

Give & Take

A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia

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A Decade of
NGO Partnerships



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Mission Statement

ISAR's mission is to strengthen the ability of citizens and social change organizations in Eurasia and their colleagues in the US to influence decision-making, advance social justice and promote environmentally sound stewardship of the earth and its resources.

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.

On the Cover: ISAR's June 2001 Women's Leadership Exchange Program facilitated meetings across Siberia. US nuclear safety activists from Los Alamos, NM to Long Island, NY joined with their counterparts in Russia who are also struggling to persuade industry and government officials to address health and safety concerns and stop dumping radioactive and chemical poisons in disenfranchised communities. This issue of *Give & Take* explores mutually beneficial partnerships in which both US and FSU activists learn from and assist each other.

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1991–2001: Ten Years of NGO Partnerships

This year marks a momentous anniversary—it has been ten years since the fall of the Soviet Union. Although ten years is by no means long enough to judge the transition a success or failure, the end of the cold war opened the doors to cooperative activities between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on both sides. Thus, 2001 is also a ten-year anniversary for joint NGO efforts. *Give & Take* felt it would be interesting to look back over the decade of NGO partnerships and try to assess what they have achieved. Ten years is long enough to come to some general conclusions on what has worked and where we should go from here.

Since 1991, and in some cases earlier, partnerships between NGOs in the former Soviet Union (FSU) and in the West have been decisive in the establishment and maintenance of FSU-based NGOs. They have proven beneficial to each side, both as a learning experience, and in achieving goals through building international coalitions. Each group is able to publicize the work of the other, thereby providing a broader base of moral and financial support; they can provide training to each other in areas where one partner is stronger than the other; and they can help each other when challenged by government agencies engaged in activities that endanger people or the environment. Whether it's in the FSU or the US, a partner can intervene to publicize the other's situation and show international support.

The articles in this issue of *Give & Take* show what working together has meant for long-term US-FSU partners. Some of these partnerships have endured while others have evolved into different activities and relationships. In Section One, ISAR's executive director, Eliza Klose, describes how partnerships with environmental NGOs in Eurasia positively affect the NGO movement as a whole, and how the personal relationships that develop from them, in turn, keep the movement strong. Nino Saakashvili, of Horizonti, the Foundation for the Third Sector—one of ISAR's long-term partners—follows with her thoughts on how the ten-year partnership with ISAR has benefited her group.

Section Two looks at four partnerships from Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia. Each article describes one side of a partnership and what each has gained from joint efforts. The third section contains articles from well-known US NGO representatives describing their experiences with long-term partnerships in the FSU. Gary Cook, director of Earth Island Institute's Baikal Watch project, shares his early experiences of partnership, from being called “environmental spies” by the local press to being asked by Russian NGOs to help them deal with international corporations. David Gordon of Pacific Environment explains how his NGO works with groups on the ground in the Russian Far East and Siberia, noting the value of strong local leadership, Russian fluency among US staff, and tighter bonds formed through much travel and regular communication.

All of these partnerships represent a movement that, despite its short history, is maturing and enjoying success due to the determination of partners on both sides. These groups have been empowered and energized by their partnerships, and would not have achieved nearly so much without the support of their counterparts on the other side of the world.



Tamara Kowalski
Editor

Kremlin Convenes NGO Forum

Hundreds of NGO activists, officials, and even the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, gathered in November in Moscow for a dialogue on how independent civil initiatives can help address national problems.

Despite mixed reviews from attending NGO activists, the “Civic Forum” was an historic assembly of NGO leaders and top administration officials. Putin addressed NGO leaders in person, went on record as standing for an open, independent civil society, and personally accepted petitions and written grievances from activists.

Putin’s remarks, as translated by the BBC, included many pro-civil society statements. “I can assure you that [we] realize perfectly well that civil society could not be organized at the initiative of the representatives of the authorities, and especially not according to their instructions. Moreover, I regard any attempts to impose a civil society from above as absolutely counterproductive, practically impossible and even dangerous. It can never be created on someone’s instructions. [The authorities must] create the most favorable medium for [the] development of civil society. . . . What we need is a dialogue of equals. We realize that the efficiency of this dialogue to a large extent depends on us, on the authorities’ representatives and on the authorities as a whole. [W]e are ready to undertake essential organizational measures and, if necessary, legislative measures.”

Putin was introduced by Lyudmila Alexeyeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, who noted that Forum attendees represented more than 350,000 Russian NGOs, groups that today employ one million people and assist some 20 million Russians. As quoted in the *Moscow Times*, Alexeyeva said, “These figures are proof that civil society already exists in Russia.”

Many NGOs and observers questioned the government’s intentions in organizing the event. By no means everyone agreed that the Forum represented a step forward or even a sign of a thriving civil society movement. Yabloko Party leader Grigory Yavlinsky told the newspaper *Obschaya Gazeta*, “I hope that sensible people will not take the Civil Forum very seriously. It is a one-time action that will end, while the issues of cooperation between civil organizations will remain.”

During the conference, participants formed working groups of up to 300 people to discuss topics such as the Chechen conflict, health, women’s issues and foreign policy. These groups then divided again into smaller groups to come up with concrete proposals, *The Moscow Times* reported. The *Times* also reported that organizing the forum cost \$1.5 million, which was covered by some of Russia’s largest business groups, such as Alfa-Bank, Interros, and Sberbank.

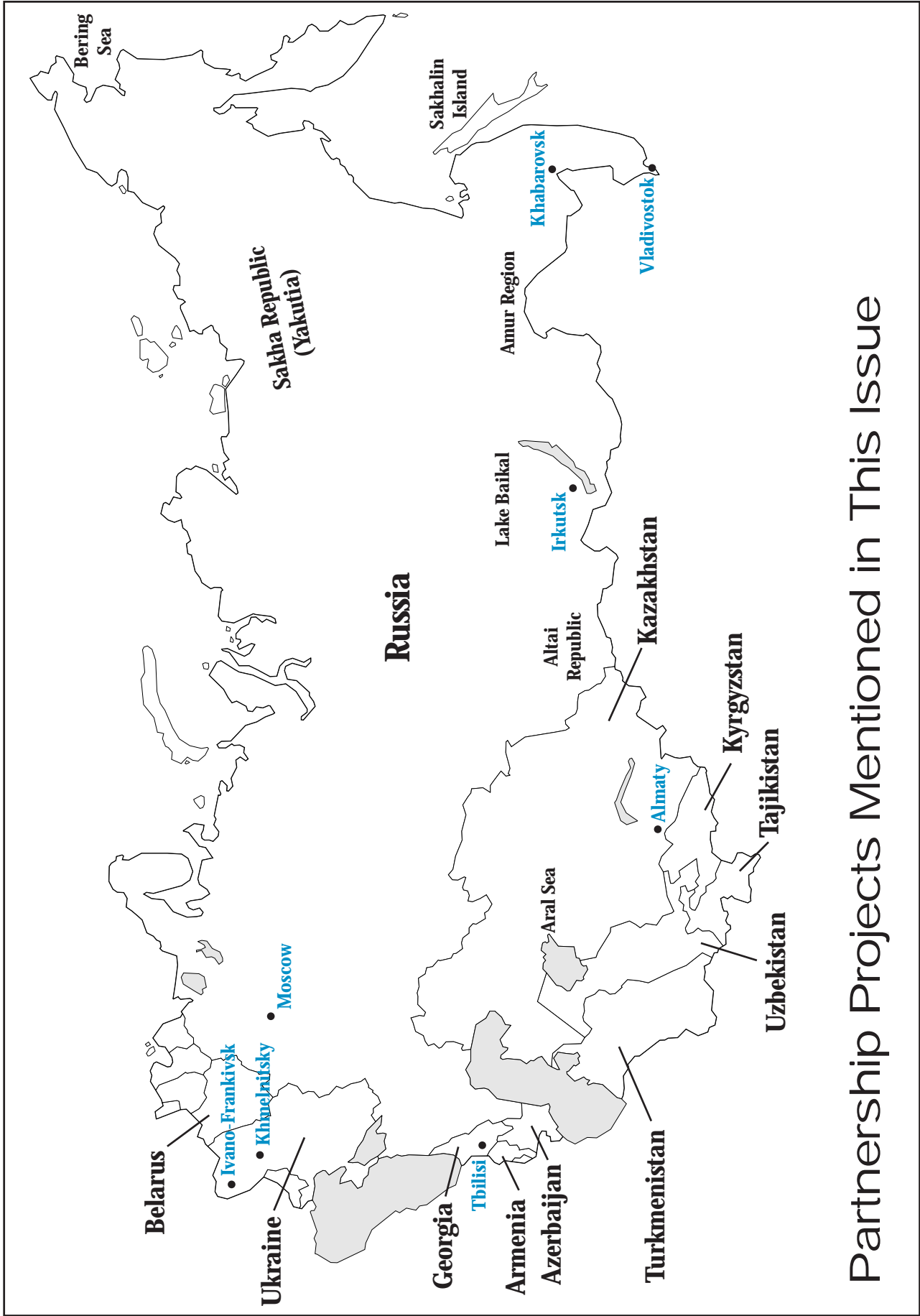
Yuri Shirokov, director of ISAR-Siberia, said, “In the beginning, the Forum reminded me of the days when everything was decided from the top. But NGOs succeeded in substantially changing the character of the meeting. In my opinion, this demonstrated the authority and professionalism of the NGO movement in Russia. I wasn’t sorry I attended.”

