transparency of online development communication of the MFA. The empirical part was conducted as semi-structured interviews for the MFA's partner NGOs, which are a central stakeholder group in development cooperation in Finland. The objective of the empirical part was to clarify the NGO's perceptions about the transparency of the MFA's online development cooperation, as well as to receive suggestions how transparency could be improved at the ministry. To meet these objectives three research questions were formed.

The research questions were answered by the empirical part, which covered nine semi-structured interviews with representatives from partner NGOs of the MFA. The data gathered were analyzed by the means of of a qualitative contents analysis, using deductive and inductive approaches.

This chapter is dedicated to the conclusions of the study. In addition, the central findings are discussed in relation to relevant theory and previous studies. Finally, some suggestions for future research and an evaluation of the present study are presented.

## 7.1 Conclusions

As discussed in chapter 2.1, scholars have defined transparency in various ways. The simplest definitions describe transparency as access to information. Most scholars relate the concept of transparency to openness, accountability and trust. Rawlins (2009, 75, 79) summarized the elements found in the transparency literature, defining transparency as follows: “Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies and practices...to be transparent, organizations should voluntarily share information that is inclusive, auditable (verifiable), complete, relevant, accurate, neutral, comparable, clear, timely, accessible, reliable, honest, and holds organization accountable”. Moreover, some authors go beyond access to information, and include participation or involvement of publics in the definition. In this study, the definition of Fairbanks et al. (2007) was followed, emphasizing access to information and possibility for participatory communication. In the empirical part, various elements of transparency were studied. The findings of the empirical part support the broader definition of transparency, going beyond access to information and including the participatory element.

First of all, findability of information was one of the often mentioned issues in the interviews. It is not only about having information available, but also but also about making it accessible so that everyone can find the relevant information quickly and easily. Findability was also connected to the amount of information. The optimal amount of information is something to be considered when optimizing transparency. According to Heise (1985, 209), the most important part of the public communication model is that governments officials would make all releasable information publicly available. It can be questioned, however, if this is necessary, or if some parts of the data can be left to be available on request. In addition, what does it require to publish all the information and is it even possible? Among the interviewees, the importance of findability was stressed more than having all the information published. Information needs to be structured; it is unusable if it cannot be found.



Second, providing detailed open data can mean very little without public engagement and proper consultation. In order to ensure that citizens are able to participate in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes, open data must be accompanied by wide consultative processes and guidance. Individuals and civil society representatives should be able to bring new ideas, information, and also to question the government officials' approaches, and finally, to hold policymakers accountable. This becomes possible only if they know what the government is doing, what the government is supposed to do, and what their own rights are.

Also, taking part in public discussion was also considered to contribute to transparency by some of the interviewees. It can be questioned, if active participation to public discussion is part of transparency or if it goes beyond it. Should governmental agencies take part in agenda setting, and facilitate public discussion? And from the contrary point of view, can a governmental agency communicate transparently without taking active part in public discussion? If no, which is a proper level of participation in order to be transparent? The answers of the interviews suggest that participation to public discussion is part of governmental transparency, but it should be further studied, to which extent an organization should participate in order to be transparent. Participation in the debate is often suggested from the perspective of societal problem solving rather than for democratic transparency purposes alone.

Moreover, development cooperation is a specific field in a sense that there are same directives to all donors who are members of DAC. Thus, in order to see a bigger picture, it should be possible to receive similar information from all the donors and to compare the data. In other words, the data should be interoperable and comparable across countries. The studies of Heise (1985) or Fairbanks et al. (2007) don't take this aspect into account, but in the field of development communication, it brings additional value for transparency. At the international level, the format in which data is published is an important factor from the perspective of coordination. In the context of the global aid transparency agenda, various tools and resources are available to help governments and donor agencies access and publish aid information, such as IATI, as discussed in chapter 3.4. By providing the information in an accessible and comparable format, donors can coordinate their activities with other donors, target aid to areas where it is most needed, and monitor the impact

of aid projects and programs, thus maximizing the impact of the aid interventions.

