

Give & Take

A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia

Spring 1999
Vol. 2 / Issue 2



NGO Image in the FSU:
What's the Public View?

Editor in Chief
Eliza K. Klose

Managing Editor
Paul Lawrence

Editor at Large
Amy Forster

Assistant Editor and Layout
Rachel Griffiths

Editorial Assistance
BJ Chisholm
Alice Hengesbach
Michelle Kinman
Miranda Lutyens
Kate Watters
Amy Wilson

Mission Statement
ISAR promotes citizen participation and the development of the nongovernmental sector in the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) by supporting citizen activists and grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in their efforts to create just and sustainable societies.

ISAR's offices work to facilitate partnerships between and among NGOs in Eurasia and the United States, and to educate the public in the US and Eurasia about the unique role that grassroots organizations play in shaping a positive transformation in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

ISAR History
Established in 1983 by Harriett Crosby and Nancy Graham as the Institute for Soviet-American Relations, ISAR originally served as a clearinghouse on US-USSR citizen exchange and published the journal *Surviving Together* until the end of 1997.

Opinions expressed in articles appearing in *Give & Take* do not necessarily reflect ISAR's views.

More information about ISAR's programs is available on our web site, www.isar.org.

To find out how to receive *Give & Take* please see the back cover.

On the Cover: A Moscow homeless man displays *Yest Vykhod* (The Way Out), a paper he is selling. Photo courtesy of the Center for Humanitarian Aid.

Contents

Spring 1999

Vol. 2 / Issue 2

4

Newsflashes

5

NGO Image

Russian Public Warms to Nonprofits

by Elena Topoleva

Kazakhstan's NGOs Intensify Outreach

by Amy Forster

A Funder on NGO Image in Russia

by Georgina Wilson

10

Constituency Building

Planting the Seeds that Matter Most

by Andrey Ozharovskii

Yerevan Training Center Builds Civil Society from the Rubble

by Anahit Mkrтчian

14

NGOs and Controversial Issues

Moscow Center Changes Public Attitudes Towards Homeless

by Julie MacDonald

Amid Economic Pressures, Anti-Nuclear Activists Rally Support

by Paul Lawrence

Human Rights Group Harnesses Media to Defend "Mother's Right"

by Paul Lawrence

The Gay 90's: A Decade in Review

by Kevin J. Gardner

21

Effects of International Assistance

Civil Society or the Third Sector?

by James Richter

NGOs Left Out of Caspian Development

by Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal

26

NGO Innovations

27

Index of Organizations

Contact information for organizations in bold text throughout the journal is in the index.

NGO Image: Are Community Attitudes Changing?

This issue of *Give & Take* is devoted to the question of how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are perceived in this eighth year after the collapse of the Soviet Union: how their image has changed, for better or for worse, and what NGOs are doing—and need to do—to raise public awareness about their activities.

We solicited articles on the subject from NGOs themselves as well as from people who support, train and study them, trying to gather insights from throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU). As our authors make clear, the conditions for NGOs are very different from country to country, and the desirability of publicizing NGO activities varies dramatically from the Caucasus to Russia to Central Asia. But wherever they operate, NGOs face cynicism regarding their charitable goals and a legacy of mistrust linked with the obligatory volunteerism of Soviet times.

We have divided the discussion into four parts: general overview pieces on the public perception of NGOs in Russia and Kazakhstan; articles on NGO efforts to generate greater community support; stories about how groups dealing with controversial issues, such as homelessness, homosexuality and human rights, are handling the image problem; and views on how Western assistance has affected NGO responsiveness to local need.

The general opinion is that NGOs have come an extraordinarily long way in the last eight years, but the term NGO is scarcely a household word. According to recent polls taken in Siberia, for instance, 26 percent of the population could name an NGO in 1995; by 1997 the figure was 32 percent. Most people involved in the Third Sector understand that positive media attention is crucial to raising public consciousness. The Agency for Social Information in Moscow was founded specifically to serve as a bridge between nonprofits and journalists. NGOs like the Mother's Right Foundation in Russia have used the media to great effect in pressing for better conditions for young soldiers. The British Know How Fund, USAID, the Open Society Institute, among others, support television films and NGO media outreach, while training programs throughout the FSU now offer courses on working with the press.

In the end, however, NGOs must derive their power from their constituencies. As many of our authors explain, the image and impact of an NGO depends on whether it can speak for a broad public as it attempts to dramatize and address a chosen issue. Thus, for all that Western assistance has done to foster the growth of the Third Sector, it can also skew its development when NGOs pursue activities based on the interests of their funders instead of their communities. Civil society, as James Richter notes, "must come from within the population," "must be rooted in society." Thus, the ultimate key to Third Sector success and sustainability depends on whether NGOs in the former Soviet Union can build local support, attract volunteers and represent the views of those they serve.

Eliza K. Klose
Editor in Chief

Cause for Optimism in Trial of Vladivostok Whistleblower

In the first positive development in the case of environmentalist and naval officer Grigory Pasko, judges ruled this April that the prosecution would not be allowed to call its remaining 23 witnesses, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports. Pasko is standing trial for the alleged sale of military secrets to Japan and has been jailed since November 1997. He was arrested after Japanese television aired his documentary film exposing the disposal of radioactive waste into the Sea of Japan by the Russian Pacific fleet.

Although Russian laws enacted in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster make it illegal to withhold information on environmental health hazards and are designed to protect whistleblowers, Pasko was put on trial this January and his case classified a state secret. Pasko is currently being held in solitary confinement and has contracted tuberculosis. For information on the case and how to help, contact Amnesty International; ph: 202-546-0200; fax: 202-544-7142; <www.amnesty_usa.org>.

NGO Pressure Stops Logging in Virgin Forests

In a victory for environmental NGOs, the Finnish timber companies UPM-Kummene and Stora Enso announced in April the extension of their voluntary moratorium on logging in Russian old-growth forests. The news from UPM-Kummene and Stora Enso, the two largest foreign timber ventures operating in Russia, came on the heels of an announcement from the Russian company Svetogorsk Pulp and Paper Mill that timber from virgin forests would not be used in their products.

The victory is the result of a five-year confrontation between environmental NGOs and timber interests over logging in the pristine forests of Russia's Northwest. NGO activists from the Socio-Ecological Union and Greenpeace used satellite

maps of forests in Karelia, the Komi Republic and the Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions to find 49,420 acres of largely undisturbed old-growth forest. A coalition of NGOs then publicized the findings and launched a consumer education campaign to pressure timber interests not to purchase wood from old-growth forests. The original UPM-Kummene and Stora Enso moratorium began in 1995, after Britain, Germany and the Netherlands announced that they would not use wood from the disputed areas.

-Environmental News Service

NGO Appeals Ban Of Independent Lawyers From Azerbaijani Courts

The Association of Lawyers of Azerbaijan (ALA) announced that it intends to appeal to the chair of the Constitutional Court in its fight to overturn the December order issued by Azerbaijan's Minister of Justice, Sudaba Hasanova, barring independent lawyers from representing clients in criminal cases. Following Hasanova's directive, Azerbaijan's police forces were ordered not to share information with independent defense lawyers or allow them to accompany their clients to meetings with law officials. Hasanova's instructions are in direct violation of legislation enacted in 1997-98, which provides for independent legal counsel in Azerbaijan. Prior to 1997, only lawyers belonging to the state-sponsored Collegium of Advocates were allowed to represent clients in court.

Since January, the ALA has sent out numerous appeals to government officials pointing out the illegality of the Justice Ministry's actions. However, meetings with the prosecutor general, the prime minister, the chair of the Supreme Court and numerous judges have proven unproductive. Although only government bodies have the right to bring matters to the Constitutional Court, the ALA hopes its latest appeal will yield results.

-International League for Human Rights

Russian Public Warms to Nonprofits

by Elena Topoleva

THIRD SECTOR,” “NONGOVERMENTAL organization,” “nonprofit”—only three years ago these words sounded foreign to Russian ears and were only used by a narrow circle of professional nonprofit leaders. In Russia today, Duma deputies include references to the Third Sector in their speeches, radio and television stations air programs featuring nonprofit organizations and newspapers carry discussions on nonprofit taxation. The emergence of the nonprofit sector has affected not only the Russian language, but is increasingly influencing and drawing the attention of government officials and the mass media.

A few years ago, nonprofits and the government were only beginning to understand each other. Today, meetings between NGO activists and government representatives have led to the adoption of some crucial NGO legislation and created friendships between nonprofit leaders and formerly hostile officials. However, this is just the beginning of a difficult journey and there are still many obstacles to overcome. For two years now, NGOs have fought for the adoption of a Law on Social Order, which would allow nonprofit organizations to compete for government funding to implement federal, regional and municipal programs. So far, this law has only been adopted in a few regions. On the federal level, the passage of the law has been blocked by the hostility of high-ranking officials, including the Minister of Labor and Social Development, Sergei Kalashnikov.

Minister Kalashnikov distrusts nonprofits, as he has announced many times from different podiums and from the television screen. To support his argument, he references several scandals connected with Russian nonprofit organizations, such as the money laundering of the National Sports Fund. These scandals attract a lot of media attention, and worse, taint the reputation of the thousands of honest groups that work in the public interest. But what about the Russian people? What attitudes do they have towards nonprofits? Russians know about the nonprofit scandals from the press and from politicians, but this alone does not determine their relationship with the Third Sector. In fact, it is difficult to talk about a general public opinion towards NGOs because the Russian Third Sector has such weak ties with the public.

According to public opinion polls commissioned by USAID and conducted in 1998 by the All-Russian

Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), only four percent of the Russian population has ever participated in nonprofit work. One reason for this is that the rapidly growing Third Sector has not concentrated on involving the public in resolving important social issues. Russian nonprofits rarely attract volunteers, do little to solicit private donations and almost never attempt to involve the public in the decision-making process. However, the same VTsIOM survey showed that 12 to 13 percent of citizens had used some sort of NGO service. Taking into account that the Third Sector in Russia has only existed for ten years, these numbers are heartening. Nevertheless, in order for the Third Sector to expedite the formation of a strong Russian civil society, it is essential that NGOs begin to actively work with the public and that citizens begin to assist nonprofits by volunteering time and money, and by offering moral support.

Nonprofits and the Media

Although in general Russian citizens are poorly informed about the work of the nonprofit sector, certain positive trends are emerging. According to the results of research conducted from 1995-97 by the Education Development Center (EDC) in Omsk, Krasnodar and Stavropol, knowledge of NGOs is slowly growing. In 1995, only 26 percent of those polled could name one NGO, while in 1997, that figure had grown to 32 percent. EDC's research showed that the main source of information about the NGO work is the Russian mass media.

If one were to flip through newspaper files or review television and radio programming from five years ago, it would be difficult to find reports on charitable activity. What coverage there was tended to be negative and concentrated on the scandals of “thieving” foundations. Unfortunately, Russians historically take the press at its word despite the obvious prejudices of many media outlets. Today, a different picture is emerging. Hardly a day passes without some mention in the press of human rights organizations, NGO-supported children's clubs or consumer rights organizations. Russian NGOs now even have their own media fans—journalists at major publishing houses and radio shows who specialize in the Third Sector. Anna Politkovskaya, a famous Russian journalist working at *Obshaya Gazeta*, has become a real friend of the movement, and her talented pen has

Financial scandals involving charities attract a lot of media attention, and worse, taint the reputation of the thousands of honest groups that work in the public interest.

done more for the Third Sector than all the Duma debates or meetings with cabinet officials. In addition, the Russian Third Sector now has its own information outlet, the **Agency for Social Information** (ASI).