Maria Cherkasova, director of the Centre for Independent Ecological Programs, said: “Among veteran activists, we had many discussions on whether participation in the Forum would be worth it. Most of us wished to take advantage of the opportunity to come to Moscow. Thanks to the efforts of Svet Zabelin of the Socio-Ecological Union, more than 200 persons from different and distant parts of Russia, including Sakhalin, Kamchatka and Chukotka, attended the Forum.”

In his closing remarks, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov echoed President Putin’s willingness to listen to suggestions from independent NGOs. “Without the participation of public organizations, reform of the government’s social policy is doomed to fail,” he said.

Official statements embracing openness and transparency are far simpler to produce than genuine, lasting social change. Yet at the very least, the authorities can now be reminded of their promises—perhaps even held to them. The public has voiced its demands for justice, environmentally sound policies, and renewed action on social issues. It will take concrete action to prove that these demands are taken seriously.

As Shirokov said, “Only time will tell whether the Forum will have been just a marker in Russian history or whether it will be remembered as a genuinely meaningful event.”



Partnership Projects Mentioned in This Issue

US-FSU Partnerships: Rewards and Challenges

by *Eliza K. Klose*

WHY PARTNERSHIP? THERE ARE all the obvious reasons. Partnering with an organization in the FSU extends the possibilities and expands the resources of both sides. Partnering gives the American organization access to the information, experience and unique knowledge of its FSU partner. Through the US organization, the FSU partner gains access to international contacts, financial and technical resources, opportunities to expand its own expertise, and knowledge. Whatever capabilities each side has on its own are multiplied enormously by joining forces.

These are important and valuable benefits of working in partnership, but over the course of the last ten years of working with NGO colleagues in the FSU, I have found there are much deeper ones. The first is highly personal, but then most of the deepest reasons for things are personal. Working with grassroots activists in Eurasia allowed me to develop my connections

with a part of the world that holds great fascination for me. From 1977-81, my family and I lived in the Soviet Union when my husband worked as *Washington Post* correspondent there. At that time speaking out in opposition to the government and socializing with foreigners was dangerous for Soviet citizens. Nonetheless, many of the people we met befriended us and took us and our three children into their lives. Returning to the region ten years later with ISAR, when the situation had radically changed, gave me an opportunity to play a small part in the huge and challenging transition that was occurring. And this time I had the chance to travel much more widely and come to know a broader range of people, from Azerbaijan to the Russian Far East, from Kazakhstan to the Carpathian Mountains.

The experience of making friends among dissidents and human rights activists in the '70s, of baking potatoes over a campfire with our three children while covering the latest story of artistic censorship or politi-

A Relationship on Equal Footing

Partnership between Horizonti, the Foundation for the Third Sector, and ISAR began on the basis of shared principles, values and interests. ISAR-Georgia opened in 1994 as a local office under the aegis of ISAR-DC. This cooperation offered the staff of ISAR's Tbilisi office tremendous experience, based on western democratic principles. The office became acquainted with the philosophy of NGOs and was able to work for the creation of an NGO sector in Georgia. The country benefited greatly from this partnership, which helped to lay the foundation for a more democratic society by supporting citizen initiatives.

Areas of responsibility between ISAR-DC and ISAR-Georgia were clearly defined from the beginning. ISAR-DC provided Tbilisi with the freedom to launch many new programs, establish its own strategies (with the agreement of ISAR-DC), study local needs in

detail and then respond to those needs. The sustainability of ISAR-Georgia and its development demonstrated the success of this cooperation.

In 1997, ISAR-Georgia expressed the desire to become an independent Georgian organization. ISAR-DC supported the idea of creating a Georgian foundation on the basis of ISAR-Georgia and the two worked to create the first independent Georgian foundation—the Horizonti Foundation. The Horizonti Foundation continued the activities started by ISAR-Georgia and developed new programs and new strategies for responding to the needs of Georgian NGOs.

Thus the cooperation between the ISAR office in Washington and an ISAR field office developed into cooperation between two independent organizations, one American and one Georgian. The experience gained from the four-year partnership with ISAR-DC proved to



Irmgard Hunt

Nino Saakashvili, director of Horizonti, the Foundation for the Third Sector in Georgia, and ISAR Executive Director Eliza Klose.

cal harrassment, has been mirrored ten years later in my work with environmental NGOs throughout Eurasia. This time the occasion might be a long sociable train ride from Khabarovsk to Blagoveshchensk during

which we swapped folk songs and stories along with strategies for addressing industrial pollution or management problems in a local NGO or perhaps an early morning walk with a new Kazakh friend at a staff meeting in Harper's Ferry, WV, during which we discovered a shared belief in the capacity of the human spirit.

Working in partnership has not always been easy. There have been moments when our partners have publicly attacked our intentions. I remember one particular instance in 1993 when ISAR was first offered support from USAID to begin a grantmaking program. Our partners at the time were the Socio-Ecological Union (SEU), a large umbrella organization consisting of conservation NGOs from all over the FSU. The SEU felt strongly that we should do our grantmaking from one central office to reinforce the FSU-wide nature of the environmental movement. We believed that we could do a better, more equitable job operating from separate offices in Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia. Our decision to do so sparked a storm of passionate e-mails accusing us and the US government of having achieved in one stroke what the Soviets had been unable to do in 70 years: sundering the environmental movement.

Fortunately our partnership weathered the crisis. When we launched our grant programs and looked for seasoned board members, we turned to some of our

loudest critics since they, like us, were eager to have the grant program succeed. Their long experience in the environmental movement helped us assure that the grant process was fair and transparent and that grant monies went to effective, trustworthy organizations. In the end, we became stronger allies for having aired our differences, stood up for what we believed in—and forgiven each other. Now, eight years later, ISAR's Caspian program, which convenes environmental NGOs from around the Caspian Sea, enables us to support interregional NGO activities as the SEU had wanted us to originally. We can do so comfortably now that we have built ties throughout the region, and the national NGOs with which we work feel strong enough in their own right to work in coalition with NGOs from other former Soviet republics.

Our partners, whether our eight field offices or other collaborating Eurasian NGOs, look to us for help with fundraising. We have not always been successful, in part because we cannot always convey the value of offering small grants at the grassroots level. Many large government donors, driven by the need to demonstrate large and rapid results, feel compelled to support large programs costing millions of dollars instead of continuing to support our smaller programs over a longer period of time. Fortunately, we have found some funders who understand the value of building civil society by supporting small, local efforts that can grow

gradually into larger, more extensive ones. These funders themselves have become partners in our efforts. Furthermore, a number of them have begun to fund our field offices directly, rendering our local staff increasingly confident and autonomous.

The process of empowering people to put their ideas to work and experiencing their joy in the discovery that you believe in them is deeply rewarding. It is all the more so because the people we are working with come from all over the former Soviet Union, where the process of reform is slow and conditions difficult. But, there are also enormous satisfactions in partnering with other Americans who share our commitment to supporting grassroots activism in Eurasia or members of grassroots US groups who are dealing with challenges similar to those faced by FSU groups. And even closer to home, I feel fortunate to work with my wonderful American staff who care so much about what they do, the people they work with, the region where we operate, and the vision that we share. These partnerships make the world a richer, more stable place every day.

Together all of us face huge challenges, both in the US and Eurasia. The intoxicating excitement of 1991 when the Soviet Union fell and everything seemed possible has been replaced by concern that reform has stalled and repression is becoming the preferred method for dealing with change in countries like Belarus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Many are worried that powerful global corporations will take advantage of the uncertainty and exploit the natural resources of the Caspian Sea or the Russian Far East unless the citizens of these regions can take a strong stand to protect their societies and their natural heritage.

Can the many-faceted partnerships we are lucky enough to participate in help address these challenges? We cannot know. But we have felt their power already, the strong links they create, their ability to energize us and others, and to provide support in a moment of crisis like September 11. It is up to us to build on the foundation laid down across a decade of working together. These partnerships seem the best and strongest hope we have as individuals and as a world. ●

Eliza K. Klose is executive director of ISAR.

significant organizational development of Georgian NGOs.

Today the sustainability of the Third Sector in Georgia requires cooperation with the business sector. The absence of such experience should not discourage us. We can and must learn from those who have such experience and skills. American NGOs have been working with the business sector for a long time, which helps to explain the well-established culture of corporate philanthropy in the US.

We are happy that the Western, particularly American, experience is being introduced in Georgia. Our old partner and friend ISAR will help us learn more about it. Exploring these issues together seems the most fruitful direction for our future partnership with ISAR and we look forward to positive results from our joint efforts. We have been working together for a long time and we understand and appreciate each other's values. We believe that we can move to a new stage in working together with the NGOs and citizens of both our countries and we anticipate immense mutual benefit from this cooperation.

—Nino Saakashvili, director of the Horizonti Foundation.



NGO Lessons from Georgia: Failed Expectations, New Cooperation

by *David Usupashvili*

GEORGIAN MET THE BEGINNING of the new millennium with mixed feelings. Many people were unsure whether to expect new opportunities or new troubles. Are the most difficult things behind us or still ahead? Are we becoming a part of Europe or will we stay one of the focal points for the clash of civilizations? Does globalization offer new hope for survival or another threat? These questions arise from the extremely complex situation that the Georgian people find themselves in after ten years of continuous efforts to democratize and liberalize our post-communist society.