Transparency and accountability are both essential components of citizen participation in decision-making on development issues. The right of citizens to participate in public decision-making is fundamental to democracy. However, transparent development communication is challenging for many reasons. First of all, the subject itself is complex, and creating a complete, understandable picture of it requires real expertise. The empirical part of the study showed that the respondents, who are professionals in the field, had faced problems in understanding the information on the MFA's webpages. For non-professionals, i.e. average taxpayers in the donor country or recipient country citizens, the field and language are even more challenging to understand. Development agencies should make the complicated field as understandable as possible for the target audiences.

In addition to providing understandable information about development cooperation, information needs to be nuanced and give a truthful picture to the public. Transparent communication includes always risks, and the conditions in the field of development cooperation are not without risks either. Publishing information on the spending on and results of development cooperation might reveal matters that the organization is not proud of, and open the issue to external criticism. There is a risk of losing supporters by admitting failure or by telling about difficult conditions of development cooperation, but it also presents an opportunity to learn from mistakes. Furthermore, committing oneself to transparency requires the organization to put more pressure on addressing such concerns. Occasional poor results and inadequacies are not worrisome when the organization is able to demonstrate that it is learning and doing as much as possible to avoid such issues in the future. Transparency can help foster a stronger learning culture in the organization, and when more agencies are publishing such matters, it becomes normal that there are also inadequacies. In order to give a complete picture of the reality and conditions of development cooperation, communicating about diverse sides of it is necessary, including dilemmas and difficult issues.

The responses of the interviewees are in line with transparency literature discussed in this study. Heise (1985, 209) highlights the importance of publishing all releasable information, whether it is positive or negative in nature.

Rawlins (2009, 75, 79) follows in the same direction, stating that “Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal”. Providing a comprehensive picture of development cooperation is fair for those whose tax money has been used and those on whose behalf the work is done, and it is also of practical benefit in terms of increasing trust and opening the issue up for feedback and pressuring to improve the effectiveness of the activities. Transparent information on the activities and results is a foundation upon which greater accountability can be built.

Moreover, in order to communicate transparently, organizations need to understand the stakeholders’ needs and target contents to them accordingly. Development cooperation has a specific character of having stakeholders in various countries with different backgrounds. This makes targeting a difficult. As discussed in chapter 3.2, there are important stakeholders in both donor country and recipient country. Understanding the publics and sharing understandable information with them can be challenging. Donors hold a key position in the accountability chain. They are in quest for showing value for money, and proving development effectiveness for stakeholders. In this study the focus was on the donor country, and accountability was discussed mainly from the point of view of the citizen in the donor country. However, citizens in the recipient country, the beneficiaries of development assistance, are equally important stakeholders. Finding the most suitable communication methods and channels for different target groups is part of maximizing transparency.

As discussed in chapter 2.2, many scholars have pointed out how crucial public trust is to a government and tied with the concept of transparency to building trust. When publics feel that they have necessary information about agency decision, they are more trusting in the actions of the agency (Heise, 1985). Citizens can lose their trust in the government if they feel that the government is not transparent concerning its actions, and this can, in turn, threaten the health of a democracy. The Finnish publics’ trust in official information has been traditionally high, and official information on development cooperation has generally been thought to be trustworthy. This was also seen among the interviewees; their trust to development communication was high in a sense that there were no thoughts that information would be intentionally withheld from public. There is still room for various improve-

ments in publishing development data in a more transparent way, but there is a healthy, trustful foundation for further improvements of transparency.

To summarize, in order to obtain transparency in development communication, open and accessible information is not enough. The responses of the empirical part reflect a need for widening the definition beyond the previous ones discussed in this study. In addition to being open, data provided should always be structured, targeted, and interoperable. It should be easily findable and accessible, understandable, comparable and well targeted. Providing data in any format is better than nothing, but there are significant benefits to be gained by publishing structured, regularly updated data using open standards. In addition, all this should be accompanied by guidance.