The Agency for Social Information

ASI developed out of the first Russian independent news agency, Postfactum. In 1994, a few of Postfactum's journalists and editors came into contact with several NGOs. Convinced that the future of Russia lies with nonprofit leaders and their organizations, the staff of Postfactum decided to create ASI in order to better inform the Russian public about the nonprofit sector. ASI believes that the press is the straightest path to the hearts and minds of the Russian public, and works as a bridge between nonprofits and the journalists.

For the past five years, ASI has published a weekly bulletin that is distributed to over 60 Russian media outlets. The bulletin first consisted of only six pages covering Moscow-based organizations, but now includes over 50 pages of information from ASI partners throughout Russia. In order to interest journalists in the Third Sector, ASI also puts out other publications and organizes round tables and press conferences to introduce NGOs to the media. ASI leaders hope that good press coverage of NGOs will help to form a positive relationship between Russians and the nonprofit sector, without which there can be no true civil society. ●

Elena Topoleva is the director of ASI. Translated by Rachel Griffiths.

Kazakhstan's NGOs Intensify Outreach

by Amy Forster

THE MAJORITY OF NGOS IN Kazakhstan have been slow to reach out to the general public, government officials and businesses. This lack of outreach, together with the legacy of the Soviet period when independent action was impossible, has hampered public understanding of NGOs and why they are relevant to people's lives.

Increasingly, however, government officials and the general public are coming into contact with NGOs. According to journalist Larisa Popova, many parents have been introduced to NGOs and the possibility of independent action through school parent associations. Popova, formerly of Family Association, an Almaty NGO, explained that the dire economic straits of school systems throughout the country have led parents to pool resources, labor and creative ideas to support their children's education. As of 1998, 57 such "social funds" had registered, and an association had formed to unite them.

Other NGOs have also achieved widespread public visibility. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers has established affiliates in cities throughout Kazakhstan, and its work to ensure the safety of those serving in the military is well known. Pensioner and homeowner associations unite many citizens in practical efforts to improve their lives. City cleanups and Earth Day actions involve the public and give visibility to the work of environmental groups.

While these examples suggest that the public is becoming aware of NGOs and how they can benefit society, these cases remain the exception, not the rule.

Neither Soviet socialization nor post-Soviet "do for yourself" thinking have encouraged voluntary social action, and even when Kazakhstanis are aware of NGOs, they often remain skeptical of their motives.

NGOs themselves often reinforce the perception that they are working solely for their own benefit by struggling with each other over access to money and information. Some organizations see no need to reach out to new members, resulting in an NGO sector that lacks a widespread public base. Weak NGO legislation compounds the problems of building membership. Nonetheless, the organizations that have broken down these barriers to prove the benefits of their work to skeptical citizens and governments have begun the process of public education necessary for an effective and sustainable NGO sector.

Communicating with the Public

Popova became interested in how the public understands NGOs and how NGOs reach out to the public when she placed a newspaper advertisement marketing public relations services to businesses and received a number of queries from NGOs. While initially surprised by this response, she was encouraged to see that NGOs were beginning to think about outreach.

Working as a journalist, Popova looks for ways to include NGO efforts in her reporting. She explained that newspapers are willing to print articles about NGOs, but that there are not enough journalists writing on NGO themes. She noted, "journalists don't

NGOs themselves often reinforce the perception that they are working solely for their own benefit by struggling with each other over access to money and information.

necessarily understand NGOs—when I go talk with groups, we speak the same language.”

While Popova has found newspapers receptive to stories about NGOs, some NGO leaders have been asked to pay to get their information out through the media, a common practice in Kazakhstan. Another more welcoming option for Kazakhstani organizations is the newspaper *21st Century*, also a nonprofit organization. The weekly paper, distributed nationwide, examines political and social questions and often discusses the work of NGOs, or publishes appeals and articles written by NGO leaders.

Involving the Public

NGOs have taken many different approaches to educating the public and involving them in their work. The choice of approach depends on the NGO's goals, activities and the political climate in which it operates. While some NGOs are made up of a couple of active individuals who incorporate primarily to gain the legal and fiscal status of an organization, other groups aim to involve the public and increase community participation. Some NGOs are closely linked with business or government counterparts; for example, members of *Caspian Tabigat* (Caspian Nature), an NGO in Atyrau, work for the municipal Committee on the Environment, and the environmental club in Zhana Ozen, a small city in Mangistau Oblast, is made up of local business leaders.

NGOs that seek to attract more public involvement have used a number of outreach techniques. *Caspian Tabigat* involves the local community through its youth programs and publicizes its cause in local newspapers. Another Atyrau organization, the local affiliate of the Republican Women's Association, has advertised to attract members and learn more about the concerns of local women. The group has placed ads in four local papers inviting women to contact them with their concerns. They are collecting the information in a database and will use it to assist in planning and setting priorities. The strategy has been successful in recruiting members, although Aigul Solovyova, head of the organization, acknowledged, "I'm sure many will fall off our lists since they won't really want to do work." The Association is currently making an effort to reach out to wealthy professional women who can help them launch a microcredit program.

Recruiting and active involvement of members is also a priority for *Parakhat* (Reason), an Aktau-based social movement with 1,200 members throughout Mangistau Oblast. The organization, which works for free elections and political reform, as well as addressing social issues, needs a large membership for projects

such as election monitoring and political advocacy. *Parakhat* members gather at a general conference every two years to review the movement's programs and choose new leaders.

Promoting Volunteerism

Another method of involving the public in NGO activity is by attracting volunteers. Volunteerism in most former Soviet countries still carries a negative stereotype since people connect the idea with the forced "voluntary" labor they were expected to provide during the Soviet era. However, a number of NGOs are trying to change this stereotype by recruiting volunteers for projects ranging from environmental clean ups to providing free medical services in remote villages.

Inkar, an NGO in the city of Aqtobe in western Kazakhstan, collaborates with the local university on a small business support program, and as part of that agreement, solicits university students as volunteers. A more formal arrangement with the university will provide six students with structured internships.

In Almaty, the Soros Foundation has established a project called Volunteer House to promote volunteerism and give people opportunities to "change themselves and the world for the better." Established this year, the center strives to attract volunteers to social service and to strengthen NGOs by finding specialists to donate their time. Volunteer House maintains a database of people interested in volunteering, studies the human resource needs of local NGOs, and conducts trainings for volunteers and organizations that incorporate volunteers in their programs. It also places volunteers with appropriate organizations.

Working with Local Governments

While the national government often remains suspicious of independent action, local governments in some regions have started to work with NGOs. Examples of such cooperation, though not yet common, can be found from around Kazakhstan. In central Kazakhstan, the Karaganda EcoCenter and the Ministry of Education are working together to produce

Citizens Air Concerns During Town Meeting

In an effort to bridge the gap between parliamentarians and their constituencies, the Southern Kazakhstan Association of Lawyers joined with the American Bar Association/Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative and the International Foundation for Election Systems to organize a ground-breaking town meeting in September 1998. The resulting exchange of ideas excited both parliamentarians and citizens.

The town meeting attracted nine parliamentarians and approximately 80 local community members, who learned of the event through television and newspaper advertisements. Local lawyers, heads of NGOs, students, professors and local media representatives were among the crowd, which eagerly posed a range of questions to the representatives. Topics of discussion included teacher salaries, pension benefits and the difficulties involved in making budget cuts. Another subject of great interest was an amendment proposing direct election of local leaders, who are now appointed by the president. Election themes were prevalent, and the audience asked many questions about how free and fair elections should be conducted. Local citizens also took the opportunity to tell parliamentarians that university students were forced to sign petitions in support of current President Nursultan Nazarbaev's re-election.

Town meetings both increase the accountability of legislators to their constituents and raise the level of public knowledge regarding the legislative and governmental processes.

-AF

environmental education curriculum materials. In Taldy-Korgan, in eastern Kazakhstan, an NGO is working with the city government to help local businesses apply to microcredit programs. Elsewhere, NGOs are bringing citizens and their government representatives together, such as in Shymkent, in southern Kazakhstan, where a lawyers' association sponsored a town hall discussion between parliamentarians and local citizens (see sidebar).

Having a stronger public base and more cooperation with the government is just one part of the challenge for NGOs working to create positive change. To make progress, NGOs need to prove their value to a wider segment of the public and to find allies in all areas of public life. If over time NGOs become more rooted in Kazakhstani society, the opportunities for them to affect large-scale and lasting change will multiply. ●

Amy Forster is the editor at large of Give & Take.

A Funder on NGO Image in Russia

by Georgina Wilson

THIS IS A PASSENGER ANNOUNCEMENT: there are beggars operating on this line; please do not encourage them by giving money to them. If you want to give to a good cause then I suggest you contribute instead to a registered charity." A somewhat opinionated, though unsurprising announcement in a train on London's Underground.

How many train operators in Moscow would think of making such a recommendation? And how many of their Russian passengers would accept the legitimacy of a "registered charity," much less the suggestion that they might give money to such an intermediary to look after those less fortunate than themselves? How, in reality, has the public image of charitable organizations or NGOs improved over the last five to seven years?

During this period of huge change in the NGO sector, many organizations were concerned with ensuring their long-term survival, not with their image, so the question would have been irrelevant. Moreover, had it been asked, there probably would have been as many answers as there were NGOs, so varied were their fates during this period of baptism by fire.

Today, however, some groups are ready to address the image question. Vadim Kalinin, leader of ASEKO, the Association for Ecological Education says, "Attitudes to our organization have changed completely since it was established eight years ago. It is very noticeable that state structures—such as educational and research institutions—now keep in constant contact with us, work with us and invite us to conferences. Before they ignored us and our attempts to make contact with them. Also our name, ASEKO, appears to have become a brand-name, which is known widely. This could be partly because we work with school teachers; in Nizhny Novgorod we did a survey which showed that whereas a few years ago only five percent of the population had

heard of us, now we can say that we are known to the majority of inhabitants. However, it is impossible to compare our experience with that of other organizations, or generalize on that basis about the public image of NGOs."

Lada Yurchenko of the Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center in Novosibirsk, on the other hand, felt she could generalize about the sector in her city: "Certainly since 1994 there have been huge changes in how the NGO sector is viewed, because even in 1994 there was hardly an NGO sector to speak of. But now there are 1,300 NGOs in Novosibirsk, and people can see the active work of these organizations as well as the real fruits of that work."

Yurchenko attributes this mainly to the change in the way the press views NGOs, portraying them as useful to society. "Of course not every person on the street will know that the sector exists, and detailed information about individual organizations is probably still only known within the sector, but society generally has a positive attitude towards the sector," she says. "There's trust in us to solve social problems; the local authorities are very prepared to work in coalition with us, so there have been huge changes. Schools and colleges form partnerships with NGOs and even set up NGOs themselves. We carried out some market research on the way business sees the Third Sector and found that 10 to 12 percent provide some sort of support to NGOs, which is impressive given the fact that only 5 percent of the population is involved in the sector."

But what are NGOs themselves doing to promote their activities or the sector in general? It appears that only those whose core activities involve promoting the NGO sector or educating children and adults about their role can claim to have clearcut public relations strategies. Since ASEKO, for example, is involved in

How, in reality, has the public image of charitable organizations or NGOs improved over the last five to seven years?

education and outreach to people not generally involved in the NGO sector, it makes sense that it is better known and better publicized than many others.