Unfortunately, corruption and mismanagement in Georgia have raised serious doubts about the functioning of state institutions. They have undermined public trust in government and eroded the moral foundations of civil society. The legacy of totalitarianism and colonialism combined with a weak tradition of civil society in the pre-communist period have led to inadequate social controls over the institutions of government. Since independence, and after several years of intensive cooperation with western organizations, some elements of civil society, such as independent media and NGOs, have developed. However, many people are alienated from the political process and the influence of civil society remains inadequate. These conditions can easily foster the growth of left or right wing populist attitudes and endanger Georgia's fragile democratic achievements.

Georgia's international prestige is in great danger as well. Political and economic globalization makes this a critical issue because nowadays a country cannot make progress without active engagement in the international system. A few years ago, Georgia had won the reputation for being a country that, despite many impediments, had the determination to successfully pursue democratic and market reforms. This international confidence remains to some degree; however, Georgia's failure to carry out practical and vigorous measures to fight corruption and increase government efficiency could lead to a drastic decline in political and economic support from the international community. Such a loss of support would undercut Georgia's ability to address its multitude of problems.

The only hope for addressing the current negative trends and getting society back on track is greater and more effective cooperation between local and foreign partners. Consequently, this is the right time to analyze Georgia's experiences with cooperation between Georgian and foreign organizations and to identify areas where improvement is possible.

Obstacles to Achieving Positive Results

Many examples of cooperative efforts between western and Georgian civil society counterparts exist, but few have produced positive results. This is especially true when partners are not trying to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. A number of organizations and individuals (including myself and my organization—the **Georgian Young Lawyers Association**) have benefited enormously from cooperation with Western partners, but even these gains have not been adequately shared with society as a whole. In this regard, development assistance to Georgia does not differ significantly from assistance to other countries. However, I would argue that we could have had better results if both sides had taken full advantage of their opportunities and made fewer mistakes.

In the early 1990s, Georgia had one of the most advanced anti-communist social movements of the FSU. Citizen activism was very high and Georgians were ready for significant changes in behavior and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the first opportunities for real cooperation emerged very late—not until 1994. We lost four important years for several interdependent reasons. The first non-communist government's extreme nationalism scared the West, which then chose to wait for a better opportunity to start large scale cooperation. These circumstances led to the isolation and weakening of Georgia's emerging civil society, which soon became involved in bloody civil and ethnic conflicts that drained valuable resources and time from Georgia's development as an independent nation.

When our Western friends finally arrived in Georgia with substantial, long-term programs, the momentum had passed, and we had to overcome not only the usual obstacles for successful implementation of joint programs, but also a great deal of public cynicism exac-

erbed by extreme economic hardship. We have often discussed with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), ISAR and other US organizations how much we could have done if critically needed technical assistance had come to Georgia immediately after independence. So, the first and foremost problem with cooperation was that it came too late.

Second, very few foreign consultants, advisors and program officers had the courage and passion to work effectively in Georgia. Georgian people, as proud representatives of the South, tend to be more emotional than rational. They are ready to spend their last cent to please a person they like but would reject even the most favorable business offer if they did not feel an emotional attachment to the potential partner. Thus, Georgians see the ideas and concepts offered by a project in terms of and personalized by the person advocating them. In other words, the moral standing of potential partners and their professional ethics, demonstrated on a daily basis, matter more to a Georgian than the person's education, experience, or professionalism.

Georgians not only better understand an international expert with courage and passion, such a person can "infect" them with enthusiasm and hope. An expert who conveys that he is doing his job only because he has been paid to do it is difficult for Georgians to connect with and makes people feel cynical about the project. Georgians would say "pay us the same money and we will do a better job." Now, after ten years of independence, people more and more frequently ask, "Are Americans coming to help us or to establish a better environment in our country for their own businesses?" Unfortunately, very few foreigners are able to demonstrate, by their words or actions, that their efforts in Georgia are not directed more toward securing privileges for themselves than to insuring fair competition, the rule of law, and security for everyone.

The third problem with cooperation is the quality of the assistance provided. One obvious explanation is that the US, like the rest of the world, was not prepared for the scale of assistance needed by post-communist nations. They lacked human resources. Sovietologists, like our local dissidents, were good at criticizing the Soviet system, but had a limited idea of how to change it. As a result, aid agencies had to recruit unqualified people. The larger, more important former Soviet countries absorbed the best people. Many of those sent to Georgia had a very limited understanding of post-communist societies and thought they would face the same issues they had faced in, say, Africa.

I remember many meetings with foreigners in the mid-90s who raised totally irrelevant issues. Most were

still under the influence of Cold War era propaganda and thought that Georgians had been starving during the Soviet era and had no idea what a TV set was. They did not understand that Georgian workers and farmers had achieved a high level of professionalism. Thus, substantial assistance money was spent on worthless activities. They also counted too much on the "invisible hand" of the free market, forgetting that the Soviet mentality of the vast majority of Georgians was no less strong an "invisible force."

Many international organizations also ignore Georgian law: They do not bother to register their offices properly or to register their staff in the government's taxpayer list. To avoid taxes, they use the personal accounts of their expatriate employees to pay salaries to their local employees.

The local civil society community has new problems as well. Recently, Georgian civil society has been polluted by individuals who view civil society assistance as an opportunity to get grants to support their own businesses and political careers. Such behavior has a much greater overall negative impact on society than the achievement of narrow project objectives.

Key Ways to Cooperate More Effectively

Two of the first US pioneers to arrive in Georgia were ISAR and NDI. The day after their representatives arrived, Tbilisi had no electricity, gas or other source of energy. We taught them how to use an old wood-burning heater and how to turn on an old Soviet military generator in order to charge a laptop battery. This first basic cooperation led to a lasting friendship and partnership between our organizations. Although ISAR and NDI never provided any grant support to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Michael Clayton of ISAR [see next page] and Daniel Kunin and Ted Jonas of NDI, through their honesty, courage, enthusiasm and work ethic probably played the most important role among foreigners in helping our leadership set the organization on the right track.

Cooperation means asking fundamental questions: Is our agenda for ourselves and our societies realistic? Can we decrease the distance between the developed and developing worlds by accelerating the process of development? Will the developing societies survive such a complex and speedy process? Cooperation itself can answer such questions. And whoever wants to study true cooperation should consult the people mentioned above and draw lessons from their success. ●

David Usupashvili is a board member of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association.

Georgians see the ideas and concepts offered by a project in terms of and personalized by the person advocating them.



Western Assistance Providers Must Build Trust, Maintain Cultural Awareness

by *Michael Clayton*

DAVID USUPASHVILI WROTE MANY of the laws passed in Georgia since 1994. He started an NGO to advance the skills and ethics of Georgian lawyers. He worked for a USAID Rule-of-Law contractor, and he evaluated the process of Georgia's democratic development as a fellow at Duke's Sanford School of Public Affairs. He avoids the glare of the media spotlight and quietly wields influence in moving Georgia toward a more democratic and prosperous society. He provides an insightful and fair perspective on the problems and accomplishments of partnerships in Georgia.

As a small part of the movement to build a more civil society in Georgia, I especially appreciate David's point that the measure of a successful partnership should not be the benchmarks identified in a proposal. Even during the most challenging periods (civil unrest, months of unpredictable gas, electricity and telephone lines), it was never too difficult to implement a well-conceived partnership project. Both international and Georgian organizations developed acumen to shape proposals to ensure such success. Georgians benefited from such projects. However, few foreign organizations and few individuals succeeded in building trust, mutual respect and combined visions for change. This level of partnership takes a deep desire (on both sides) to be part and to share the pains of a different culture—and to work as equals in identifying solutions to problems we do not fully understand. The beneficial influence of such a partnership far exceeds the costs of getting there.

Georgia today is a society largely devoid of trusting partnerships; the naive period of assuming that foreigners only want to help Georgia is past. They have heard about (and experienced) too many glaring examples of failed relations with foreigners. As such, Georgians remain greatly impressed and impacted when they see a relationship that works. In small but perceptible ways, these relationships enable Georgians to trust “strangers” working to better society. A battery of such partnerships could transform Georgians' trust of both foreign visitors and their own civil servants. Doing so would alter the landscape needed for a lasting democracy. Unfortunately, as noted by David, these partnerships are the exception rather than the expecta-

tion—and the goodwill built through successful partnerships is undermined by the frustration of less successful ones.

I also found appropriate David's comments about the quality of assistance provided. Unfortunately, too many foreigners came to Georgia with a template in mind and an agenda in hand. While experience in other developed or developing countries is certainly valuable in an environment like Georgia, too often they spent the first year of their assignment trying to apply formulae from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Panama, Russia or Somalia. They latched on to Georgian partners who speak English, French or German (or, maybe, Russian) and who nod their heads (rather than question and challenge) as the project money flows. This strategy works for hitting the benchmarks and writing the report for the donor—but it leaves Georgians wondering if the foreign partner has any desire to understand and help Georgia.

What David did not mention in his article was the tremendous value that the foreign side takes home from working in a successful partnership. While we often leave behind the project, we take away a new perspective on our own society—and we can utilize the experience to explore new ways to solve problems here. We also remain committed to helping our lifelong partners—and feel energized and inspired by their successes. The nights we spent working in parkas by candlelight to draft NGO legislation still make any “challenging” business situations I face here in the US feel much less daunting.