One of the key findings of the study is that a development agency should focus on providing its stakeholders a nuanced picture of reality in development cooperation. The public should be informed about what development cooperation entails – and that sometimes investments can possibly fail. The relation to other policies should also be made clear to the stakeholders in order to avoid creating false expectations. News media can provide much help in communicating about development issues, and cooperation with other development actors can be beneficial. Development agencies should also actively take part in public discussion.

## **7.2 Evaluation of the Study**

The quality or trustworthiness of research is often described in terms of reliability and validity, as discussed in chapter 5.4. As explained earlier, the concepts were traditionally used in quantitative research and are based on an assumption that there is an objective reality. They cannot be straight applied to qualitative research as they primarily demand for the needs of quantitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133). The present study is qualitative in nature, focusing on perceptions, subjective views, interpretations and experiences of the interviewed stakeholders.

Although traditional forms of reliability and validity aren't straight applicable to qualitative research, they cannot be ignored. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 189) propose that structural validity plays an important role in qualitative research. Structural validity can be enhanced by explaining all the phas-

es of the research process and the choices being made: purpose of the study, data collection, selection of informants, data analysis and possible personal biases. In case of the present study, the methodological choices were explained in detail in chapter 5. Furthermore, the process of analysis was described systematically. Based on detailed descriptions, a reader should get a clear picture of the research process and the various steps of it. Moreover, while analyzing the data, quantification and tabulation was also used when relevant. The original transcribed materials were kept at the side during the whole analysis period.

The matter of reliability in qualitative research, on the contrary, concerns mostly the quality of the data and their analysis. This includes documenting the data correctly and taking all the relevant material and data into account, for example (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185, 189). In case of the present study, the interviews were carefully planned, recorded and transcribed, in order to enhance reliability. Before the actual interviews, the interview questionnaire was tested to see if the questions are understandable and if the structure of the questionnaire was appropriate. The recorded interviews were transcribed word by word and saved as Word-files. In addition, the relevant citations were added to support the results, so that the interviewees' voices would be heard in the study.

### **7.3 Limitations of the Study**

When analyzing the results of this study, certain limitations need to be taken into account.

One limitation refers to in the use of only qualitative research method in the study. The present study has relied largely on a qualitative methodology of data collection, although some quantitative methodology was used to a limited extent. More quantitative work could be undertaken in the future to provide a wider perspective to the present study. The qualitative methodology was relevant for this study, as the intention was to find out perceptions and views of a certain group of people. Although the interviewees provided expert-insights for answering the research questions, a survey could have brought additional opinions and consequently, more information, concerning the issues researched. Triangulation would have helped the researcher to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied.

The researcher has a central role in qualitative research (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008, 210). The subjective realities of both the researcher and the interviewees are reflected in the results. The study involved a particular group of people in a certain moment of time, and it could not be repeated to the full extent. The circumstances, in which the study was conducted, were unique and the results are not fully generalizable. It was a case study, focusing on the transparency of one organization, as perceived by a limited number of stakeholders. However, the goal of the research was not to generalize matters, but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the intensive study of particular cases. The results were then discussed in relation with previous studies and theory in the Discussion –chapter, to connect them with the broader context of the literature.

The professionalism of the interviewees supports the reliability of the research. The participants were chosen based on suggestions of the MFA officials. Participants were quite critical with their answers. However, as only one representative was interviewed from each organization due to the limited resources, strong conclusions cannot be made. Although a quantitative survey was considered as another possible method for gathering the data, the qualitative approach was chosen for the present study, in order to gain deeper insights to the topic.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was quite long and covered many topics. It combined scale questions with open-ended questions and additional questions. A more focused approach could have provided more in-depth answers from the participants.

It should be taken into consideration that the present study only covered the perceptions of stakeholders of certain organizations, but that the perspective of the case organization itself was not studied. The original idea was to include also the case organization's voice in the study, but it was not possible within the limited resources for the study. Nevertheless, as government organization's purpose is to serve the citizens, stakeholders' views can be seen a valuable and relevant starting point for a study.