The media organization Internews—which was founded originally by Americans but has now become an indigenous Russian NGO—has recently completed a joint project with the Thomson Foundation, a British media organization, to make six short films about local NGO efforts to solve social problems. The series, which was funded by the British Know How Fund through the Partnerships in the Nonprofit Sector grants program, was carried out in cooperation with regional television stations with the goal of training television journalists to make documentaries with a positive slant. Judging by viewer reaction, the series has had a positive impact. Expressing a common opinion, one viewer said: “Such stories make you feel good, give you a reason for living. Usually there’s nothing to watch on TV except sex and violence.”

Media coverage of the Third Sector still has a long way to go, however, and tends to concentrate on nonprofit scandals and misuse of funds. Yurchenko says that such stories do not seriously threaten the standing of NGOs in Novosibirsk: “The financial scandals occur mostly in the charitable foundations, particularly those set up by commercial firms or businesses. They do gain a lot of publicity on national TV, but they probably don’t threaten the image of the sector in general. The most important thing is for people to be able to understand how an organization spends its funds and where those funds come from. When there is transparency in an organization’s finances, then people can trust that organization.”

When you ask those involved in the Russian NGO sector about the public image of NGOs, they tend to focus on NGO relations with business, the government and the press, not with the average citizen. Masha Chertok from the **Charities Aid Foundation** (CAF), for instance, speaks of the tendency to define “public image” in terms of NGO relations with local governments, because that is where the most noticeable change has happened. “There have been some significant shifts in the attitude of the authorities, particularly in those regions where the Law on Social Order (legislation that would allow nonprofit organizations to compete for government funding to implement government programs) has been accepted,” she says. “But the general population is very far from the NGO sector. It would not be true to say that most people really know about the NGO sector. The sector just hasn’t yet developed to a stage in which organizations are planning strategies for advertising themselves to the population at large.”

The lack of development is easily explained in terms of the struggle for survival which has characterized the last 10 years of the Russian NGO sector, according to Jenny Hodgson, director of CAF Russia. “Charities in Russia have spent so much time and effort getting themselves recognized by the government, getting themselves a sustainable and useful legal status, and then getting the funds to survive that they haven’t had a chance to address the issue of public opinion,” she adds. “Many of them have only just now become properly client-oriented, and very few have really had the time or resources to look to the public for support.”

Educating the public about the role of NGOs will inevitably require a heavy investment on which there will be no quick return. People who grew up in the Soviet welfare state are unused to the idea that NGOs can solve social problems and meet the needs of vulnerable people. Hodgson explains, “People are distrustful of organized charity. Although they are generous in giving to people more needy than they, such as the beggars in the metro, they don’t understand the idea of giving money to a third party to do the job for them.”

Chertok goes on to say, “There’s very little sense of community responsibility in Russia in the way it is understood in, say, America. Such a community sense only exists in rural areas, but in those areas the kind of organized NGOs that occur in cities are nowhere to be seen.”

As a result, says Hodgson, “We at CAF Russia are trying to develop much more local and low-key community initiatives, ones that do not even necessarily involve money—just resources in the form of volunteers or the exchange of used goods. We’re wanting to move beyond established NGOs to reach more local community groups.”

It may be that the local level is where the building blocks of a broader public understanding of the NGO sector will be created. NGOs in Russia have made remarkable strides in the past seven years, expanding and consolidating their activities and status. If their public image is to catch up with the rest of their achievements, they must now begin to develop the kinds of initiatives that will respond to local concerns and inspire local volunteers. ●

Georgina Wilson is a program manager at Charities Aid Foundation UK and runs the Partnerships in the Non-Profit Sector grants program with program manager Masha Chertok at Charities Aid Foundation Russia. The grants program is funded by the British Government’s Know How Fund.

If NGO public image is to catch up with the sector’s achievements, NGOs must begin to develop the kinds of initiatives that will respond to local concerns and inspire local volunteers.

Planting the Seeds that Matter Most

by Andrey Ozharovskii

S EVEN YEARS AGO, RESIDENTS IN Novorossiisk united to create an municipal arboretum on the site of a 50-acre dump next to the city's most popular beach and a famous World War II memorial. After one unsuccessful attempt to start the project, a citizens' initiative group called the **International Discussion Club** (IDC) and a local university realized that public support was the ingredient needed to ensure the project's sustainability. They now have developed an integrated project that involves and benefits the entire community while efficiently utilizing the media, regional government and foreign donors.

Novorossiisk, a provincial city of 200,000 on Russia's Black Sea coast, battles problems similar to those faced by other small cities trying to manage cooperative projects with foreign donors and combat environmental degradation. Many NGOs in smaller cities have little experience working with charitable organizations and have difficulty raising funds. Municipal authorities are often reluctant to make decisions without approval from higher levels of government, making it hard for enthusiastic citizens to initiate community development. With this in mind and aware that the arboretum project would require volunteers and support long after the grant money was spent, IDC created a public relations strategy that emphasized doing a "project for the people."

The arboretum project failed on the first attempt due to a lack of funding and poor weather, but was revived when three local Russian members of the New York-based Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) received a grant in 1997 to try again. Additional funds were later secured from the Open Society Institute and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Organizers learned early in the process that they needed local support to demonstrate the viability of the project; UNDP reduced their initial grant from \$10,000 to \$700 when the IDC failed to get official approval from the city administration.

With funds secured, the grantees considered two strategies for implementing the project. The first was

simply to execute the project themselves. The grant was large enough to buy all the needed materials and to complete the work without community involvement. Initially, working alone appeared to be the most efficient way to move forward. However, having learned from earlier mistakes, the grantees decided that they must generate local support and create a wider group of stakeholders with a direct interest in seeing the project completed.

The IDC created a core group of people responsible for the arboretum. The group, composed mostly of students, formed its own nonprofit organization, Green Lungs Novorossiisk. Leaders then purchased seedlings and launched a media campaign to inform the public about the benefits of the park and to invite citizens to participate in planting trees.

Unlike some environmental organizations, the supporters of the arboretum were able to structure action-oriented projects that directly benefited the community and involved public participation. Other groups mistakenly use foreign funding for information-sharing activities without balancing their work with practical goals that produce visual results. The imbalance gives the public the impression that funds primarily benefit participants of the project, not the community.

In the fall of 1997, media advertisements began inviting volunteers to participate in six *subotniki*, days of community service. Each event drew 20-30 volunteers, ranging from students to pensioners. The actual planting of the seedlings—the part everyone enjoys—was only 10 percent of the job. Recruiting volunteers for long-term work has been a greater challenge, but a local university has incorporated the maintenance of the arboretum into its environmental curriculum. The *subotniki* also gave project organizers an opportunity to explain how caring for the environment requires more than just one day of work. Some students still volunteer for mulching, watering and securing the seedlings for harsh winter weather.

Green Lungs' members waited until they could demonstrate wide community involvement and had

Aware that the arboretum project would require volunteers and support long after grant money was spent, IDC created a public relations strategy that emphasized doing a "project for the people."

proven the value of the project before approaching the city administration to legally register the arboretum. Proving first that the project had generated broad-based community support hastened the registration process since members were seeking approval to continue an activity rather than approval for a new one.

Although launching the project without official approval bordered on illegal, once project leaders had mobilized dozens of volunteers, planted over 2,000 seedlings and the media had amplified the benefits of the tree-planting throughout the city, local administrators readily committed \$2,500 for the future development of the project and granted the arboretum official legal status. Most importantly, the project has transformed a section of dormant land into a symbol of growth for the entire city, especially for citizens who took an active role in doing the work. ●

Andrey Ozharovskii is the president of the IDC and a LEAD member.

courtesy of Andrey Ozharovskii



Volunteers learn the proper technique for planting seedlings at the arboretum site.

Yerevan Training Center Builds Civil Society from the Rubble

by *Anahit Mkrtchian*

THE SOCIAL PHENOMENON OF civil society will take a long time to become a tradition in Armenian culture. During its eight-year existence, the Armenian NGO sector—parallel with Armenian society—has experienced natural stages of development. Organizations started with humanitarian projects amid the destruction of the earthquake in 1988 and the influx of refugees from the battle-weary regions of Azerbaijan. Recently, NGOs have become better informed about the problems citizens face and have refocused their efforts on widening the constituencies they serve, generating self-sufficiency in the community and seeking the root causes of the problems facing local communities. However, vertical relations in Armenian culture still dominate the popular subconscious and the implementation of horizontal relations within the community, including those that represent special interests and NGOs, have developed with difficulty.

Having acknowledged the challenges facing NGOs in their efforts to promote civil society, the **NGO Training and Resource Center** (NGOC) in Yerevan has conducted sociological surveys to assess the pressing needs of Armenian NGOs and adapt its training program to help NGOs overcome these challenges. Survey results have indicated that NGO leaders have difficulty in creating sustainable structures for their activities as well as in developing external relationships with their communities. As a result of the survey, the NGOC has developed new methodologies to ensure that its training program addresses current needs, and several new training courses have been offered, including Peculiarities and Vision of the NGO Sector during the Transition Period; Values and Behavior within the Organization; Public Opinion Research; and Conflict Resolution.

In its observation of human rights, women's and environmental NGOs over the past two years, the

NGOC has pinpointed the external difficulties faced by NGOs and identified possible coalitions within the community to solve social problems in Armenia. In all site visits, training and consultations, the NGOC

communities. Only after boards were appointed, including representatives from all strata of the community, did they begin to prioritize the community's concerns. Their second step was to identify other community players—government officials, local authorities, other NGOs, or private volunteer organizations—that could contribute to the resolution of the problems.

courtesy of the Armenian Assembly of America

An initiative of the Ecotourism Association to preserve the unique ecosystem of the Noravank Canyon involved the government, diocesan groups and community members. In negotiations, the participants discussed ways to use the land while not infringing on the rights of the local population. The dialogue yielded an agreement that addressed such concerns as irrigation rights, protecting the natural area and preserving the rights of the neighboring community. The initiative has demonstrated the significant role an NGO can play as an intermediary among different interest groups.

Many Armenian NGOs work on refugee issues resulting from the events in Azerbaijan and Russia over the last decade. With the large influx of refugees, often Russian-speaking Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, communities have had to wrestle

NGO leaders meet media representatives to share ideas for cooperation.

stresses the importance of encouraging community involvement and using existing community structures as much as possible. As a result, many NGOs have already initiated new projects that mobilize local citizens.

The community development project Success Through Accepting Responsibility is the collective idea of five NGOs participating in the NGOC's advanced training program. The idea originated from a training exercise and has now blossomed into a large community development project that involves government officials, media representatives and NGOs in Gyumri, a region destroyed during the earthquake in 1988. The aim of the project is to raise the level of consciousness of all members of the community. By bringing together representatives from many different groups, the project has generated discussion about who should be responsible for addressing legal, psychological and health care needs in the community. The result of the exercise has been a new community council that continues to work with the original five NGOs and municipal authorities to more effectively meet citizen needs.

In a similar effort, the NGO Future Generation established community boards in three regions even before it began to identify problems in the

with new challenges. Hazarashen, a group working to assimilate refugees into the local population, has developed training sessions where refugees and residents can explore cultural differences. By including refugees and community members in training sessions, the participants have realized that solving controversial problems requires including all members of the community—new and old—in the dialogue. As a result of the cultural trainings, local citizens have agreed to form an association with refugees to better address differences. Hazarashen's activities have also expanded to include younger members of the community. Its leaders outlined a cultural curriculum for the public school system to create conditions of mutual tolerance and the curriculum has been sent to local officials for approval.

Educational NGOs often have the greatest impact in demonstrating the benefits of community involvement. Their work as intermediaries most effectively illustrates the role of family, social and cultural organizations, the church, the business sector and other community groups in improving the educational system. As in other post-Soviet countries in transition, Armenia suffers from an acute lack of funds for its work in the educational field. This need has opened a

window of opportunity for NGOs to prove their utility. In some cases, the government has initiated an experiment to allow NGOs more control in education. Other groups working in education have tried to demonstrate the role parents play in supporting their children. The NGO Armenian National Education created discussion groups comprised of teachers, parents and pupils and produced television and radio programs to underscore the important role of the Parents' Board in school management.