Time and resources do not make a successful partnership; desire and commitment to be involved in the other's society make the difference. In the current period when Georgia is truly suffering and when many of its most promising young leaders see little hope for the future, I feel fortunate to have developed a relationship with David. This relationship developed informally, outside of any funded project. Based on this relationship, I remain optimistic for Georgia—because people like David remain committed to working with foreigners to identify solutions that work for Georgia. ●

Michael Clayton is former director of ISAR-Georgia.

Kazakhstan NGO Chooses Goals and Partners with an Eye on the Long Term

*Give & Take interviewed Sergey Kuratov of the Kazakhstani environmental NGO **Green Salvation** on his experiences in establishing successful partnerships.*

Give & Take: What benefits has your NGO gained from international partnerships?

Sergey Kuratov: One example of successful cooperation would be the joint work that we conducted with the US-based NGO ACDI/VOCA. Our partners at ACDI/VOCA assisted our efforts to include

Kazakhstan's Ilye-Alatausky National Park in the list of World Heritage sites of the UN convention for worldwide protection of cultural and natural resources. ACDI/VOCA provided the kind of administrative assistance that neither our own organizations nor the government's Department of Nature Protection could offer. In Kazakhstan, hardly anyone had experience in managing a national park of this new type, with specially protected territory.

GT: When working in partnerships, what did your NGO initially set out to do and what did your partnership actually achieve?

SK: I can't give a precise answer to this question. For example, some of our cooperative plans fell through because our country lacks a normal legal climate for cooperative action

between local and international NGOs. The most successful projects were those that didn't touch on serious environmental problems, but focused on environmental education, scientific research, conferences and trainings. All of these are undoubtedly essential, but without concrete action toward reducing pollution and the destruction of nature, these projects alone won't have the desired results.

GT: What are the benefits and pitfalls of cooperative activity in your experience?

SK: Without question, it's advantageous to a partnership when western partners provide financial, technical, and informational support. Work goes less well with "consultational" support and the organizing of cooperative action. Western foundations and NGOs

don't always have a clear understanding of the situation in our country, so their activities often fall prey to two extremes: either they offer no advice whatsoever, or they attach too much importance to their own notions and models of how to solve the problem. An organization that attempts to analyze the situation and master its specific characteristics is a rare exception. One such organization is ACDI/VOCA. Another is [the Dutch NGO] HIVOS (Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation).

GT: What is the status of your partnerships today? Do they still continue? If so, in what form?

SK: We continue to work in partnership with a range of outside organizations. With some of them, we've concluded cooperative agreements that allow both us and our partners to more accurately define the forms that our collaborative work will take. Just the same, we believe that a partnership takes time to develop. It's essential to make the transition toward the kind of cooperative action that is useful to both sides. Perhaps a new model of this kind of teamwork would be participation in the International Right to Know Campaign, a global movement to demand greater corporate accountability through information disclosure.

GT: What impact have partnerships had on you and on what you are doing today?

SK: I'd say the main accomplishment of our past cooperation has been that we have made many new friends and found like-minded persons with whom we share many values and beliefs. We've begun to hope that our combined efforts can make a genuine contribution to protecting nature and human rights. We intend to continue to strengthen our ties with our overseas colleagues.

GT: What advice would you give others engaged in US/FSU cooperative activities? What would you tell them that you wish you'd known before you started?

SK: Firmly define your goals before you start. Choose your partner carefully. Build relationships not on the basis of projects but on the basis of where your own plan of action lines up with the activities of your partners. Don't be afraid to criticize or to propose your own ideas, but also be open to criticism. And use the best experiences of your partner organizations. ●

Sergey Kuratov is founder of Green Salvation. Translated by John Deever.



photo by Michelle Kimman

Sergey Kuratov



Economic Development Requires Self-Sustaining Organizations

by John Deever

FOR TEN YEARS, THE US-BASED development NGO **ACDI/VOCA** has been well-known in the FSU for its economic development projects. First focused primarily on the agricultural sector, ACDI/VOCA today goes beyond organizing agricultural trade associations and farmer-to-farmer exchanges. In its drive to promote economic growth of all kinds, ACDI/VOCA looks for opportunities to improve the efficiency of small and medium enterprises, to assist business associations, and to create lending institutions where credit needed for business start-ups is sorely lacking. ACDI/VOCA—the result of a merger of Agricultural Cooperative Development International and Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance, each of which had over 30 years of experience in agricultural and cooperative development—works in communities from Eastern Europe to the Russian Far East, and in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia as well.

With an approach to development that emphasizes long-term impact and local participation, ACDI/VOCA works with what it calls “local strategic partners”: local organizations that spring from a particular project but then go on to become independent and self-sustaining. These partner organizations continue to work with ACDI/VOCA, but also fund and support a variety of development initiatives on their own.

Local Strategic Partners

Dennis DeSantis, senior vice president for Europe and Asia, said that ACDI/VOCA’s partners assist other organizations. “We look to use our partners in ‘East-to-East’ trainings,” DeSantis said. “For example, our partner in Poland, Firma 2000, holds trainings in Ukraine. Also, we’ve taken NGOs in Belarus to Poland. Another example is our Hungarian partner, House of Hungarian Tastes, which acts as an agricultural consultant organization throughout the Balkans.”

ACDI/VOCA’s long-term objectives are to expand broad economic and social opportunity. When small and medium-scale enterprises in FSU countries participate more fully in market economies, they can compete regionally and internationally. More efficient commercial ventures and a positive business climate bring ben-

efits to citizens who have been excluded from the international economic network of markets and trade associations. Potentially, economic empowerment can lead to fairer social and political relations and structures.

“We employ our partners where we can, but they’re not dependent solely on us for their business,” DeSantis said. “Our local strategic partners develop their own business plans and strategies and operate independently.”

DeSantis explained that the local strategic partner model has been particularly successful because both ACDI/VOCA and the local partner gain from the partnership. “Partnerships need some built-in value,” he said. “What is the intrinsic, inherent value in the relationship? If it has value, you’ll continue the relationship, but if it doesn’t, it’s not going to happen. You see a lot of projects out there where people say ‘we’re going to create these partnerships, linkages, public-private relationships, or NGO coalitions.’ But there’s got to be some reason for them to continue to be associated with each other. That’s not rocket science, but ACDI/VOCA has found that we have to stay focused on meeting the needs of the partners so that the relationship benefits both parties.”

Civil Society Structures and Microlending

ACDI/VOCA incorporates civil society development into all of its projects and not always through traditional means such as NGOs. “We’ve had some tremendous success working with industry associations—like meat packer associations, bakers associations, fruit and vegetable distributor associations,” DeSantis said. “Not all civil society practitioners recognize that groups like these are part of what makes up civil society. Bowling leagues, church groups, professional associations, the PTA—that’s all civil society.” In some countries, especially in Eastern Europe, he said, several of the trade associations ACDI/VOCA works with have reached a point where they are influential enough to shape the national legislative process.

Other ACDI/VOCA partners include nonprofit microfinance organizations such as the Kazakhstan Community Loan Fund (KCLF) [see *Summer 2000 Give & Take*], the Bai-Tushum Financial Institution in

Kyrgyzstan, and the Ukraine Agricultural Finance Development Foundation in Ukraine. These partners provide access to credit for microenterprises and medium-sized agricultural firms. “The credit goes through a local, nonbanking financial institution,” DeSantis said. “They don’t accept deposits, but they make loans. And they’re able to get additional lines of credit from other financial institutions or from other donors like the Eurasia Foundation or EBRD.”

KCLF has to date made \$4.5 million in loans to over 6000 borrowers from three branches. ACIDI/VOCA has similar partners on Sakhalin Island in Russia and in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Exchanges

Hundreds of US farmers, businesspeople, and leaders of farm cooperatives have learned about life in the FSU by volunteering their time and expertise abroad. Volunteer assignments typically focus on agricultural and business development, and last two to four weeks. Many volunteers go on repeat assignments. Wisconsin dairy farmer Damon Szymanski was recently honored for his 50th visit as an ACIDI/VOCA agricul-

tural development volunteer. Szymanski had worked in 12 countries in the FSU and Eastern Europe. “Private farmers lack the information they require to succeed as farmers in a market economy,” Szymanski said. “ACIDI/VOCA represents the best kind of foreign aid: don’t just send money, send information. And get it to the right people.” Through ACIDI/VOCA, Szymanski has also hosted dairy farmers at his Wisconsin dairy plant, where they toured and studied US agricultural production techniques such as cottage cheese production.

DeSantis said, “Often the technical assistance experts in the US end up staying in touch personally with their counterparts, via the Internet or otherwise. Those partnerships also can take on a life of their own outside ACIDI/VOCA.”

Through years of time and energy invested in exchanges and partnerships, ACIDI/VOCA and its local strategic partners see their cooperative work as involving an exciting synergy—the kind of foreign assistance that can pay off exponentially. ●

John Deever is a publications program officer at ISAR.

Local Approach to Environmental Ed Aided by Strong International Partnership

by *Natalia Ulianets*

I’VE BEEN IN THE UKRAINIAN ENVIRONMENTAL movement for over 10 years. For eight of those years I led the women’s environmental education NGO, *Ditina i Dovkilya (Child and Environment)*. During this time I’ve learned much from others as well as taught myself a great deal. I’ve made many interesting contacts with like-minded activists and friends.