Finally, the present study can be criticized for being limited to communication practices of the case organization. The NGOs are also implementers of development cooperation and development communication themselves. Focused on the development communication of the MFA, nothing is known about the communication practices of the NGOs themselves or their inten-

tions to promote transparency.

## **7.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

Transparency in development communication is a wide concept, and there was no space to study more than a narrow section of it in this thesis. In this study, the focus was on the donor country and perceptions of the partner NGOs. Studying perceptions of different stakeholder groups on a wider scale would be a good topic for future research. As discussed in chapter 3, the number of stakeholders is large in the field of development cooperation, consisting of stakeholder groups in both the donor country and recipient country, and also of the international aid community as whole. Understanding needs of different stakeholder groups would offer valuable insights for improving the transparency of online communication.

In particular, it would be interesting to get an insight to taxpayers' perceptions on transparency of development cooperation. As discussed in chapter 4.2, the MFA conducts annually an opinion poll on Finns' attitudes about development cooperation and development policy, and the opinions have been mainly positive in tone. It would be interesting to conduct a similar poll, but focusing especially on what publics' actually know about development cooperation, or to include such questions in the existing poll.

At the moment, the topic of aid transparency and accountability has received attention mostly in the north. However, transparency to recipient countries' governments and citizens is also of importance. A lack of transparency and accountability in aid can limit accountability within recipient countries to those who seek to hold governments to account there. Too often, the demands of taxpayers and citizens in the north are disconnected from those of recipients and citizens in the south. Stakeholders in recipient countries should also have a voice in the decisions. It would be interesting to study how much information the citizens in the recipient country actually receive about the development assistance in their country and how it could be improved.

In this study, the focus was on NGOs' perceptions of the current transparency in online development communication. It would be interesting to include the case organization's perspectives to the study and see how the views sup-

port or differ from each other. As discussed in chapter 2, there are various factors inside the organization that have an effect on transparency. According to the model of Fairbanks et al. (2007), organizational support is one of the main things affecting transparency. It would be interesting to study what kind of impact different elements of the model have on transparency of the communication, for example, how engagement and support from the top management influences transparency, or what kind of role politics has in transparency of development communication.

What finally matters, last but not least, are the outcomes of transparency to the results of development assistance. An important field for further studies would be the chains of causality between aid transparency and development outcomes; how transparency actually affects the development outcomes.



## **List of acronyms and terms**

DAC Development Assistance Committee

DPC Development Policy Committee

GNI Gross National Income

IATI International Aid Transparency Initiative

NAO National Audit Office

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

OAP Open Aid Partnership

ODA Official Development Assistance

OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OGP Open Government Partnership

WB World Bank

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## APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Hyvä yhteistyökumppani,

Opiskelen Jyväskylän yliopistossa filosofian maisterin tutkintoa, pääaineenani yhteisöviestintä. Olen tekemässä tutkintooni liittyvää pro gradu -tutkimusta aiheesta kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvän verkkoviestinnän avoimuus ja läpinäkyvyys.

Toivoisin, että osallistuisit haastatteluun, joka on osoitettu ulkoministeriön kumppanuusjärjestöille, ja tukisit näin tutkimukseni toteutumista. Vastaamalla sinulla on mahdollisuus vaikuttaa myös ulkoministeriössä toteutettavien muutosprosessien onnistumiseen. Käytän haastattelun runkona oheista lomaketta, johon voit tutustua ennen haastattelua. Mikäli haluat vastata anonyymisti, mainitsethan tästä haastattelun yhteydessä.

Kiitos etukäteen yhteistyöstä!

Terveisin,

Jarna Virtanen

1. Sukupuolesi?

Mies

Nainen

2. Ikäsi?

18-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-70

3. Ammattisi?

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4. Kuinka usein käytte UM:n verkkosivuilla a) [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi)?

Päivittäin

Viikottain

Kuukausittain

Harvemmin kuin kuukausittain

En koskaan

b) [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi)?