Development policies that support social and economic integration must simultaneously defend the interests of individuals and communities. Therefore, the NGOC has developed the following conceptual objectives to ensure that the NGOs participating in its programs remain responsive to community needs. First, NGOs are encouraged to understand community dynamics, which includes identifying the relationships between all community members. Second, NGOs are

encouraged to mobilize their local resources to ensure that the community is supporting their initiatives. Special emphasis is given to educational development, public safety initiatives, expanding economic opportunities and recreation since these activities create the widest base of community involvement. Finally, the NGOC seeks to strengthen neighborhood relationships, improving the overall quality of community life.

The transition in post-Soviet states has shown that there is no quick-fix for communities building civil society. However, the new generation of NGOs is better informed about the challenges they face and understands the advantages of cooperation with local communities. ●

Anahit Mkrtchian is a research analyst for the NGOC in the Social Marketing department. The NGOC is a project of the Armenian Assembly of America, which maintains offices in Yerevan and Gyumri.

Azerbaijani Trainers Help NGOs Raise Visibility

The rapid changes in Azerbaijan's economic and political situation have been matched by the development of its Third Sector, which five years ago consisted of only 10 to 15 active NGOs; today there are over 150. The most successful NGOs have developed a good relationship with the media, government officials, business leaders and the public. Many groups, however, have had not made a sufficient effort to publicize their activities and raise their visibility in the community.

There are many reasons why public image is not a high priority for NGOs in Azerbaijan. Few are able to designate one person to handle public relations and fundraising. Usually the leader of an organization tries to do both jobs along with everything else necessary to keep the group going. Furthermore, most of the population, especially in rural areas, is too concerned with mere survival to pay attention to NGO issues. One of the largest constraints, however, is that some NGO leaders prefer to keep a low profile to avoid attracting the attention of the government, which tends to equate NGOs with the political opposition, or tax officials, who can use unclear nonprofit legislation to tax the NGO's resources excessively.

Organizations involved in training NGOs, however, realize that in the long run NGOs will have to improve their public image if they are to play an effective role in society. ISAR-Baku, for instance, has

added public relations to its training program and is creating a system enabling NGOs to evaluate their progress. Participants in ISAR's trainings return after several months to share their experiences working with the media, the government and local communities and compare notes on how they have dealt with obstacles. On occasion, they have actually received a more positive response from local authorities than they expected, being offered office space, access to government vehicles or permission to work in state schools.

Many Azerbaijani NGOs need help reaching out to the media. They do not know how to use the press to publicize their activities and journalists have little idea of the positive role NGOs can play in society. Trainers are addressing this gap by developing seminars for NGO leaders on how to approach journalists. NGOs and Mass Media Relations, a seminar recently held in Baku, brought NGO leaders and journalists together to discuss ways to work together in the future. Similar sessions on working with business and government have also been planned. While such programs cannot directly solve the serious legislative and legal challenges that confront NGOs in Azerbaijan, they can help expand the dialogue essential to increasing public awareness and appreciation of the Third Sector. ●

- Telman Yolchiyev, ISAR-Baku training coordinator, Lala Abdurahmanova, ISAR-Baku trainer

Some NGO leaders prefer to keep a low profile to avoid attracting the attention of the government or tax officials.

Moscow Center Changes Public Attitudes Toward Homeless

by Julie MacDonald

UNDER COMMUNISM IN THE Soviet Union, homelessness officially did not exist. It was illegal to be *bomzhi*, people without legal abode. All citizens received housing from the government, and only those who dropped out of society were homeless. These people were considered criminals and thrown in jail. Since perestroika and the economic reforms that left many people destitute, the face of the homeless has changed dramatically, though not always in the eyes of the general public.

The **Center for Humanitarian Aid** has been working since 1996 with Moscow's homeless. Started by a group of Russian and American volunteers, the

Center has gone from feeding about 100 people twice a week to feeding up to 300 people every day. Staff also distribute clothes, food and other donated items. In 1998, the Center began publishing *Yest Vykhod* (The Way Out) a newspaper sold by the homeless to earn money and change the public's view of the needy.

The Center aims to correct misconceptions about homelessness. For seventy years, Soviet society did not have a system of "charity" and today's population generally misunderstands the identity of the homeless. The Center deals with a variety of public attitudes, many from Soviet times and most unfavorable. Common comments about homelessness include: it's the government's problem; it's their own fault; they are a bunch of drunks and deserve to live as they do; and if you make it easy for them, more

homeless will flood to Moscow. The economically strained government, which has neither the resources nor the desire to deal with homelessness, does little to change unfavorable opinions in the community.

Public reactions to the Center's activities are mixed. The Center struggles against the constant threat of being closed down by the local community, the police and the Center's landlord, the Orthodox Church. Some members of the community accuse the Center of drawing a large crowd of undesirables to the area. While the local police say they support the program in theory, last year they temporarily closed the feeding program on three separate occasions. Police officers have arrested homeless visitors as they leave the Center, as well as vendors selling the newspaper. There is an uneasy peace with the city administrators, who leave the Center alone unless they are bombarded with complaints.

The city often attempts to hide the problem rather than to confront it. As host of the Goodwill Games last summer, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov "cleaned up" the city, which included closing the Center's operations so visitors would not see the food lines of homeless people. Many homeless were rounded up, bussed 60 miles from the city and then abandoned.

Despite official ambivalence to the plight of the homeless, on a private level, community attitudes are starting to change. The Center has created an advisory board of prominent Russians, including rock star Boris Grebenshikov and television host and writer Masha Arbatova. The circulation of *Yest Vykhod* has grown from 2,000 to 18,000 since the first issue in January 1998. Most importantly, community members are getting more involved with the Center by donating their clothes, food and time to help the homeless. There are now more Russian volunteers than foreign. These volunteers are involved at all levels of the organization, including the feeding program, fundraising, management and public relations.

Visitors—members of the press, potential sponsors and both Russian and foreign volunteers—are astounded when they first come to the Center. They expect to see dirty, drunk, smelly and incoherent

The Face of Homelessness

Galya, 27, used to live in Kazakhstan where she worked as a nurse, helping people who could not take care of themselves. She had a nice house, and says she always welcomed children from a nearby orphanage for the holidays.

After a fire destroyed her home, Galya moved to Nizhny Novogrod to stay with an aunt. She worked as a janitor for a social service agency, but the office closed down in September and she and her mother borrowed money to get to Moscow to see if they could find work.

Unable to find anything other than begging, they found their way to the Center and received warm clothes, a hot meal, medicine and their first batch of papers. Now they are selling *Yest Vykhod* every day, and earn enough to pay for a permanent location to sell their papers. Once guards told them to leave, but they showed them the paper and explained how it works. Now the guards read it and ask when the new issue is coming out.

With the money they earn selling the paper, Galya and her mother rent a small room and send money to their families. Soon Galya's brother is coming to Moscow to sell papers, as he can find no other work in Nizhny Novgorod.

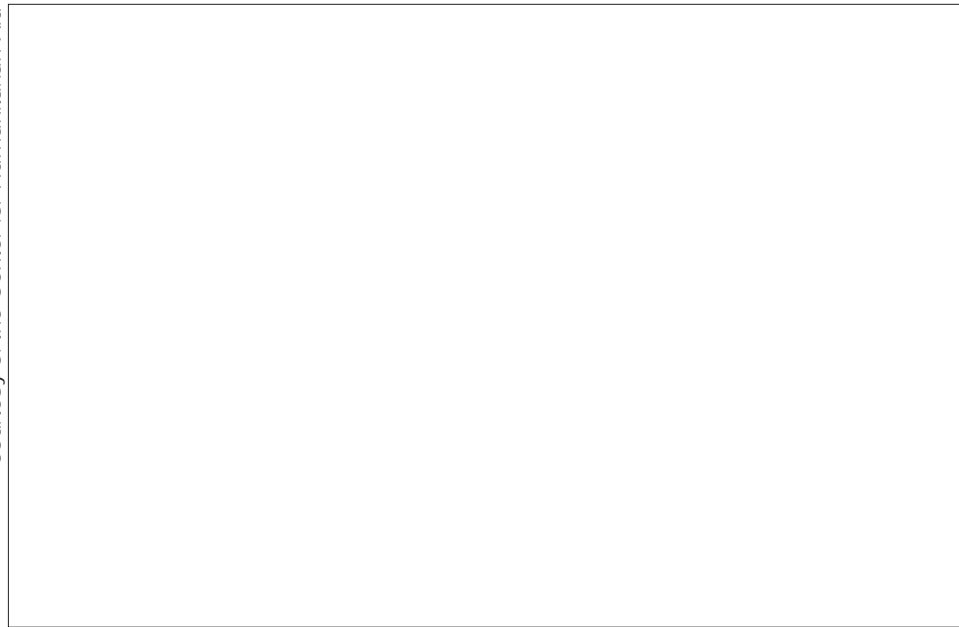
-JM

people. While it is true that many of the homeless fit these stereotypes, the group also includes pensioners, invalids, families and children who live on the streets. Only by taking the time to get to know the homeless and their stories can one understand the reality of their predicament.

Russia's weak safety net leaves many people with nowhere to turn for support when they hit hard times. Widespread cases of apartment fraud and theft have forced many people to the street, and the desperate economic conditions in the provinces have added to the proliferation of homelessness in larger cities like Moscow. A law requiring all Russian citizens to have official registration in the city where they live makes arriving from the provinces even more challenging. Anyone not officially registered in Moscow can be arrested. Homeless people lacking proper documents are technically breaking the law, which allows police to harass and abuse them.

Contrary to popular belief, many homeless want to work, which was the impetus behind starting *Yest Vykhod*. The newspaper provides a source of income for many homeless, whose only other option would be begging or crime. Homeless vendors buy the paper for 50 kopecks (\$.02) and sell it for three to five rubles (\$0.12-\$0.20). Thirty regular vendors and about 100 transient vendors sell the newspaper every month. Vendors have been able to obtain housing, buy train tickets to their home cities and, most importantly, maintain their dignity while struggling to survive.

courtesy of the Center for Humanitarian Aid



Volunteers serve hot meals on a cold day in Moscow.

As awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness grows and more citizens become actively involved in confronting the problems that force people to live on the streets, citizens are learning that homelessness does not mean helplessness, and that individuals can make a difference in these difficult times. ●

Julie MacDonald is a US Peace Corps volunteer working for the Center for Humanitarian Aid.

Amid Economic Pressures, Anti-Nuclear Activists Rally Support

by Paul Lawrence

THE INCREASING PRESSURE ON Russia to generate income for its struggling economy has led the federal Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom) to seek potentially lucrative nuclear contracts that, if completed, pose serious risks to the environment and the Russian people. In an atmosphere where generating profit outweighs almost all other concerns, anti-nuclear NGOs face a complex public relations challenge in trying to rally community support against one of the few industries still providing jobs and supporting local economies. According to Russian activists who visited the US in March, Minatom generally disregards citizen concerns and often places short-

term economic growth ahead of long-term sustainability.

Fran Macy, director of the **Center for Safe Energy**, which organized the activists' visit, says that the Three Mile Island scare and the Chernobyl disaster alerted both American and Soviet citizens to the dangers of nuclear power. However, Chernobyl did not alter Soviet reliance on nuclear energy as Three Mile Island did in the US. Today, Russian activists continue to wrestle with Minatom, which Macy describes as a highly centralized branch of the government with enormous influence due to the huge profits it generates from its national and international activities.