When I began working at Child and Environment, my first teachers were books—specifically, materials about environmental education that had been kindly donated by environmental groups in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, and the US (particularly by the US Environmental Protection Agency). These groups put the wind in our sails as we set up our own environmental education projects. We found in these written materials something completely new to us, a very interesting approach toward making environmental education effective and creative. Later we had the good fortune to further study environmental edu-

cation in England and the Netherlands, and to draw upon the experiences of these countries. We also had the chance to share what we knew and what we had already learned ourselves.

In 1997, the **Institute for Sustainable Communities** (ISC) in Vermont began working in Ukraine on a project called “Community-Based Environmental and Civic Education in Ukraine.” Child and Environment was invited to be ISC’s Ukrainian coordinating partner for the project. For two months our organizations conducted demonstration projects in the provincial capitals of Khmelnytsky and Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine, places where no such projects previously existed. The fundamental goals of the projects were to develop community-based environmental education programs and to demonstrate interactive environmental education teaching methods.

The idea of community-based environmental education was new and unusual to all of us. Ukraine can now boast a fairly large number of environmental



Partners: A Source of Innovation

ISC has always viewed partnership as essential to successful collaboration. To that end, we work closely with host-country partners like Child and Environment to design and implement programs, overcome obstacles, and accomplish project goals—often within the context of major economic, political, and legal transitions distinct to each country.

As Natalia notes, partnership is not always easy! It takes commitment, openness and a willingness to learn on both sides. Over the years, ISC has been fortunate to work with many committed partners, jointly learning and sharing new approaches, technologies, information and perspectives. Our partners are also an important source of innovation to us in developing effective strategies to do our work. In May 2000, ISC's education partners from the past seven years, including Child and Environment, gathered in Plock, Poland to offer advice and guidance on re-orienting environmental education methods

toward “education for sustainability”—integrating economic, social and environmental aspects into education.

At the meeting, our partners recommended combining ISC's education work and community action in the same community, to create greater synergy and impact. We are hopeful that this will become a reality, and are working to secure funding for a new partnership project—working with Child and Environment as education partners, and ISAR-Ednannia, ISC's partners for the Local Environmental Action Program (LEAP) in two communities in Ukraine.

ISC values the ability to create connections among our various partners into a broader network of contacts. We all derive comfort and support as we learn that our colleagues from around the world are seeking to overcome the same challenges and benefit from each other's successes.

—Barbara Felitti, senior vice president at Institute for Sustainable Communities.

education NGOs, all of which employ different approaches, although we are probably the only group using our particular strategy. A key objective of our strategy is to engage young people in identifying and addressing community problems. Local curricula reflect specific environmental problems in each community (such as water quality and air pollution) and draw on community resources. The NGOs in Khmelnytsky and Ivano-Frankivsk with whom we worked took to these ideas with enthusiasm.

Our cooperative work encouraged us to more actively raise the level of local environmental awareness by further coordinating with other members of society. We included local NGOs, teachers, methodology specialists at teacher training and recertification colleges, and government colleagues at the environmental protection departments. They too understood that working meaningfully and effectively meant using local resources and mutual assistance.

We discovered wonderful opportunities for these groups to bring their ideas and plans to life. Residents played active roles in developing programs, starting with choosing actual local environmental problems to work on. By the end of the project we had developed a

course of study and an active group of student teachers. Everyone who participated in the process is now able to instruct others using the same environmental education methods. It is worth pointing out that the use of interactive teaching methods was something new for the majority of teachers who participated.

One of the most valuable accomplishments of the project was the presentation of our work at a national convention on practical approaches to environmental education. Participants studied these new methods and adapted them to local situations in order to develop models that could be distributed around the country. Another important result of the project was the creation of two versatile environmental education lesson plans: “Water—The Basis of Life” for eighth graders, and “Clean Air, Clean City” for sixth graders.

For our organization, cooperation with a US partner gave us the opportunity to refine our approaches to this kind of work, as well as to master a whole range of new material connected with environmental education. Our partnerships extended not only to ISC, but to Polish and Hungarian NGOs. During the course of the project, we saw the community-based environmental



courtesy of ISC

Seventh graders in Khmelnitsky School No. 12 perform a skit on pollution as part of an ISC/Child and Environment project.

education process take off. We gained experience, as well as new partners and friends.

Our US colleagues offered us the chance to widen our professional circles, so much so that we now are working even with Japanese NGOs (such as the Learning and Ecological Activities Foundation for Children—LEAF). Thanks to them, our web page now appears on the Internet in both English and Japanese.

As a result of this cooperative work, our group and our activities have become well-known not only among Ukrainian environmental NGOs, but internationally as well. Even beyond the NGO community our

name has become familiar to a variety of governmental departments.

International partnerships are undoubtedly useful because they enable NGOs to: acquire new knowledge, skills, and experience; study the different styles and methods their partners may have developed; bolster their professional reputation; and of course, improve their foreign language skills.

Our two years of work on the ISC project was very fruitful, and our results speak for themselves. But to say that everything went smoothly and without a hitch would not be accurate. Sometimes difficulties of a purely organizational nature arose, as when two working styles clashed. Likewise, we experienced challenges connected with the idiosyncrasies of Ukrainian financial regulations. But, step by step we overcame these hurdles through cooperative coexistence.

Today I am proud of our experiences. Our interesting and useful demonstrations of innovative teaching methods have conveyed expertise to our colleagues.

We continually support our connection with US partners, through which we exchange professional ideas and accomplishments. In the process, we seek funding to continue such projects together. Our cooperation may yet have transforming effects even beyond what we can predict. ●

Natalia Ulianets is director of Child and Environment.

Russian Environmental Activist Ponders Partnership Sparked a Decade Ago

by *Lydia Popova*

IN THE EARLY 1960s WHILE STANDING in a long line in front of Moscow's Sokolniki Exhibition Park trying to get into the "American Exhibition," as we all called it, I could not even imagine that one of the exhibitors would become my future US partner in environmental projects, Francis Macy.

I did get in, but certainly as a teenager I was not very interested in transport technologies—Fran's topic at that show. It was the time of "The Thaw," and my country's interest in the United States—the overseas political, economic and military rival of the Soviet Union—was enormous. In every city the exhibition visited, lines formed before dawn. Behind the Iron Curtain, few people ever met foreigners, and for us, Americans had a special aura. We loved American literature, American movies, and American jazz.

After high school and university, I spent more than 20 years of my career in a secret institute of the Ministry of Atomic Energy. Very soon I felt frustrated by my work, as the environment was never a priority for Soviet industry, much less nuclear facilities. I loved nature, so the environmental damage caused by reprocessing plants in Siberia and research institutes in Moscow that I knew about professionally raised my consciousness and made me seek out allies. Only after the devastating Chernobyl accident, which gave an impetus to political reforms in Russia, did my fate lead me to a meeting with the founders of the Socio-Ecological Union (SEU). We made friends, and I happily decided to dedicate my knowledge and expertise to working with them.

The Gorbachev era was marked by dramatic changes in political attitudes toward the environment.



For environmental NGOs it was really a Golden Age. The SEU received its first grant from a private American foundation, and I was invited to work full-time for an environmental NGO. I decided to leave my government job and to dedicate my life to the protection of the environment.

In 1991 a large group of US environmental NGOs, headed by Eliza Klose, arrived in Moscow. The SEU helped organize the first US-USSR conference of environmental NGOs. I believe it was the start of my cooperation with American environmentalists, especially those who were concerned about the consequences of Chernobyl. In 1991 we marked the fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe and I finally met my dear friend Fran Macy and his remarkable wife Joanna Macy. Both of them were very concerned about radioactive waste management and waste transportation.

That meeting did much to spur and strengthen my cooperation with US environmental NGOs. I worked closely with Fran, and we even applied for a USAID/ISAR grant for the Joint Russian-American Cooperation for the Environment, which was extremely productive for both sides. We were really from different worlds, but we were attracted to each other because as citizens we felt no antagonism. We wanted to work together, and we did. Our efforts were directed to building a network of Russian antinuclear watchdog citizen groups, and to strengthening their capacity.

Americans have more experience looking for alternatives and conveying them to the government. Russian activists have fewer resources and therefore sometimes find practical solutions in seemingly dead-end situations.

helped me to build both my family and my professional relationships.

What did the Americans learn? As I see it, they learned how to understand a different culture and how

to teach people who are not ready to accept teaching. They had to learn tolerance, too.

Young American activists helped environmentalists in the FSU use new information technologies. In the early 1990s our environmental movement was technologically ahead of most of society. We were the first to use e-mail and the Internet, which greatly helped us understand the value of fast communication.

Cross-cultural exchanges were very important to the movement. Visits of Russian environmentalists to the US and of American environmentalists to Russia helped us to see many shared features in the operation of nuclear military-industrial complexes and the damage these facilities cause to the environment and people. We learned how to press our governments jointly to make politicians begin disarmament and undertake environmental remediation. Participation in the joint projects of Russian and American environmentalists and peace groups helped me learn more about project planning. Fran Macy was (and still is) especially strong in this, and I enjoyed planning with him. Sometimes we worked together in my kitchen, when Fran traveled to Moscow, and we had breakfast or lunch at my home. Our joint work was always a mixture of “business” and culture.