Päivittäin

Viikottain

Kuukausittain

Harvemmin kuin kuukausittain

En koskaan

5. Kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvän viestinnän avoimuus ja läpinäkyvyys on minulle

1=Erittäin tärkeä

2=Melko tärkeä

3=Jonkin verran tärkeä

4=Vähän tärkeä

5=EI lainkaan tärkeä

1

2

3

4

5

6. Millaista tietoa etsitte kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyen [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) tai [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi) -verkkosivuilta? (Rasti sopivat vaihtoehdot)

- Ajankohtaisia uutisia kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyen
- Yleistä tietoa kehityspolitiikan periaatteista
- Tietoa kehitysyhteistyöhön käytetyistä määrärahoista sekä mille maille ja sektoreille ne jakautuvat
- Tietoa tuista yhteistyökumppaneille, kuten kumppanuusjärjestöille, korkeakouluille, kansainvälisille järjestöille, valtion laitoksille jne.
- Tietoa kehitysyhteistyön tuloksista
- Julkaisuja ja aineistoja
- Ohjeita kehitysyhteistyön toteutukseen
- Tietoa rahoitusinstrumenteista
- Tietoa kumppanimaista
- Tietoa kehitysyhteistyön teemoista, kuten ihmisoikeudet, ilmastonmuutos, koulutus, jne.
- Tietoa globaalikasvatuksesta
- Muuta tietoa, mitä?

7. Löydän tarvitsemani kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvät tiedot [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) -verkkosivuilta

Aina Usein Melko usein Harvoin En koskaan

8. Mikäli et ole löytänyt tarvitsemasi tietoja, niin millaisia tietoja? Millaisiin ongelmiin olet törmännyt etsiessäsi tietoja?

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9. Kuinka hyviä alla olevat ominaisuudet ovat kehitysyhteistyön verkkoviestintään liittyen [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) -sivuilla? Ympyröi parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto.

	1=Erinomainen	2=Kiitettävä	3=Hyvä	4=Tyydyttävä	5=Heikko
Tiedon ajantasaisuus	1	2	3	4	5
Tiedon ymmärrettävyys	1	2	3	4	5
Tietosisällön mielenkiintoisuus	1	2	3	4	5
Kuvat	1	2	3	4	5
Verkkosivujen rakenne	1	2	3	4	5
Verkkosivujen ulkoasu	1	2	3	4	5
Verkkosivujen käytettävyys	1	2	3	4	5
Hyödyllisyys	1	2	3	4	5

10. Mihin edellämainittuihin ominaisuuksiin UM:n verkkoviestinnässä mielestäsi tulisi erityisesti kiinnittää huomiota?

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11. Kuinka tärkeinä pidät seuraavia kehitysviestinnän sisältöjä UM:n verkkosivuilla [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) ja [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi)? Ympyröi parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto.

	1=Erittäin tärkeä	2=Melko tärkeä	3=Jonkin verran tärkeä	4=Vähän tärkeä	5=Ei lainkaan tärkeä
Ajankohtaiset uutiset kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyen	1	2	3	4	5
Yleinen tieto kehityspolitiikan periaatteista	1	2	3	4	5
Tietosisältö kehitysyhteistyön määrärahoista	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto tuista yhteistyökumppaneille, kuten kumppanuusjärjestöille, korkeakouluille, kansainvälisille järjestöille, valtion laitoksille jne.	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto kehitysyhteistyön tuloksista	1	2	3	4	5
Julkaisut ja aineistot	1	2	3	4	5
Ohjeet kehitysyhteistyön toteutukseen	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto rahoitusinstrumenteista	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto kumppanimaista	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto kehitysyhteistyön teemoista, kuten ihmisoikeudet, ilmastonmuutos, koulutus, jne.	1	2	3	4	5
Tieto globaalikasvatuksesta	1	2	3	4	5

12. Onko jotain erityistä, josta kaipaisit lisää tietoja UM:n verkkosivuille [www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi) tai [www.global.finland.fi](http://www.global.finland.fi)?

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13. Asteikolla 1-4, mitä mieltä olet seuraavista väittämistä UM:n verkkosivujen tilasta kehitysyhteistyön osalta? Ympyröi parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto.