Oleg Bodrov, a representative of **Green World** in Sosnovy Bor, explains that Minatom has exerted its influence in the administration of the aging Leningrad Nuclear Power Plant, located on the coast of the Gulf of Finland. When confronted with the danger of deteriorating storage

facilities that exceed their designed capacity by 130 percent, Minatom could have invited international experts to analyze the problems and to offer solutions. Instead, it appointed its own committee and buried the urgent problem in an avalanche of official documents.

The pressure to sweep potential environmental threats under the carpet in Russia has been exacerbated by the economic crisis.

To solve economic problems, Minatom has considered several money-making strategies that include importing waste from Europe and America to reprocess and store. They also propose to burn MOX (mixed-oxide) fuel from disarmed nuclear weapons in nuclear reactors.

“Nowhere in the world have people taken plutonium from nuclear weapons to make reactor fuel,” explains Michael Mariotte, director of the **Nuclear Information & Resource Service** in Washington, DC. He adds that the US is considering use of the MOX technology, but only as a means of immobilizing fissile material created for use in weapons. Russia, however, considers fissile material a “financial asset,” and hopes to use it to replace other forms of fuel, reprocess it and then burn it again.

Olga Pitsunova, the chair of the **Center for Assistance to Environmental Initiatives** in Saratov, is battling the implementation of a MOX program at a nuclear facility near her city. She says that the threat of nuclear catastrophe has galvanized the grassroots movement to stop the project. However, generating community support has been more difficult since

residents fear that failure to use the new technology could lead to economic losses. “The problem is that the city is dependent on the station,” says Pitsunova. “The station pays taxes, builds schools, and besides, they have so much money, they are able to win over the local residents.”

Dependence on the energy sector pits environmental protection against economic development in other regions as well. In Sosnovy Bor, for example, Bodrov says 80 percent of the city’s budget comes from the nuclear power plant. In cities relying on the energy sector for growth, the community tends to view environmental activists as saboteurs of economic stability because they seem to place the threat of future environmental destruction ahead of current economic difficulties.

The citizens of Volgodonsk, however, have different priorities, according to Irina Reznikova, an activist battling the completion of a new Chernobyl-style reactor on the Don River in Southern Russia. “Eighty percent of the population supports our opposition to the building of a new station,” she says. “People regard ecological safety as more important than finding a job.”

Despite assurances that the most people in the region support her NGO and oppose the nuclear industry, tensions still run high. In 1998, demonstrators camping outside the construction site of the nuclear facility were beaten by over 300 workers who feared they would lose their jobs if the plant was not opened. Still, she considers the workers a minor segment of the community and suggests that the way to combat such fear and anger is to create new jobs in other sectors of the economy.

All of the visiting activists agreed that the most effective way to challenge Minatom and head off community resistance is to create a wider constituency of informed citizens. Pitsunova says the best way to build support is by disseminating information and creating “dialogue groups,” which she describes as seminars involving all parties in a conflict resolution-type scenario.

Macy suggests that one way to combat the financial pressures driving communities to gamble with nuclear energy development is to emphasize support for energy conservation and alternatives to nuclear power. He adds that the Center for Safe Energy has made a point of organizing seminars for anti-nuclear activists that include specialists on energy conservation to ensure that NGO leaders understand the importance of developing alternative sources of energy.

Green World, the Sosnovy Bor group, actively seeks to balance its anti-nuclear activities with education

courtesy of For a Nuclear-Free Don

Citizens protest against a reactor in Volgodonsk.

about alternative energy sources to build community support for its initiatives. The group aims to distribute information and analysis on nuclear safety, energy efficiency and renewable energy in the region.

Although economic analysis indicates that nuclear fuel is really not the most cost-effective means of producing energy, regional politics make it difficult to convey the message. "Nuclear energy is the most expensive way to produce a kilowatt of electricity," says Macy. "But if a regional government builds a coal burning power plant, then the regional government must pay for it. If the facility is nuclear, it is financed by Minatom."

As in the US, the media plays a central role in the distribution of information that can help the population decide for itself whether the benefits of nuclear energy outweigh the environmental risks. However, the visiting activists did not agree on whether the mass media in Russia helps to educate the public, or is

simply used as a tool by the nuclear industry to sway public opinion to support nuclear energy. Mariotte says that unlike their US counterparts, anti-nuclear activists in Russia cannot generate funds to disseminate information in the mass media. Support for such efforts, he asserts, is one of the most effective ways to increase the impact NGOs exert on the community.

Despite the urgency of the threat posed by the burgeoning nuclear sector, anti-nuclear groups must struggle to generate wide community support. Like NGO activists working on other pressing environmental and social issues, their calls for action to the population are drowned out by more critical issues.

"We face social apathy," says Bodrov. "Because Russians are bombarded by so many problems, atomic energy is not the most pressing issue. The key problem is that people are not getting paid." ●

Paul Lawrence is the managing editor of Give & Take.

Human Rights Group Harnesses Media To Defend "Mother's Right"

by Paul Lawrence

MOST NGOS IN THE FSU DO not understand how to use the media and few have developed public relations strategies. However, the **Mother's Right Foundation**, an organization that has been defending soldiers' rights in the Russian military since 1990, has made media relations a centerpiece of its operations. By effectively employing the mass media to relay information about human rights abuses, the group has amplified its message and more importantly, empowered families to seek compensation for the loss of their sons and to find out the truth behind their deaths.

"The right of a mother is to save her son," writes the group's chairperson, Veronika Marchenko. And to do this, she adds, the first step is to tell the truth about the deteriorating conditions in the Russian army. The public must demand military reform, showing government leaders that citizens will not tolerate human rights abuses.

Military service, once a proud tradition in Russia, has been tarnished by the brutal war in Chechnya. It is now characterized by peace-time deaths, hazing and an

alarming rate of suicide among conscripts. All men are required to serve two years in the Russian army, thus the issue of soldiers' rights affects almost every family with a male child. Despite the prominence of the issue and promises to end conscription from President Boris Yeltsin during the 1996 election, reform has come slowly and the Russian army still operates behind a veil of secrecy. Disclosing problems in the armed forces has always been a risky topic in Russia, since most information about the military has been handled as a state secret.

Mother's Right has successfully used the media to reveal the truth. Trained journalists working for the group have conducted a media blitz, issuing press releases, appearing on television and radio programs, and conducting conferences to ensure that citizens are aware of the corruption prevalent in the army. Since February 1998, forty Russian and foreign newspapers have written reports based on data collected by Mother's Right. Numerous television and radio programs have broadcast reports on individual cases identified by the

Give Us Your Take

Comments on our articles? Join the dialogue. *Give & Take* welcomes letters to the editor. You can send your thoughts to ISAR, 1601 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009 or to <letters@isar.org>.

Once the public has seen the details of a case, it becomes more difficult for the state to ascribe military deaths to accidents or suicide.

organization and the BBC filmed a documentary on human rights abuse in the Russian army using their materials.

Aside from drawing attention to the issue, Valeria Pantyukhin, press secretary for Mother's Right, says the group has learned from parents' letters that the information distributed to the press is also badly needed by families who have lost their children in the army. She adds that it is important for these families to be able to receive legal advice, exchange information and seek individuals who might serve as witnesses in court. Mother's Right provides such information in its newspaper, *Mother's Right*, which is published monthly.

Pantyukhin explains that once the public has seen the details of a case, it becomes more difficult for the state to ascribe military deaths to accidents or suicide. The power of public attention has brought many cases to trial, allowing families to learn the truth and receive compensation for the wrongful death of their sons.

Media scrutiny and increased public attention assisted in the resolution of the case of Dennis Kuzmin, whose parents initially lost all wrongful-death benefits because their son had allegedly committed suicide. After two months of inquiry, during which lawyers from Mother's Right assisted the dead soldier's parents, it was proven that Kuzmin had died in a weapons accident. As a result, death benefits were restored. Throughout the course of the investigation, Mother's Right made sure information from the trial reached interested journalists.

The Kuzmin case was resolved as a result of investigative journalism and media pressure on the military, a powerful tactic still unfamiliar to many NGOs in Russia, where printing the truth about the

military has often been considered a treasonous act. Through its careful collection of facts and assiduous efforts to defend parents' rights, reinforced by its carefully built relationship with the media, Mother's Right has kept controversial human rights issues prominently before the public.

Success working with the media, however, has not improved the organization's relationship with government officials. Marchenko says that Mother's Right has survived three "hard examinations" from state officials seeking to limit their activities. In 1994, the Moscow procurator and Ministry of Justice investigated Mother's Fund for allegedly working in bad faith. The case was dismissed when prosecutors were forced to admit that the organization was completely within its jurisdiction to write and publish its materials.

The latest threat to the group comes indirectly from pending tax legislation. If passed, the laws could significantly curb the activities of nonprofit organizations. For example, pro bono legal representation provided by Mother's Right could be taxed like any paid service provided by a commercial business.

Legislative setbacks, however, do not generate public indifference to the efforts of Mother's Right. "After every newspaper article or television segment on its activities, Mother's Right receives telephone calls from people seeking assistance for the parents of a dead soldier," Marchenko says. In 1998, a year marked by financial crisis, Mother's Right received 47 contributions from individuals in 22 different cities. She concludes, "for a country where donating money to NGOs is 'not the norm,' this is a very promising sign." ●

Paul Lawrence is managing editor of Give & Take.

The Gay 90's: A Decade in Review

by *Kevin J. Gardner*

GAY AND LESBIAN GROUPS IN the FSU are just like other NGOs in the region—weak, poor and driven by singular personalities. In some ways, this decade in Russia could be called the "Gay 90s." The wrenching political, economic and social changes opened up windows of opportunity for anyone with enough guts, brains and money. The first international gay and lesbian conference in Russia took place in the summer of 1991, and since then, dozens of gay activists and groups have come and gone. Queer publications have

appeared, and alternative dance clubs and bars have opened their doors for business. All have suffered harassment and setbacks in one form or another, but most continue to survive.

In a 1996 report, the **Charities Aid Foundation** listed 26 Russian gay and lesbian organizations, publications and dating services. This report points out how "young" these organizations are, and how "they have not been entirely successful in promoting significant change nor in penetrating into the lives of the majority of gays and lesbians." A Russian representative

of the Eurasia Foundation made similar comments about how gay and lesbian organizations have remained “isolated” and how the movement “has lost its momentum.” Today, the activities of homosexual organizations remain focused on community building through social activities, hotline services and publications, allowing gays and lesbians to find and help each other. What groups still lack are activities that educate and build bridges with other sectors and movements in order to promote real change for sexual minorities in Russia, including the elimination of their vulnerability and unnecessary suffering.

Democracy, Homosexuality and NGOs

Respect for fundamental human rights is a prerequisite for the development of civil society in Russia and the FSU. If any group—homosexuals, Gypsies, people from the Caucasus—is denied its rights because it is unpopular, the whole protection system is undermined. As has often been stated, one indicator of the stability and effectiveness of a democratic society is the treatment it accords its most vulnerable and unpopular groups.

Despite the decriminalization of male homosexual relations in Russia in 1993 (female relations were not illegal), reports have shown regular and constant breaches of the rights of lesbians and gay men in Russia, including the right to privacy, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of association and assembly. In particular, a 1997 report entitled “Gay & Lesbian Human Rights in the ‘New’ Russia”^{*} documents harassment, discrimination and violence against gays by the police, potential employers and housing authorities.