Russian and American movements are similar, yet different. Americans have more experience looking for alternatives and conveying them to the government. Russian activists have fewer resources and therefore sometimes find practical solutions in seemingly dead-end situations. We still have a lot to learn from each other, and it is crucially important to continue our cooperation. Global environmental problems like climate change or radioactive pollution make us realize how small our beautiful world really is—so vulnerable that we cannot entrust its fortune to politicians. As citizens, we are destined to work together. ●

*Lydia Popova is director of the **Center for Nuclear Ecology and Energy Policy of the SEU.***

courtesy of Fran Macy



Enid Schreibman and Fran Macy, co-directors of the US NGO Center for Safe Energy with Popova (l to r) at a conference in Leningrad Oblast organized by the Russian NGO Green World.

Lasting Collaboration: Relationships Both Professional and Personal

by Fran Macy

LYDIA POPOVA AND I LAST MET IN August at the International Sustainable Energy Conference and Action Camp: “Confronting Nuclear Power with People Power” organized by the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) and the midwest Nuclear Energy Information Service. Lydia and I offered a workshop on Russian-American collaboration on environmental campaigns. So many people came to participate, we had to expand into a second room. Half of those present had participated in US-Russian environmental exchanges and still had fresh memories of the cold war, so we felt inspired by the current possibilities for joint work among activists. We explored practical ways to overcome the inevitable communication problems and build mutual trust.

continue to this day. In 1992, with help from Lydia and me, Natalia Mironova of the Movement for Nuclear Safety invited US activists to a Chelyabinsk conference on radioactive contamination at nuclear weapons sites. And in Krasnoyarsk, activist Vladimir Mikeev, head of the Citizen’s Center on Non-Proliferation, organized three international conferences, the last one (in 2000) focusing on plutonium issues. Also in 2000, network groups in cities near nuclear reactors have recently organized well-publicized public hearings on the use and management of plutonium.

Today the Russian activist network, expanded in size and scope, is called the Network for Sustainable Energy. Together with the **Center for Safe Energy** in Berkeley, CA, run by Enid Schreiber and me, Lydia’s Center has coordinated our joint activity over the last three years. Many other Russian and American activists have also developed cooperative efforts since the early 1990s. All of us have been aided enormously by the e-mail equipment and training offered by the Sacred Earth Network.

I am deeply grateful for my friendship and partnership with Lydia Popova and her colleagues in the energy network. For over a decade, they have significantly enriched my sense of purpose and direction. These Russian NGO leaders, many of them women, have been courageous and persistent despite many hardships and frustrations. We have stayed in each other’s homes and come to know and care about each other’s families. We have maintained our partnerships through e-mail, but repeated personal contacts are the most nourishing. We now relish each other’s cultures, dance to each other’s music, and sing each other’s songs. Our project planning is genuinely collaborative. Joint projects feel important to all of us since we share this small living planet, and both Russians and Americans carry a heavy load of responsibility for the nuclear activities of their governments. Perhaps the most powerful lesson from this decade of experience is that productive international collaboration requires personal as well as professional relationships. ●

Fran Macy is director of the Center for Safe Energy of Earth Island Institute.



Fran Macy at the 1991 Moscow environmental conference where he met Lydia Popova.

ISAR archive

I first met Lydia in spring 1991 at a conference of Soviet and US environmental activists organized by ISAR. The gathering sparked a number of lasting relationships for me, the most rewarding and productive of which has been the one with Lydia. We started working together almost immediately when I returned to the USSR with a delegation of ten Americans, including my wife Joanna, for a conference in Kiev on the fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. We discovered that we shared a joyous love for life and a deep concern for the dangers of radiation released from military and commercial nuclear facilities.

At this time, Lydia was establishing her Center for Nuclear Ecology and Energy Policy. We decided to try to help new environmental groups organize into a movement. With partnership grants from ISAR we held workshops for nuclear activists from all over the FSU and made small grants to local organizations. Since these activists often felt isolated from the international movement, Lydia and I, with help from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, organized a series of US-FSU activist exchanges that



Joining Forces to Protect Lake Baikal

by Gary Cook

BAIKAL WATCH HAS BEEN WORKING in partnership with Russian environmental groups since the early 1990s. Over the years, it has been fun and rewarding for us to help the Baikal Fund in Chita, for instance, as they created a national park in a wilderness area threatened by a gold mine. Or the Baikal Environmental Wave, as they educated the public about the importance of protecting the Baikal seal. Or the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, as they have brought hundreds of Russian and US activists together through their summer exchange program.

These Baikal NGOs and others like them have become more effective over the last decade, gradually closing the gaps and strengthening the links between international partners and local groups. This is as it should be, because Baikal is, after all, a World Heritage Site, whose distinctive beauty and biological wealth deserves to be valued throughout the world.

The situation has changed a great deal since the early '90s. In those years, a front-page newspaper article accused a few foreigners of being "environmental spies." For our part, we the accused were not exactly clear on the concept; we did not understand what an environmental spy was supposed to be doing. We therefore dismissed the allegations as an attempted "smear campaign," and left it at that.

Some time later, the relevance of these accusations is more easily appreciated. Such news articles could only demonstrate that our international partnerships must have been having some effect. Perhaps our collaboration had caused some self-interested parties to rethink their ways. Maybe these parties feared that our efforts would prevent them from "earning" some easy profits at the expense of the environment.

Even today, local critics assert that most Westerners have been posing as environmental naysayers only to prevent Russian entrepreneurs from developing their own natural resources; that our overarching goal was to pave the way for international corporations to swoop in and develop Russia's riches. In point of fact, and somewhat ironically, Earth Island Institute and Pacific Environment (i.e., the groups that were accused of sending over these "spies") had come to monitor the activities of these very international corporations. Siberian environmentalists had invited us to Russia precisely because we had been keeping track of corpora-

courtesy of Gary Cook



David Brower and Grigorii Galazii meeting on the day Baikal Watch was formed. Both were eminent champions of Baikal and the environment and in some ways "fathers" of their countries' environmental movements. Although both passed away in 2000, "their legacy at Baikal remains," Cook said.

tions around the world and had been publicizing the damage that they were doing.

One is tempted to call such collaboration something like: "international intervention by invitation." Such interventions can take many forms. Most recently, they have focused on the burgeoning oil and gas industry in Russia. The objective here has been to ensure that if oil and gas in Russia are extracted and transported at all, it must be done in the most environmentally sound way possible. One early result: thanks largely to joint US/Russia efforts, Exxon has been prohibited from dumping wastes directly into the ocean off Sakhalin Island. In this way, international corporations have been made aware—one might say painfully so—of the effectiveness of NGO coalitions.

Similarly, the government and corporate leaders who have proposed building lengthy oil and gas pipelines from Baikal to China are beginning to think twice. They realize that if they build their pipelines through the Tunka National Park, as originally planned, they will raise a storm of protest from the local environmental groups and their international partners.

Of course, effective Siberian NGOs, such as the Baikal Environmental Wave or the Baikal Center for Environmental Expertise, have been publicly criticized

for accepting what is seen as foreign funding. Our explanation in reply is that such funding is international, not simply Western; but this generally falls on deaf ears. Most Russians do not accept the argument that Western funding for Russian environmental initiatives represents a kind of balancing of accounts—after all, many of the foundations were established by groups who, at one point, made their money from environmentally damaging industries in other parts of the world. Of course, partnerships between Western activists and Russian NGOs generate a good deal of doubt and suspicion; but so far these doubts have not really vitiated any of our cooperative US/Russian efforts.

“NIMBY” Syndrome Goes International

A major reason why Russian NGOs want to work in tandem with international partners is a global extension of the “not-in-my-backyard” (NIMBY) syndrome. In other words, if an unscrupulous corporation can set up shop in Russia and escape the environmental regulations that “limit” its activities in the US or Europe, then it is time for international NGOs to step in. They can help their Russian colleagues block these multinational corporations in Russia, or at least hold them to the same standards they would face in the West. Without such joint NGO watchdog efforts, profit-oriented corporations will naturally choose to operate in countries where environmental safeguards are weakest.

The Russian government’s recent decision to promote the importation and storage of foreign nuclear wastes is an example of an issue that calls for international coalition-building. To begin with, this decision means that the countries that produce radioactive waste will not have to worry about contaminating their own “backyards.” Moreover, the dumping of nuclear waste in Russia will be done at minimal or reduced cost, and will make the entire atomic industry more competitive—artificially so, in that it will decrease the real costs of atomic power, and make it less expensive than other, more sustainable sources of energy.

In addition to monitoring these international industries, these NGO partnerships also play a key role in educating the public about environmental issues. They can address the false premise that protecting the environment inevitably impedes economic progress. The partners can publicize the true costs of environmentally damaging policies, such as the ones that promote nuclear energy. And since government and industry are generally interested in maintaining the status quo, it is up to NGOs in both countries to encourage people to look at the many subsidies and tax breaks that protect polluting industries, and skew the balance between economic interests and environmental protection.

International NGOs, for instance, can describe for their Russian colleagues how US workers in the rust belt around the Great Lakes deserted the region, no doubt largely due to the increasing pollution and degradation in their hometowns. And they can make the analogy with the heavily contaminated industrial cities of Siberia, where economic depression is much worse than in other parts of Russia. Such stories can help educate the Russian public and persuade politicians that long-term economic progress is possible only in a green environment.