	1=Täysin samaa mieltä	2=Osittain samaa mieltä	3=Osittain eri mieltä	4=Täysin eri mieltä	eri
Löydän sivuilta helposti etsimäni tiedon	1	2	3	4	
Tietosisältö on selkeää	1	2	3	4	
Sivut päivittyvät liian harvoin	1	2	3	4	
Sivujen ulkoasu on miellyttävä	1	2	3	4	
Sivuilla on riittävästi mahdollisuuksia vuorovaikutukseen	1	2	3	4	
Sivut palvelevat kansalaisjärjestöjen tarpeita	1	2	3	4	

Mikäli sinulla on lisättävää tai tarkennettavaa edellisiin väittämiin liittyen, voit lisätä tähän:

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14. Mistä seuraavista sosiaalisen median kanavista olet löytänyt ulkoministeriön tarjoamaa kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvää tietoa?

Facebook

Twitter

YouTube

Vimeo

Flickr

Blogit

Muut sosiaalisen median kanavat, mitkä? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Minkä sosiaalisen median kanavien käyttöä ulkoministeriön tulisi mielestäsi tehostaa?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. Onko sinulla kehitysehdotuksia, kuinka verkkosivujen sisältöä tulisi parantaa?

\_\_\_\_\_

17. Asteikolla 4-10, minkä arvosanan antaisit UM:lle kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvän verkkoviestinnän avoimuudesta ja läpinäkyvyydestä?

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

## APPENDIX 1 QUOTATIONS IN FINNISH

1. *"Kehitysyhteistyöhön liittyvä avoimuus on mulle erittäin tärkeää. Se on sellaisia asioita joka kiinnostaa tosi paljon ja intuitiivisesti tuntuu tosi tärkeältä."* (P1, lainaus 1)
2. *"No se on tietenkin hirveän tärkeä. Ilman muuta täytyy olla rahavirrat ym. avoimia, julkisia tietoja. Koska ne on julkisia tietoja."* (P7, lainaus 2)
3. *"Tää on ehkä väärin aseteltu tää kysymys. Ehkä ennemminkin pitäis kysyä kuinka paljon eforttia se vaatii.(...) no kyllä mä ne löydän sieltä, mutta vaikeesti. Ja joskus mä en kyl itse asiassa löydä niit sillee et sit täytyy kysyä et muistaaks joku miten sinne mentiin, missä ne oli, ja yleensä sit joku tietää polun. (...) Sit on ollu tosiaan jotain semmosta mitä mä en vaan löydä ollenkaan..(..). Ja sit mä meen johonkin jonkun lähettämään sähköpostiin ja mulla tuhrautuu hirveesti aikaa yrittää löytää se."* (P9, quote 3)
4. *"Noi forminin sivut on mun mielestä hankalat rakenteeltaan. Global.finland.fi on helpompi. Mut sitä globalia mä käytän enemmän niin että mä katson mitä siellä on, että mitä uutisia, mitä ajankohtaisia asioita, et sieltä ei ehkä niinkään hae, kun taas forminin sivuilta nimenomaan hakee jotain tiettyä. (...) on pitänyt opetella ulkoa se sivujen rakenne, jotta tietää että mistä mitäkin löytyy, että osaan ne polut."* (P2, lainaus 4)
5. *"Noi jutut pitää laittaa tonne suosikit-palkkeihin...(..) Niitä saa joka kerta etti sieltä. (...) polut on epäloogisia ja siellä on liikaa tietoa, se on sotkuinen se sivu. (...) global on meille relevantimpi, sieltä löytyy helpommin ja nopeemmin. Mutta siinäkin on varmaan vähän sama historia, sekin alkaa olla aika täynnä kaikenlaista. Monesti mun on helpompi soittaa virkamiehelle ja kysyä, kun ei jaksa sitä alkaa sieltä (sivuilta) onkimaan."* (P4, lainaus 5)
6. *"Niistähän (formin-sivuista) verkkoviestintää tekevänä ihmisenä näkee että ne on niin äärimmilleen paisutetut, et ne on ihan halkeemispisteessä."* (P8, lainaus 6)
7. *"Kehityspolitiikassahan on nää läpileikkaavat tavoitteet ja niille on nää ohjeet et miten niitä pitäis kansalaisjärjestöjen yhteistyössä jotenki sitten noudattaa ja siel on näitä indikaattoreita ja kaikkee. Et niitä mä hain sieltä pitkään. Sit*