In addition to advocating legal protections against abuses by the state, gay and lesbian organizations can also combat social discrimination. In Russia and the FSU, the emergence of gay NGOs has taken place in tandem with the overall explosion in social movements and the development of the Third Sector. Gay and lesbian groups have fulfilled several critical NGO roles by providing community services and support, by promoting and defending democracy and human rights, and by helping to build

pluralistic, representative civil society. In other words, gays and lesbians have become a recognized part of civil society in Russia, and their organizations cannot be separated from the rest of the Third Sector.

Building Bridges

Throughout the 1990s, sexual minority issues have gained increasing attention around the world. NGOs in Russia and the FSU have been able to ride this wave, building community links and transforming public perceptions of homosexuality. In the spring of 1992, for example, Russian and American activists, journalists, health professionals and government officials gathered together for the first international HIV/AIDS training symposium in Russia. For one week, this diverse group of over 200 people from around the FSU and the United States lived, worked and socialized together on a boat docked in a Moscow harbor, exploring difficult social and medical questions while challenging each other’s stereotypes and misinformation. This combination of an intimate environment and broad

Gay Groups in Russia Challenge Stereotypes

“Since the beginning of Soviet times, gays and lesbians have been among the most discriminated against groups in Russia,” says Dmitri Lytchev, editor in chief of the Russian gay rights magazine *1/10*. “Until May 1993, gays were still criminally prosecuted for voluntary sex acts and lesbians were subject to psychiatric persecution. After the decriminalization of homosexuality, however, aggressive homophobia does not just disappear.”

Lytchev and other gay rights activists are working to challenge homophobia and bring the issue of gay rights into public discourse, taking every opportunity to openly confront stereotypes. For example, when the St. Petersburg gay and lesbian organization, Krilija became the first Russian gay organization to receive official registration, it placed an announcement in *Argumenti and Fakti*, a major Russian paper with a circulation of 30 million. One television station picked the story up and aired a half-hour, prime-time piece on the group’s achievement.

Lytchev adds, “My colleagues and I travel throughout the country to give lectures on AIDS prevention and our audiences are usually comprised of the heterosexual majority. We never forget to underscore that we are gay, and by our example show people in Russia’s provinces that gays are not the monsters portrayed by the majority of Russia’s press.” Lytchev and the staff of *1/10* also try to make their publication interesting to heterosexuals, hoping to “influence the mentality of the sexual majority with our informative material in order help them change their mind about gays and lesbians.” A continual frustration for Lytchev is that newsstands tend to classify *1/10* and other gay publications as erotica or pornography.

Although difficult, the work of gay activists has made a difference in the lives of Russia’s gays and lesbians. Krilija provided legal support to a gay man accused of robbery, who was later found innocent. They also raised money to bring medicine to gay prisoners in Nizhnii Tagil. Lytchev’s estimates *1/10*’s readership at approximately 40,000, and says that he receives letters from gays and lesbians living in Russia’s provinces stating that *1/10* is often their only source of information, support and friendship.

- Rachel Griffiths, assistant editor, *Give & Take*

representation from a variety of communities resulted in what one St. Petersburg doctor called an “explosion” in the minds of the media and the medical and political establishments.

In 1995, the European Union’s Phare/Tacis Democracy Program funded the International Gay and Lesbian Association’s Anti-discrimination Project to work for one year with designated gay and lesbian groups in the three Baltic countries, St. Petersburg and Moscow. The project helped to strengthen participating groups and supported them in building links within their own communities and working with the govern-

Gay and lesbian groups have made an impact on social perceptions of homosexuality by holding press conferences, organizing seminars, publishing educational materials and helping to lobby politicians.

ment on issues of gay rights and discrimination. Although a lot of time and resources were wasted on building physical infrastructures that eventually fell apart when the funding ended, these groups did make an impact on social perceptions of homosexuality by holding press conferences, organizing seminars, publishing educational materials and even

helping to lobby politicians on legislation concerning issues such as family life and STD/HIV/AIDS prevention. One of the more memorable moments occurred at a press conference organized by the Moscow group Triangle, when a lesbian from Siberia spoke with a paper bag over her head to protect her identity and drive home the point that most sexual minorities in Russia still live in fear.

Around the same time, the AESOP Center, a Moscow-based sexual health resource agency, received USAID funds through Abt, Inc. to set up the first sexual health coalition. For one year, local NGOs representing the growing spectrum of the Third Sector—the women’s movement, sexual minorities, anti-violence efforts, STD/HIV prevention activists, drug rehabilitation centers—came together to develop leadership skills, advocate legislation and explore interdisciplinary issues related to sexuality and human rights. Coalition members felt empowered, were eager to exchange experience and demonstrated an acceptance and support of gay participants and issues. Unfortunately, as often happens in the Third Sector, the project ended when the money ran out.

The Funding Community

Over the last decade, gay NGOs in Russia and the FSU have made great strides in gaining support from funders. In 1995, in addition to the European Union’s Phare/Tacis grant mentioned above, the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands also awarded grants to the Triangle Center and to *1/10* newspaper, a publication for Russian gays and lesbians. American funders did not lag far behind, with grants coming from the Soros Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Winrock International NIS-US Women’s Consortium and World Learning to sponsor a range of programs. Both Winrock and World Learning channeled USAID funds to gay initiatives, and Winrock even went the extra mile to resolve a complaint from a US Congressional committee staff member that US Government funds had been allocated to a Russian lesbian organization.

As the Winrock incident illustrated, the process of developing links between gay NGOs and funders was not always smooth. For example, the Eurasia Foundation, another agency devoting USAID funds in the region, balked at supporting gay and lesbian NGOs and implemented a policy against funding gay groups in the summer of 1995. This unfortunate decision to deny gay and lesbian organizations equal access to funding severely impacted at least two Russian NGOs—Astarta in Siberia and Triangle in Moscow. Triangle’s ineligibility for funding from the Eurasia Foundation proved a key factor in its decision to shut its doors after its initial European funding ended. In response, a lobbying effort was mounted to persuade the Eurasia Foundation to rescind its anti-gay policy, and with the support of Congressman Barney Frank, the foundation adopted non-discriminatory policies in hiring and grantmaking two years later. The story has a happy ending and its lesson is clear: fair opportunity and equal access to sufficient and sustainable funding is necessary to enable gay and lesbian organizations in the FSU to continue their vital work of supporting sexual minorities and transforming public perceptions of homosexuality. ●

Kevin J. Gardner lived in Russia from 1991-97, and worked with many of the NGOs in this article on sexual health and human rights issues.

*A copy of this report may be obtained from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission at 1360 Mission St., Ste. 200, San Francisco, CA 94103, ph: 415-255-8680, fax: 415-255-8662, <iglhrc@iglhrc.org>.



Civil Society or the Third Sector?

by James Richter

MOST PEOPLE WOULD AGREE that Western assistance for the promotion of civil society in Russia has been one of the few effective means of fostering democratic change. Most would also acknowledge, however, that civil society must come from within the population, that promoting civil society from the outside is inherently contradictory. Although Western assistance policies have been successful in stimulating the growth of NGO capacity and professionalism, current trends in Western funding may serve to divorce nonprofits from their local constituencies.

Civil society can be defined as an overlapping network of autonomous, voluntary associations—formal and informal, political and non-political—that creates a space for public action between the individual and the state. In a strong civil society, such associations are woven into the fabric of daily life and help structure citizens' relations with each other and with the state. According to Robert Putnam, author of *Making Democracy Work*, civic associations instill the habits of cooperation, solidarity, public-spiritedness and respect for legitimate authority necessary for a stable democratic polity. They also help ensure state accountability by aggregating societal demands and articulating them to government officials.

Western assistance cannot set up the informal structures that make up civil society; at best, it can reach a fraction of the organizations that constitute the Third Sector. Many people use “civil society” and the “Third Sector” interchangeably, but there is a crucial distinction between the two. Civil society refers to the associational life that helps structure the daily interactions within a society; the Third Sector refers more narrowly to the formal, functionally differentiated and frequently professional nonprofit organizations that interact with state and market actors. Strong third sector organizations have the skills and stability to provide a service consistently and efficiently over time, to get their message out to the public, to articulate their demands to government officials and to monitor government actions to ensure accountability. Since many NGOs are run on the same lines as businesses and government bodies, though, they are less equipped to socialize individuals to become good citizens.

If the Third Sector is to be a force for democracy, it must be rooted within society. Without such roots, Third Sector organizations cannot put forward the

authentic interests of the population. They are likely to respond more to the priorities of the donors upon which they depend. A Third Sector detached from local society also becomes highly vulnerable to political fashions in donor countries, as well as to suppression or co-optation by the state.

In Russia, unfortunately, detachment is a real possibility. Though more than 50,000 NGOs have registered with the Ministry of Justice since 1991, most are small and isolated organizations that rarely survive

the enthusiasm of their leaders. The key factor contributing to such weakness is the Soviet legacy of mistrust towards all public activism, though most Russians' lack of expendable time and money in the wake of economic “reform” is significant as well. After

decades of state domination, enforced activism and mutual suspicion, most Russians came to regard the public sphere as a realm of hypocrisy and surveillance rather than tolerance and cooperation. In this atmosphere, many retreated as much as possible into the privacy of their family and a close circle of friends. The public organizations sanctioned by the party, similarly, were not means of individual empowerment so much as they were agents of social control, and their functionaries frequently were cynical careerists with little interest in their nominal constituencies. Many Russians still assume that NGO workers have chosen activism as a means to line their own pockets.

Western assistance agencies, therefore, face the delicate task of reaching out to the Third Sector in Russia without distancing it further from the larger Russian society. So far, the record has been mixed. Donors have done a great job in nurturing a growing cadre of committed NGO professionals with the organizational skills and the networks to sustain their activities in the face of an often hostile social and legal

Emil Shukurov

-They got their grants and flew happily away!
-Yes, and they will never flock together again!

environment. To a large extent, however, Western donors have emphasized professional development, managerial skills and financial accountability in their dealings with Russian organizations, and have offered few incentives to reach out to the community. Quite the contrary, as organizations hire accountants and administrative assistants to attend to the myriad tasks associated with writing and implementing grant proposals, they will not divert financial or human resources from funded activities to find innovative ways to attract public support. Environmental activist Sergei Fomichov reports that one participant at a seminar for environmental organizations in Lipetsk said, "The expenditures on mobilizing human resources don't pay for themselves." Moreover, there is a great temptation among the salaried professionals of the Third Sector to

regard their activism as a career rather than a vocation, with the result that they identify more with other professionals than with their nominal constituents.

Recent patterns in Western assistance may exacerbate these problems. In the early years, assistance agencies funded by USAID offered partnerships and seed grants that spread Western resources widely through the Third Sector. More recently, they have taken to offering larger grants to fewer organizations in order that these established Russian nonprofits might now provide services to other Russian organizations that had been provided by Western partners in the past. These services include training, legal and financial consultations, internet access and networking information to smaller organizations within their sector or region. There are good reasons for this shift in priorities. Many recipients of the earlier grants hadn't the commitment or the capacity to use the funds effectively, whereas the organizations chosen to form resource centers already have proven their effectiveness. Moreover, with the prospect of decreased funding, resource centers of this kind are the most cost effective means to sustain a viable Third Sector in different regions.

Yet the new priorities may also encourage a narrow professionalism at the cost of civil society. The resource centers are small, centralized, hierarchical organizations consisting of a director and a small staff to keep the books, do the typing and manage the office, who need not share the director's concern for the organization's social mission. Such management is not likely to foster the values of cooperation, solidarity and tolerance that are so crucial to a democratic polity. Second, the resource centers have no real constituency within the larger Russian society, but work instead with existing organizational leaders to help increase their professionalism. Not only have they no mandate to attract more of the population into public activism, but they have no experience in that area which they can impart to others.