Successful environmental partnerships, therefore, depend on effective public education, not only in Russia, but throughout the world. When local citizens understand what is happening to their environment, and recognize how pollution hurts their local economies, they are energized to stop the irresponsible people who want to move from one “backyard” to another. In strengthening environmental awareness at the local level in Russia, NGOs will be able to encourage environmental activism throughout the country. Everyone cares about their health and that of their family and friends.

So, the more people there are who become environmentally enlightened, the faster the Russian movement will grow and the more successful our local NGO partners will become. Many international groups are thus eager to help their Russian partners educate and recruit the public, and, in turn, sponsor new grassroots groups and initiate new projects. If these efforts are successful, international NGOs now working in Russia will be able to recede somewhat, and leave the public education, grassroots activism, and environmental watch-dogging to Russian groups. It is encouraging to note that this trend is very much underway. Today hundreds of thousands of people are currently employed in NGO activities in Russia, many of them involved in environmental activities of one kind or another.

Ten years from now, then, the question might arise: Will international representatives still be writing this kind of article, explaining and celebrating our role as partners to Russian NGOs? If the answer is yes, it will be a pleasure for this author at least, to hark back again to those early days of collaboration, when all of us “environmental spies” were lucky enough to begin working around Lake Baikal with so many exceptional Russian partners. ●

Gary Cook is director of Earth Island Institute’s Baikal Watch project.



Indigenous Exchange Unites Threatened Groups

by *Bill Pfeiffer*

The Sacred Earth Network (SEN), one of the earliest US grassroots organizations to develop partnerships with environmental NGOs in the former Soviet Union, is known for its strong affinity for deep ecology and the spiritual side of the environmental movement. Based in Amherst, Massachusetts, SEN has continued to emphasize cooperative efforts—whether in cyberspace

or in person—in its work with groups of northern Eurasian activists. The following brief report, sent to us by SEN’s founder and executive director, describes SEN’s most recent partnership exchange and the philosophical underpinnings that drive ongoing collaboration.

—Editors

FIVE VERY TALENTED AND COMMITTED indigenous leaders from Siberia visited their native American counterparts in New England and the Four Corners area of the Southwest US from October 26 to November 11. This was an extraordinary trip for all concerned. During the numerous meetings between these two groups I felt the same magic present 10

years ago when the first US-Soviet environmental exchanges began. What was different about this historic meeting of native peoples of the North—whose discussions ranged from art and spirituality to native rights and land claims—was the depth and breadth of the subject matter. The Sacred Earth Network

(SEN) organizers felt privileged to witness the “voices of the ancestors” speaking through both the Siberians and the Native Americans.

We at SEN helped create a forum for two very proud, but subjugated cultures at varying stages of a huge revitalization process, to share what has been, and what will be, most important to their complete re-emergence. Both sides were adamant that this kind of exchange made them part of a relatively new *global* indigenous movement for self-determination . . . and they want more.

Why is this movement so critical? Why will SEN continue to work on behalf of Siberia’s native peoples

and link them with their counterparts in North America? The immediate answer is that it is the right thing to do. Siberian languages, culture, and sacred sites are fast disappearing. Tribes face starvation, joblessness, alcoholism and despair. Their lands are being destroyed.

The deeper, long-term answer is well articulated by

Jerry Mander, in his book, *The Absence of the Sacred*: “Since the beginnings of the technological juggernaut, the only consistent opposition has come from the land-based native peoples. Rooted in an alternative view of the planet, Indians, islanders, and peoples of the North remain our

most clear-minded critics. They are also its most direct victims. That technological society should ignore and suppress native voices is understandable, since to heed them would suggest *we must fundamentally change our way of life*. Instead, we say *they* must change. They decline to do so.”

Insofar as US organizations and institutions are seeking ways of assisting the positive development of Russia, we at SEN are hopeful that collaborating with the indigenous peoples of that vast part of Russia known as Siberia will become a priority. ●

courtesy of Bill Pfeiffer



Native Americans participating in the SEU exchange.

International Cooperation Fosters Successful Wildlife Conservation

by Margaret Williams

IN THE CONSERVATION FIELD, ONE cannot achieve results without partnerships. Within a wide range of geographical locations and types of programs, conservationists rely on partnerships with a variety of players, from community members to local leaders, park rangers to heads of ministries and other conservationists. For those working in the international conservation arena in northern Eurasia, for example, partnerships must begin with local, in-country experts. Whether it's an effort to save the Siberian tiger, the establishment of a "sister park" relationship, or a campaign in marine conservation, partnerships are important at all stages of work.

In nearly a decade of working in Russia, I can think of a few factors that significantly contributed to the outcome of a partnership. Above all, communication is the most decisive factor. From the very beginning of a partnership, in defining a project, to the very end, in wrapping up a project, regular and clear communication has proven essential. Although it sounds obvious, this communication does not always happen.

Partnerships work when two sides enter into cooperation they see as mutually beneficial. Each side has an

interest in the outcome, and an understanding of these interests. Thus, communication is critical as each party must clearly define their expectations and make these known to its partners. Several years ago I was involved in facilitating partnerships between US national parks and Russian nature reserves. In the one case, two "paired" protected areas seemed perfectly matched: the Russian reserve, protecting boreal forests of Karelia, was nearly identical to the northern Minnesota national park in landscape type. The two even shared many management problems such as conflicts with local communities over recreation inside their protected territories. After months of discussions about potential avenues for cooperation in the field of park management, the directors of each area had their first meeting on American soil. They spent an exciting two days touring the forests of this remote park, flying in a small plane above hundreds of silvery lakes, and talking about all that they shared in common. As they parted, each side vowed to take a number of steps to develop this new relationship in what they viewed as a potentially powerful partnership.

However, within six months of this inspirational meeting, the budding partnership was withering on the vine. A year later, only sporadic e-mails were trickling through the wires. What had happened to this new partnership? It seemed clear that the two managers and their staff members shared many common programs, responsibilities and challenges and had developed a genuine respect for each other. However, despite these factors, the individuals on which the partnership would depend were not equally interested in the outcome. Had they more clearly communicated this at the outset, each side would have been spared the investment of time and the disappointment of unmet expectations.

It's important to recognize that "partnership" does not imply "equality." The contributions of each partner may be asymmetrical. One partner may have more financial resources; another more expertise. Understanding these contributions and the expectations of each partner is another important element of a partnership. In the case of the two parks mentioned above, had the partnership further developed, it would have been important for each park manager to define what



courtesy of Margaret Williams

Nikolai Maleshin, former director of the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik, Margaret Williams, and Paul Haertel, former director of Acadia National Park (l to r).



he could offer: funding, time, expertise, or other contributions. But if expectations and input are made clear from the beginning, a partnership has a greater chance for survival.

When partners do not speak the same language, it becomes more difficult (but not impossible) to share these expectations. And it also becomes easy to attribute miscommunications to “cultural differences.” Indeed, awareness of different cultures is important, but often, poor communication or inconsiderate behavior is chalked up to disparate values. Over the past several years, I’ve learned that although my Russian colleagues and I have had entirely different cultural backgrounds, the basic standards of any relationship

always work when applied to an international partnership: communication, honesty, and fairness. While not easy to achieve, these are the most basic ingredients of the many successful partnerships that have blossomed across miles of our great continents and years of hard work, resulting in species recovery programs, new protected areas, information exchange, awareness campaigns, and many other programs that have strengthened the global environmental movement. ●

*Margaret Williams is director of the **World Wildlife Fund’s Bering Sea ecoregion program** and editor of **Russian Conservation News**.*

Pacific Environment Partnerships Span Siberia and the Russian Far East

by *David Gordon*

PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT HAS worked in cooperation with environmental groups in Siberia and the Russian Far East for over ten years. We support over 60 different NGOs throughout the region. We provide them with small grants, equipment, information, training, advice and other capacity-building tools. We organize meetings and conferences to get them together to discuss regional issues and work on regional strategies. And we bring them to the North American continent and other places on the Pacific Rim for educational exchanges.

What we don’t do is tell them what to do or how to do it. We have found that the best way to build a lasting movement is to let it grow on its own terms, with local leadership. After all, that is what participatory democracy is all about, and from our experience, it’s what works.

Many of the citizens in this vast region have a long tradition of care and stewardship for this wilderness, or as they call it, *taiga*. Some are young people who have joined citizen environmental monitoring brigades. Others are biologists and scientists who have found that working on environmental issues is a way to put their training to work on the ground to make a difference. And there are indigenous peoples whose roots to the taiga go back countless generations.

Over the years, we have found the keys to successful partnerships to be communication, information, direct support, and joint campaigns.

courtesy of Pacific Environment



Pacific Environment’s joint campaigns allow Russian and US activists to join forces and combat environmentally destructive policies and practices. Here, Russian activists study economic development alternatives such as ecotourism.

Communication

At Pacific Environment, it has been key to have staff fluent in Russian. By speaking with a variety of stakeholders and people in Siberia and the Russian Far East, Pacific Environment’s staff can get a good understanding of local politics and natural resource issues. We also don’t have to limit our cooperation in Russia to those people who speak English—which in Siberia and the Russian Far East would limit us to a precious few partners.



David Gordon (third from left) facilitates US/Russian discussion on environmental activism.

courtesy of Pacific Environment

ers to the western US for in-depth study tours, while international exchanges take US experts overseas to participate in conferences, lead seminars, and offer individual consultations.