*kun mä löysin ne ni kyllähän ne oli siellä, mutta... sit sun pitää koko ajan hyppiä linkistä toiseen ja klikata tästä ja mennä seuraavaan ja sieltä löytyy sit ehkä joku pdf jossain vaiheessa...(..) ne on semmosia mitkä pitäis olla mun mielestä helposti löydettävissä. Ne ei ollu kauheen helposti löydettävissä eikä ne oo kauheen helposti hallittavissa..” (P9, lainaus 7)*

8. *”...crosscutting issues meidän kehityspoliittisessa ohjelmassahan on, jatkuvan analyysin alla. (...) et me otetaan ikäänkuin vakavasti se mitä he (UM) kirjoittaa toimenpideohjeisiinsa. Ja siinä mielessä myös ne viestinnän eri väylät on tärkeitä tahoja välillisesti tukea, UM:n kehityspoliittisen ohjelman todellista toteuttamista.” (P8, quote 8)*
9. *”...tottakai tulokset, periaatteet, määrärahat on keskeistä mutta millä tavalla ne paketoit ni se on mun mielestä se kriittinen kysymys.” (P8, lainaus 9)*
10. *”Täytyy sanoa että yleisesti en ole kokenut että onpa vaikea sivusto ([www.formin.fi](http://www.formin.fi)), mulla ei ole sellaista mielikuvaa tai tunnetta siitä. Mutta näähän on sellaiset perinteiset viranomaisen sivut, ei ne nyt mitenkään erityisen houkuttelevat ole. Ministerit kättelykuvoissa jne...(..) ehkä sitten tää [global.finland](http://global.finland) on sellanen joka tuo mielenkiintoisemmin, monipuolisemmin ja värikkäämmin esille.” (P1, lainaus 10)*
11. *”..se on jotenkin hirveen raskas, siinä on jotenki säälittävään pieni fontti siinä forminissa. Siis sellasta tihrustamista...(..)onks se jotain kasia millä se on kirjoitettu, kiikarit tarttis. Tosi hankala lukea, kyllä mä sanoisin että se formin ei oo miellyttävä.” (P4, lainaus 11)*
12. *”Ja ulkoasu..no globalista mä en tykkää. (...) Mun mielestä ne viralliset formin-sivut on ihan nätit ja asialliset ulkoasultaan mutta global ei.” (P9, lainaus 12)*
13. *”Mä en muista, mulle ei tuu mielikuvia kuvista.. Ihan kivastihan se on taitettu ja se on kauniin värinen.” (P3, lainaus 13)*
14. *”Kuvat, mä en oo kyllä koskaan kiinnittänyt niihin mitään huomioo (forminissa).” (P4, lainaus 14)*
15. *”Ei ne nyt mitenkään erityisen houkuttelevat ole. Ministerit kättelykuvoissa jne.” (P1, lainaus 15)*