The biggest danger, though, is that concentrating Western assistance into fewer hands helps create a hierarchy among NGOs in a given sector or region, forcing grassroots organizations to go through an intermediary to gain access to outside help. This can only reinforce the suspicion that who you know, rather than what you do, determines success in gaining access to scarce resources. Even when Western assistance was spread more widely, activists who spoke English well or had contacts with the West had a natural advantage in winning grants over activists who did not. NGO activists in the regions, in particular, have expressed frustration that activists in Moscow were attempting to control access to Western assistance agencies to maintain a privileged position for themselves. With regard to local resource centers, opinion among NGO

A Social Movement or the Third Sector?

an adaptation of an ISAR-Moscow interview with Olga Pitsunova, director of the Center for Assistance to Environmental Initiatives

In my opinion, Russia does not have an environmental movement any longer, although several years ago it did. Perhaps my criteria for what makes up a social movement are too strict, but I believe that a movement is not merely a collection of organizations, each working separately towards some bright future. Rather, a movement forms only when organizations act together, working not only to promote their interests, but the interests of others. ... Also, a true social movement must reflect the interests of the population and have broad popular support.

Over the last several years in Russia, many grassroots groups have ridden the wave of grants to become specialized, professional nonprofits, and many new professional groups have sprung up. Together, they make up the independent Third Sector and work without, or practically without, community participation. However, a movement needs to include truly grassroots organizations and community-based groups for which environmental work is not a profession. These groups should have a broad base of support in their region and be united in a network with other nonprofit environmental organizations. ...

Russian law makes the distinction between "non-commercial" and "social" organizations. Today, most Russian environmental groups fit more into the first category. They are not social in their essence: their circle is too narrow and too removed from the public. Most often, grants are received only by a small group of nonprofits, which then naturally develop at a much faster rate than the truly grassroots groups. Organizations that receive grants need to orient themselves to ensuring that their smaller counterparts also have the resources to stand on their feet and continue with their work. ...

It is absolutely vital to have a person in every organization who works with the public. This is separate from "public relations," and should not be done to create an image for an organization, but to get the public involved in the organization's activities. Community involvement should be an element in every program. Unfortunately, funders do not seem to understand that groups need to work to involve their communities rather than just promote themselves. Either that or funders sincerely believe that polishing an organization's image is more important than involving and awakening the public.



activists was more mixed. Some were enthusiastic about the services provided by the centers; others complained that the centers held a monopoly on information and external assistance in the region.

Some tensions between fostering professionalism of the Third Sector and mobilizing public activism are inevitable. The organizational model encouraged by the granting process necessarily rewards practical people interested in incremental rather than transformational goals. Moreover, the huge disparity between the resources available through Western assistance, on the one hand, and the meager resources available through indigenous sources, on the other, can easily seduce the most committed activists into seeking to please their donors rather than their own constituencies.

Western agencies, therefore, should devote more time and effort seeking to counter such inclinations. First, Western funders should decentralize funding. While resource centers provide valuable services and should be continued, seed grants, if in smaller numbers, should also continue to provide an alternative source of funding for organizations that cannot get support from local governmental and business leaders. Only seed grants of this sort can ensure that alternative

voices are not lost. Funders should also attempt to ensure greater participation and instill the habits of cooperation and responsibility so crucial to the concept of civil society by considering organizational governance as an important criterion for evaluating grant proposals. They could show preference, for instance, to participatory models that ensure that organizational members have some voice in deciding organizational policy. Finally, funders should emphasize practical projects by making more money available to organizations that mobilize the public to provide immediate, tangible, practical improvements in their lives. Among women's organizations, for example, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers and the growing network of domestic abuse hotlines and crisis centers have shown a remarkable ability to enlist public support, precisely because they offer concrete, practical services to their constituencies. Organizations providing affordable housing or promoting neighborhood self-management councils have also had success in mobilizing public support. ●

James Richter is an associate professor of Political Science at Bates College.

NGOs Left Out of Caspian Development

by *Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OIL reserves in the Caspian Basin presents a situation ripe for the emergence of local NGOs in support of environmental protection. First, widespread awareness already exists concerning the environmental risks of oil development in the fragile ecosystems of the Caspian Sea. Prior to independence, the Soviet Union had set aside the Northeast Caspian as a special protected zone, banning all economic activity besides fishing and water transport. Yet, with independence in 1991, the Kazakhstan government lifted this ban to allow seismic exploration within the Caspian. Second, energy development in countries as diverse as Nigeria, Ecuador, and the United States has traditionally served to galvanize local environmental and political activism. Since 1991, one would expect to see the greatest development in Kazakhstani NGOs working on issues concerning off-shore oil exploration in the Caspian Basin given the salience of environmental issues in general and the fact that the Caspian is one

of the few spots left virtually unadulterated by the legacy of the Soviet Union. Instead, the majority of Kazakhstani NGOs ignore the energy sector and opt for small-scale environmental education programs on global topics such as biodiversity, thus catering to the priorities of their Western funders rather than the needs of their constituencies.

Due to a set of domestic and international constraints, the NGO community has had little success in influencing local communities regarding energy development strategies in the Caspian Basin. At the domestic level, Kazakhstani and Western NGOs face a political system that has become increasingly restrictive since 1994. This has produced several structural constraints for NGOs, including restrictions on freedom of the press, political

The conclusions drawn here are based on research carried out by the authors in Kazakhstan in March and December 1997 with support from the National Research Council Collaborative Research Grants in Sectoral Policy. As part of this research, the authors generated a report, "The NGO Paradox: Goals, Strategies and Non-Democratic Outcomes in Kazakhstan" for the Columbia University/Carnegie Corporation Project on NGOs in the FSU. An version of the report is forthcoming in *Europe-Asia Studies* (November 1999).

Western NGOs need to provide the correct incentives for local groups to actively increase their membership and engage in political activism that focuses specifically on issues of local concern.

mobilization and access to government officials, albeit to a lesser extent than under the Soviet system. Both local and Western NGOs are also limited by economic conditions. Due to the deteriorating economic situation in Kazakhstan, many local groups must rely upon international funding sources to survive. Internal sources of funding are largely absent since the general population is unaccustomed to paying membership dues and lacks the funds to do so. The fact that Kazakhstani organizations must turn to Western NGOs and foundations for financial support has induced them to adapt their own goals and strategies to meet those of Western NGOs. As a result, many local NGOs now speak of sustainable development, biodiversity and desertification, rather than emphasizing local issues. Thus, while many local environmental NGOs agree that Caspian development poses a great danger to local populations and ecosystems, they are not actively involved in either opposing development or advocating strict environmental regulations to govern it.

The crucial role of the energy sector in Kazakhstan's future economic growth acts as another domestic constraint. Unlike other parts of the world in which local populations have mobilized against oil drilling for environmental and economic reasons, Kazakhstanis generally view the exploitation of Caspian Basin resources favorably because they expect to benefit. Thus, they also have a favorable view of the oil companies who directly contribute to this development. More importantly, many local and regional *akims* (mayors) consider the development of the Caspian crucial to economic development in western Kazakhstan. In the area surrounding the Caspian, people are less concerned with the environmental consequences of development than they are with the economic potential that would be lost without it. According to a local health and safety expert, Kazakhstanis believe the Caspian is their ticket to "health and wealth."

Since both the Kazakhstani and Western governments also view oil development in the Caspian Basin as essential to economic development and international energy security, they have essentially excluded local NGOs from the legislative and regulatory processes. As one of the key international actors providing assistance to both NGOs and the energy sector, USAID has created a real quandary for itself by simultaneously supporting democracy-enhancing programs and economic-restructuring programs. In fact, USAID's goals and strategies often conflict and undermine one another. While USAID is funding programs for NGOs in the hopes of producing a vibrant civil society, it is actually usurping the potential role of local activism through its activities in the economic sector. For

example, USAID is supporting projects throughout Central Asia to create environmental, health, safety and technical regulations for the Caspian Sea Basin. While this is a natural opportunity to include NGOs in the legislative process as representatives of local interests, USAID has instead turned to foreign consultants who primarily work with local industry and their counterparts in government ministries rather than inviting Kazakhstani environmental NGOs to participate in the drafting or even consultation processes.

Future Recommendations

The correct response to this paradoxical situation is not to discontinue programs that encourage non-profit development in the FSU. Rather, it is for the international community to dramatically rethink its current strategies toward this development. Western NGOs need to provide the correct incentives for local groups to actively increase their membership and engage in political activism that focuses specifically on issues of local concern. This requires adapting the form and content of funding sources to encourage local NGOs to forge links with their government and local communities, to interact more closely with local and regional officials and to make full use of local and national media sources. In Central Asia, the environmental and energy sectors provide a particularly appropriate arena for this change in strategy.

Foreign grant-giving organizations should focus their attention on stimulating political activism rather than just on promoting environmental education and global environmental awareness. Western NGOs need to encourage local groups to look toward their own government officials to respond to environmental problems, particularly at the local and regional levels, as they have become the real source of authority over the environment in Central Asia. This requires supplying Kazakhstani nonprofits and their local and regional governments with information and technical support geared toward building relationships with one another.

Western NGOs should also encourage local organizations to focus on the needs of their communities. This includes funding initiatives concerning issues of local importance, as well as rewarding local organizations that seek to increase their membership and expand their support base.

Finally, Western NGOs should encourage companies and consultants to include Kazakhstani NGOs in drafting and monitoring environmental regulations and to utilize them as an interlocutor in their dealings with the national and regional governments. Western NGOs could provide training programs to help local organizations gain the know-how to provide environmental oversight. Instead, foreign oil companies have



been conducting their own public hearings with local communities, which have stifled local NGOs as monitors of environmental abuse.

Although the strategies outlined above may cause tension with Central Asian governments in the short-run, the key is to convey to local communities, domestic authorities and international actors alike that

the development of a burgeoning civil society is in their best interest. This can be conveyed most clearly in the energy sector, in which the costs of environmental damage outweigh the expected benefits. ●

Pauline Jones Luong is an assistant professor of Political Science at Yale University. Erika Weinthal is an assistant professor of Political Science at Tel Aviv University.

Central Asian Constituency Building Program

Glancing quickly at the accomplishments of the strongest Central Asian NGOs, it's possible to forget that the whole idea of an independent, noncommercial organization is quite new to the countries of the FSU. Scratching a bit deeper however, reveals that NGO work in Central Asia is hampered in a number of ways by a lack of public understanding and the resulting difficulties in building broad based support. Recognizing this, in 1997 USAID asked **Counterpart Consortium** to develop a program targeted at increasing public understanding of NGOs. The Constituency Building program has seen results in all five Central Asian countries, despite the varying climates for NGO activity in the region.

According to regional program coordinator Sue Benedetti, the program strives to communicate four fundamental messages: NGOs are playing a role in the development of civil society; when NGOs work in partnership with government or business they are more effective; NGOs are affecting public policy; and good NGO legislation is important to the functioning of a strong NGO sector. These messages are targeted to a number of audiences: the general public, which forms the constituency of NGOs; policymakers, who often need to be convinced that NGOs have a constructive role in the policy design process; and the media, which can help NGOs gain credibility by according them a place in the public media forum.