Pacific Environment has partnered with Vladivostok-based *Zov Taigi* to publish and disseminate environmental information throughout Siberia and the Russian Far East. Starting with an idea and a small amount of funds in 1992, Pacific Environment and *Zov Taigi* first published a small, black-and-white environmental newspaper. Now *Zov Taigi* regularly publishes an full-color environmental magazine with detailed analysis of Russian environmental issues, including Siberian tiger conservation, forest use, and marine protection. *Zov Taigi* is also now producing award-winning documentary films.

We also have made sure that our partners are well connected by e-mail. Our staff tries to stay in close contact—daily or weekly—with our primary partners. And we are working to link them with each other in regional coalitions to share expertise.

Despite the benefits of the Internet age for working internationally, nothing can possibly replace face-to-face meetings. As a result, Pacific Environment staff travel several times a year to remote regions of Siberia and the Russian Far East. These direct meetings give us the opportunity to work directly with our partners as well as with journalists and government officials in each region. In person, we can best understand our partners' needs and work to meet them. These in-person meetings are also vital for developing and implementing joint environmental protection strategies.

Information

We believe that information is power. That is why we provide a constant flow of up-to-date information to our partners, why we bring them together at regional seminars and conferences, and why we bring them on cross-Pacific exchanges to meet their North American counterparts. We believe that knowledgeable and empowered citizens can change the world for the better by making informed decisions about the environment.

Years of international advocacy experience have taught us that no matter how much we research our issues or correspond with our partners overseas, there is no substitute for being there. That is why Pacific Environment conducts cross-Pacific exchanges between our partners and their North American counterparts.

Pacific Environment has organized exchanges on specific natural resource issues, such as forestry, mining, fisheries, and oil and gas development, for the past 10 years. US-based exchanges bring key international lead-

Direct Support

Pacific Environment provides direct support, in the form of grants, to its partner organizations. Pacific Environment's underlying philosophy is that our partners, working on the ground to protect the environment, can achieve greater results than an NGO working outside the borders of a country like Russia. In addition, local NGOs tend to have a far greater understanding of the issues than any foreign organization could. However, philanthropy in Russia and many other Pacific Rim countries is relatively insignificant. Consequently, a lot of very innovative local NGOs and environmental leaders struggle to support their work financially. This is why Pacific Environment's role of securing financial support is so important. Because the economic rate of exchange is so vastly different than in the US—a \$5,000 grant can support one or two activists for a year—a few US dollars go an exceptionally long way. Thus, Pacific Environment's partner groups can achieve great results with relatively small amounts of support, at least by US standards.

Pacific Environment's direct support has achieved impressive results, including:

- Helping to create several protected territories, including the Tigerekskii Nature Preserve (Altai), Vostochny Wildlife Refuge (Sakhalin), and the Borisovskoye Plateau Wildlife Refuge (Primorye);
- Halting logging in the Urkansky Wildlife Refuge in Amur Region;
- Supporting the development of a network for public environmental monitoring in Sakha-Yakutia;
- Forcing Sakhalin Energy and Exxon to re-inject some or all of their drilling wastes;
- Producing the first environmental journal in the Russian Far East.



Pacific Environment has always seen itself as a “bridge” between effective grassroots groups in Pacific Rim countries and potential funders. Our partner groups often do not have access to funders in the US. Our partner groups are often not experienced at raising funds internationally and language barriers prevent them from expressing ideas in a convincing manner. Pacific Environment, through its Direct Support Program, bridges that gap and links Western donors with the groups doing on-the-ground work.

Joint Campaigns

Pacific Environment’s strongest partnerships in Siberia and the Russian Far East involve joint campaigns. We translate our partners’ local work against environmentally destructive projects into efforts to reform international policies. And we use international policies to assist grassroots organizations in their local efforts.

For example, Pacific Environment is currently campaigning with Sakhalin Environment Watch to protect endangered gray whales in northeastern Sakhalin and improve the environmental behavior of multinational oil companies including Exxon and Shell. Pacific Environment is working with Sakhalin Environment Watch to review proposed oil development projects, provide comments about their environmental risks, and propose specific solutions to improving corporate responsibility.

Pacific Environment is also working with Baikal Ecological Wave to monitor and improve development of BP Amoco’s and Russia Petroleum’s Kovykta gas deposit in Irkutsk Region. With the Wave, Buryat Regional Union for Baikal, and other groups, Pacific Environment will also monitor proposed pipeline construction from Russia to China.

Pacific Environment is also working with organizations throughout Siberia and the Russian Far East to impact illegal logging and the illegal timber trade. Over the last few years, exports of Russian wood have skyrocketed, especially due to growing demand from China. The impacts of illegal logging are now being felt throughout Siberia and the Russian Far East. Pacific Environment is campaigning to support local monitoring—largely through the *druzhina* [see *Fall 2000 Give & Take*], or student nature guard movement—to identify illegal logging operations. And Pacific Environment is working with groups like the Vladivostok-based Bureau for Regional Outreach Campaigns to monitor trade between Russia and China. Pacific Environment is also linking this campaign to Pacific Rim and international policy efforts to halt illegal logging and trade.

courtesy of Pacific Environment



Siberian foresters are awed by ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest and Canada.

In addition, Pacific Environment is working with the Living Seas Coalition to protect the Russian Far East’s rich marine biodiversity. Living Seas is a coalition of environmental groups from the coastal regions of the Russian Far East, including Chukotka, Kamchatka, Magadan, Khabarovsk, Primorye, and Sakhalin. Living Seas is coordinated by ISAR’s Russian Far East office and has focused public attention on dangers to marine biodiversity from oil drilling and pollution as well as from overfishing. Most importantly, Living Seas has launched a public awareness campaign to raise the visibility of marine conservation issues.

In conclusion, Pacific Environment has found its partnerships with environmental groups in Siberia and the Russian Far East to be extremely productive in protecting the environment. Successful partnerships require significant investments of time and energy from both sides—and the results are worth it! ●

David Gordon is associate director of Pacific Environment.

Ukraine Joins Global Clean Up Campaign

Environmental projects that have taken flight in countries around the world are more and more often finding eager partners in once-isolated Eurasian countries like Ukraine. A good example is Clean Up the World—an international community-based environmental awareness campaign, initiated in Australia in 1989. Currently under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Program, Clean Up the World events are now held in 120 countries every September. Community activists partner with local governments and businesses to organize clean ups, plant trees, or otherwise take care of their immediate environment.

This September, Ukraine joined in. During its first Clean Up the World campaign—called “Clean Ukraine—Clean Earth” (*Chysta Ukraina—Chysta Zemla*)—over 145 local clean ups were held all over the country. More than 70,000 volunteers cleaned up 1500 sites. Participants collected 70 tons of wastepaper, 6 tons of glass for recycling, and 5.5 tons of plastic packaging. Not only did volunteers enjoy the positive experience of making a difference, they gained pride in the ability to influence local environmental problems and improve the health, safety, and attractiveness of their local communities.

The Clean Up Ukraine campaign, organized by the Lviv branch of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, was supported by the Ukrainian Ministry of Environment. Financial support also came from the Region in Transition (RITA) grants program, the East-East Program of Batory Foundation and the International Renaissance Foundation.

More information and photographs of the event are available at www.cleanukr.org.ua.

Armenian Third Sector Wins Recognition

The Armenian Assembly of America NGO Center (NGOC) has begun a new partnership with the Voice of America (VOA) radio network to highlight Armenian NGO activities.

VOA will hold weekly interviews with representatives of Armenian NGOs, who are eager to inform the public about their good deeds and the support

they offer, said NGOC Program Officer Tania Chichmanian. “We hope the VOA will help everyone understand the critical role NGOs have in Armenia as the country builds its democracy and economic status.”

One of the first NGOs to participate in the series was the “Meghvik” Youth Educational Center based in Gyumri. Vehanoush Hovhannisyan, President of the “Meghvik” Youth Educational Center, said the group has implemented many youth projects already and that “there will soon come a day when Gyumri will be flourishing and [its residents] will be cheerful and happy.”

Many NGO projects are winning media attention in Armenia today, thanks in part to the NGOC. For example, the NGOC announced, among many other projects, a training center for the disabled which has been implemented by the Stepanavan-based NGO Liarzek Kyank (Perfect Life) with the assistance of the US-based NGO World Learning. The information center, part of the NGO’s “Mirror” project, has collected data about the disabled in Stepanavan and neighboring communities, allowing services to be more effective.

Perfect Life offers free legal, medical, and psychological counseling for the disabled and provides them Internet access and training courses. To raise awareness about the rights of the disabled, seminars will be held for Stepanavan and neighboring Kurtan village beneficiaries. Such successes were highlighted on local television programs in Stepanavan, further calling attention both to issues related to the disabled and to the power of nongovernmental projects to assist citizens whose needs and rights are neglected by the authorities.

“The not-for-profit nongovernmental sector of Armenia is rich with diverse civic initiatives and activities,” Chichmanian said. “The NGOC will continue to raise awareness—both inside and outside Armenia—about what Armenian not-for-profit nongovernmental organizations are doing.”

For more information about Perfect Life, contact: Suren Maghakyan in Stepanavan at flhu@netsys.am. To learn more about the NGOC, write to ngoc@aaainc.org or visit www.aaainc.org.

Index of Organizations

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