16. *"Joskus se, et miten ne asiat on siellä järjestetty, se tieto siellä sivuilla, niin se vähentää sen hyödyllisyyttä, kun se on sirpaleista, tai kauheen monessa paikkaa, tai sitä ei löydä." (P9, lainaus 16)*
17. *"..voiko niinkun epäkiinnostavammin tän (uutiset) esitellä? (...) Tää näyttää sellaiselta, että nykyhetkessä ihmiset ei jää yleensä näihin. " (P8, lainaus 17)*
18. *"..jotkus niistä asioista mitä siellä on, just noista meitä koskevista ohjeistuksista ja tällasista niin, ne ei oo kauheen sellasta hyvää kieltä. Että ne on viranomaiskieltä ja aika semmosta kapulakieltä, et on semmosta asiaa mitä on vaikea ymmärtää." (P9, lainaus 18)*
19. *"Ja se päivitys, tietojen pitäisi olla ajantasaisia. Siinä helposti tulee semmonen että "antaa olla, enmä hae täältä", jos siellä on 2009 päivitettyjä tietoja viimeks. Et "aijaa, eiks nää ittekään usko tähän hommaan." (P7, lainaus 19)*
20. *"Se on lähinnä sellainen ilmoitussivusto, että "UM tiedottaa ja sillä siisti." (P1, lainaus 20)*
21. *"..toi vuorovaikutus sellainen, jossa olisi parannettavaa. Ois ihan hyvä että siellä ois jotain palautekanavia taikka jotain keskustelupalstoja erikseen. Että onhan globalila esim. FB-sivut , joita voi kommentoida ja tykätä, mutta ois ihan hyvä että myös siellä nettisivuilla ois jotain mahdollisuuksia kommunikointiin." (P2, lainaus 21)*
22. *"...semmonen mikä vois olla hyödyllinen, niin kysymyspalsta, neuvontapalsta. Se ois semmosta hyvää vuorovaikutusta. Ja se vois olla semmonen että "kysy mitä vaan". Teknistä neuvoa tai mikä on tasa-arvotilanne Chilessä.." (P6, lainaus 22)*
23. *"Joo, meille on riittävä (perinteiset viestintäkanavat). Esim. viime viikolla mulla oli pari epäselvää asiaa...(..). ni mä kirjoitin meidän yhteyshenkilölle UM:ssä siitä suoraan. Ei tarttenu nettisivuja sitä varten." (P3, lainaus 23)*
24. *"Mut hyödyllisyys kuitenkin erinomainen. Kyllä mä sieltä kuitenkin paljon tietoa haen ja se mitä sieltä löytyy, on tosi ymmärrettävää ja mielenkiintoista." (P7, lainaus 24)*
25. *"Facebook ja UM kuulostaa kaukaisilta kavereilta. Mä en ole UM:n facebook-frendi." (P1, lainaus 25)*

26. *"Mä kyllä tiedän että Stubbilla on Twitter.. eiku hei joo, oon käyny Heidi Hautalan Facebook-sivuilla." (P4, lainaus 26)*
27. *"Facebook-päivitykset, ottaen huomioon mitkä ne on ne resurssit, et sivut on vanhanaikaiset ja on aika konservatiivinen se viestinnän linja, niin Facebook on musta ollu yllättävään freesiä. Et tavallaan niinku se linja mikä siellä Facebookissa on niin sitä vois laajentaa." (P8, lainaus 27)*
28. *"Facebook on musta hyvä, se antaa kuitenkin mahdollisuuden vähän enempiin kun siinä pystyy olemaan sekä kuvia että jonkinverran tekstiä. Twitter on niin hiroeen tiivistä. Twitterissä viestit menee usein vähän käsittämättömäksi kun ihmiset joutuu niinku lyhentämään niitä ja sit tulee just näitä hashtagia sinne ja linkkejä ja muita ja se menee semmoseks ettei sitä jaksaa edes ruveta purkamaan itselleen että mitä tää viesti tarkoittaa." (P2, lainaus 28)*
29. *"Se mitä mä seuraisin ihan mielelläni on jotain blogeja. Mut en mä tiedä haluisinko mä jonkun ministereiden blogeja. Mieluummin mä jonkun tämmösen kansalaisvaikuttajan blogia seuraan joka puhuu kehitysyhteistyöstä." (P9, lainaus 29)*
30. *".. se jää usein niin kevyeksi.. mutta ehkä se (sosiaalinen media) jollekin antaa tietyn sysäyksen." (P7, lainaus 30)*
31. *"Kaikilla näillä on omat vahvuutensa ja sitten riippuu että minkälaista sanomaa haluaa tuoda ulos, mutta pääsääntöisesti että kaikki materiaali mielellään ulos saitilta, ja saitti on ikäänkuin koontipaikka." (P1, lainaus 31)*