One part of the constituency building effort is producing and airing radio spots and videos on NGO themes. Adapting Western ideas about public service announcements to Central Asia has resulted in longer spots and a documentary approach to telling the NGO story. Currently, a five minute Counterpart-produced program about NGOs is produced each month, and played twice a month on Kazakhstani national radio. Nearly 20 videos have also been developed and shown on television in all five countries and by the 14 Counterpart NGO Support

Centers throughout the region. Video topics have ranged from basic introductory films, such as "What is an NGO?" and "Surviving Together"—how NGOs are working to help people get by in today's quickly changing society—to films addressing topics such as "Women in the Changing of Society" and "On the Way to Sustainable Development," which explores how NGOs are working together with government officials and business people to create positive change.

Counterpart's NGO training program supports the Constituency Building program's efforts to increase NGO outreach to the public. One of the training series focuses on public education through media. The three-day workshop teaches skills such as how to write a good press release, pitch stories to journalists, hold a press conference, develop a communications strategy and break down barriers between NGOs and the media. The training has encouraged groups to work more actively with the media, and helped an artisan group do the public relations work necessary to sponsor a profitable art fair. Another Counterpart training addresses the question of how organizations can expand their membership base.

A current focus of the program in Kazakhstan is to inform the public about the need for good NGO legislation. The International Center for Nonprofit Law, a Counterpart Consortium member, is working with a local coalition of NGOs, called ANNOK, to sponsor roundtables throughout the country on NGO legislation. Several members of ANNOK recently visited the US on a US Information Service program focusing on the legislation drafting process. They will now bring their information to Almaty, Astana and other regional cities. The effort aims to educate the public about the lawmaking process as well as to send a message to parliamentarians and the government that people are concerned about NGO law. ●

-Amy Forster, editor at large, *Give & Take*

Russian Hunters Support “Don’t Shoot Birds!” Campaign

In order to combat the poaching of endangered birds of prey in Russia’s Krasnodar region, the Ecological Fund for the Protection of Falcons (EFPF) launched the campaign “Don’t Shoot Birds!” in November 1998. The impetus for the program came last year when EFPF learned of several illegal shootings of Krasnodar endangered birds, including golden eagles, white-tailed eagles, eagle owls, bustards and griffon-vultures. Although endangered animals are protected by Russian law, EFPF leaders realized that only by educating the Krasnodar population about rare birds and by monitoring nesting sites would they be able to curtail the illegal killings.

To ensure the success of the program, EFPF has tried to generate broad-based support. Surprisingly, the EFPF’s campaign has been perhaps most successful with hunters. EFPF leaders managed to convince the Medved network of hunting stores to post “Don’t Shoot Birds!” leaflets in their stores and include information about the program with every package of bullets. One Krasnodar store, Okhotnik, gave the EFPF a donation to print a survey about nesting sites and habitats. Okhotnik patrons who complete the survey receive discounts on store merchandise. EFPF’s program, which has been endorsed by Krasnodar’s hunting and fishing associations, will continue until the end of May 1999. For more information, contact Sergei Vershinin; ph: 7-8612-32-8117.

*-Svetlana Rubashcina,
Yuzhno-Rossiskii Resource Center*

NGO Fights Human Rights Abuses in Georgia

The Democratic Mesks’ Union is implementing a new program to stop human rights violations and abuse of authority in Akhaltsikhe, Georgia, installing seven mail boxes and a confidential human rights hotline to allow residents to report infractions anonymously. City residents have traditionally had an uneasy relationship with authorities, stemming from Soviet times, when Akhaltsikhe was viewed

with suspicion because of its proximity to the Turkish border and its status as a closed city. Beatings and bribe demands from police officers are common in Akhaltsikhe, but residents rarely report abuses because they fear reprisals.

The Union plans to publish a weekly bulletin, to be distributed free of charge at local newsstands, detailing human rights abuses in the city. The Union will also run a television spot to bring attention to the problem and their program. Finally, the Union will provide assistance to victims that decide to take their complaints to court. The Union hopes that publicizing human rights violations and abuses of authority will pressure local officials to respect the law and convince Akhaltsikhe residents to demand better treatment.

On the Air with Green Wave

The International Social Center for Regional Studies and Ecotourism, Kavkaz, and the Youth Environmental Center, Yashil Dalga, have joined forces to produce a series of ten environmental radio broadcasts for children in order to raise the level of environmental awareness among Azerbaijan’s youth. The show, Green Wave, receives free air time from the Azerbaijani radio program Pulse, and since last June has aired six broadcasts in Baku and Azerbaijan’s regional capitals on topics such as “What is Ecology?” “Living Water” and “Clean Air.” The NGOs try to involve children in the show’s production, encouraging them to help plan programming and bringing them into the studio to read poems and participate in ecological contests and games.

The show has drawn a favorable response from educators, parents and the show’s main audience—children. The editorial offices of Pulse have received numerous phone calls from parents expressing their gratitude for the show and suggesting future topics. Green Wave’s producers hope that their work will help listeners develop a love of nature and grow up to become the next generation of Azerbaijani environmentalists.

*-Elchin Orudzhev, director of the International
Social Center for Regional Studies and Ecotourism*

Index of Organizations

Agency for Social Information: M. Gnezdnikovski pere. 9, #3B,
Moscow 103009, Russia; ph: 7-095-229-0423; fax: 7-095-229-0554; <asi@glasnet.ru> 6

Center for Assistance to Environmental Initiatives:
B. Kazachya 84-3a, Saratov 410600, Russia; ph/fax: 7-8452-26-38-04; <volga@glas.apc.org> 16

Center for Humanitarian Aid:
Novaya-Basmannaya ul. #11, Moscow 109117, Russia; 7-095-261-8750 14

Center for Safe Energy: 2828 Cherry St., Berkeley, CA 94705;
ph: 510-883-1177; <cse@earthisland.org>; <www.earthisland.org> 15

Charities Aid Foundation:
114-118 Southhampton Row, London WC1B 5AA; ph: 44-171-400-2334 9

Counterpart Consortium: 100 Shevchenko St., 6th floor, Almaty, Kazakhstan;
ph: 7-3272-62-50-09; fax: 3272-60-86-06; <root@cpart.alma-ata.su>; <www.cango.net.kg> 25

Green World: PO Box 68/7, Sosnovy Bor 188537, Russia;
ph/fax: 7-81269-49-481; <greenwld@spb.org.ru> 16

International Discussion Club: Kashirksoye sh. 88/26-112,
Moscow 115551, Russia; fax: 7-095-956-35-86; <andrey@host.cis.lead.org> 10

Krilija: PO Box 108, St. Petersburg 191186, Russia;
ph: 7-812-312-3180; fax: 7-812-315-1302; <krilija@ilga.org> 19

Mother's Right Foundation: Luchnikov pere. dom 4, pod. 3, kom. 4, 103982
Moscow, Russia; ph/fax: 7-095-206-88-94; <mrigh@glasnet.ru>; <www.hro.org/ngo/mright> 17

NGO Training and Resource Center: 23 Sevastopolian St., Yerevan 375033,
Armenia; ph: 3-742-278-732; fax: 3-742-151-795; <ngoc@arminco.com>; <www.ngoc.am> 11

Nuclear Information & Resource Service: 1424 16th St., NW,
Ste. 404, Washington, DC 20036; ph: 202-328-0002; fax: 202-462-2183; <nirnet@igc.apc.org> 16

Southern Kazakhstan Association of Lawyers: 2A Tauke Khan St.,
Shymkent 486050, Kazakhstan; ph/fax: 7-3252-53-51-42; <ceeli-shm@nursat.kz> c/o ABA-CEELI 7

1 / 1 O: E-123 Do Vostrebvaniya, Moscow 111123, Russia;
ph: 7-095-305-5737; fax: 7-095-141-8315; <lytchev@mbox.vol.cz> 19

ISAR Offices

ISAR-Almaty:
480004 Almaty, ul. Shagabudinova, d. 128, kv. 7; ph/fax: 7-3272-67-71-88; <root@isar.almaty.kz>

ISAR-Baku:
370014 Baku, 186-15 ul. Suleyman Rahimov; ph: 994-12-93-25-51; fax: 994-12-93-48-98;
<ngo@isar.baku.az>

ISAR-DC:
1601 Connecticut Ave., NW, Ste. 301, Washington, DC 20009; ph: 202-387-3034; fax: 202-667-3291;
<postmaster@isar.org>

ISAR-Kyiv:
252150 Kyiv-150, a/ya 447/6; ph/fax: 380-44-269-8542; <isar@isar.kiev.ua>

ISAR-Moscow:
121019 Moscow, G-19, a/ya 210; ph/fax: 7-095-251-76-17; <isarmos@glasnet.ru>

ISAR-Novosibirsk:
630004 Novosibirsk, a/ya 199; ph/fax: 7-3832-21-89-24; <isarsib@glasnet.ru>

ISAR-Vladivostok:
690091 Vladivostok, a/ya 91246; ph/fax: 7-4232-21-10-96; <isarrfe@online.marine.su>

Thank You!

We would like to extend our gratitude to the following funders for their financial support of our programs during 1998-1999.

DevTech Systems, Inc.
Roy A. Hunt Foundation
Lippincott Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Stewart R. Mott Charitable Trust
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Rockefeller Family Associates
Trust for Mutual Understanding
Turner Foundation
US Agency for International Development
US Environmental Protection Agency
US Information Agency
Winston Foundation

Additionally, a heartfelt thanks to the following individuals for their investment in our work and commitment to our mission.

Sarah Carey
Sarit Choate
Harriett Crosby
Marcia and George deGarmo
Georgia and William Delano
Jamie and Andrew Gagarin
Nancy A. Graham
David Hunter and
Margaret Bowman
Donna and Arthur Hartman
June and John Hechinger, Sr.
John R. Hunting
Carol and Ted Kellogg
Celina Kellogg
W. Thomas Kelly
Eliza and Kevin Klose
Joan Kuriansky
Samuel H. Moerman
DJ Peterson
Vicky and George Ranney
Stanley Resor
Marie Ridder
Raisa Scriabine and
Bob Wallace
Marie Louise and David Scudder
Anne and Hiram Sibley
Lael Stegall
Kate Watters and
Jim Boissonnault
Beatrice W. Wilkes
Anonymous patrons

These generous individuals have made an annual donation to ISAR of \$250 or more. We invite you to join the company of those listed above. Donations are tax deductible.

Don't Miss Out on the Give & Take!

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Give & Take*, your window on the exciting world of civil society in the countries of the former Soviet Union. When you become a member of ISAR, you join a dynamic network of activists, practitioners and scholars strengthening citizen participation and the nongovernmental sector in the former Soviet Union. With six overseas offices and an office in Washington, DC, ISAR cultivates links among American and Eurasian nongovernmental organizations and seeks to facilitate the grassroots social change essential to the creation of more just and sustainable societies in Eurasia.

Your ISAR membership includes a one-year subscription to *Give & Take: A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia* and ISAR's quarterly newsletter, *ISAR in Focus*, a report on ISAR activities. You will receive invitations to ISAR's Washington, DC-based events: the NGO Forum, a seminar series focusing on NGO activity in Eurasia; and "Brown Bag" lunches featuring guests from the former Soviet Union. (Members may request Forum minutes.) You will also have access to ISAR's information resources, including the ISAR library, regional and topical information files and a regularly updated job book.

Membership Rates

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Individual | \$35 |
| Nonprofit organization/University | \$45 |
| Corporate | \$65 |

To cover international postage, please add \$10.

Please send your name, mailing address and e-mail, along with your check made payable to ISAR to:
Membership Program, ISAR, 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, #301, Washington, DC 20009.

If you have questions or would like additional information on membership benefits, contact ISAR's membership program at:
202-387-3034 or <membership@isar.org>.

Please visit our website at <www.isar.org>.



Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia

1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 301
Washington, DC 20009

Non-profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit No.4969
Washington, DC