

## Appendix 2

Sample Civil Society Baseline Assessment Report (Russia 2000)

## **NDI Civic Work in Russia**

### **I. CURRENT SITUATION**

The slow pace of democratic changes, the uncertain political situation and the presidential form of government have shaped the NGO sector and its ways of action differently than in most other ex-communist countries. The size of the country, perhaps the most important factor, is also constantly influencing the effectiveness of Russian civic organizations. The Russian civic organizations' specific features confer the whole sector a different profile than that of its ex-communist counterparts.

#### **A. Individual civic organizations**

- *Managerial skills*

Despite the fact that the NGO sector has been active in the country for more than a decade, there are a few professional Civic organizations, and a few professional NGO managers. The role of the Board and that of the staff is unclear – and in most cases the most prominent activists are both Board members and staff. Small important rules – presentation materials, agendas for meetings – are often ignored. More sophisticated rules – strategy, work plan and evaluation – are used even less. The civic organizations are run by a group of dedicated activists – who ARE the organization – in an emotional manner: they decide on activities they would like to do, when they would like to do them. Moreover, especially in the regions, one person is a member of several organizations and political parties at the same time, sometimes with antagonistic interests, and s/he represents this or that organization, as need be.

- *Advocacy work*

Although there are many Civic organizations whose mission should lead to seeking an impact on public policy, very little advocacy work has been carried out. Civic organizations do influence public policy makers, and at times they manage to get things changed or solved, but it is only through personal, informal and accidental ties. In their advocating effort, the civic organizations rely on the core of activists, and do not try to involve their members, supporters, not to mention interested citizens.

- *Contact with constituents*

The civic organizations have very little contact with their constituents and/or supporters. The general public is suspicious of civic organizations, as their role is unclear, their effectiveness uncertain and their operations poorly publicized. The members are not seen as a valuable resource, and therefore they are not used as such. The civic organizations do little to expand their membership base, or to seek input from their constituents. Many leaders of civic organizations act as if they would like to keep control over the operations and resources.

- *Moscow vs regions*

There are a few well known and respected organizations, with visible activity. Most of them are based in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The organizations in the regions are, some of them, also very active and somewhat impressive. They have very little national visibility, and little is known about their work. Most of them are coopted as partners in the networks of important, Moscow based organizations. As the regional civic organizations become more and more sophisticated, the tension and competition on resources between the Moscow based organizations and the regional ones increase. While the financial support and technical assistance do reach more and more regions, still the bulk of the funding and assistance goes to Western Russia, with very little reaching its Eastern side.

- *The civic organizations' role and means of activity*

In general, especially in the regions, the Civic organizations seem to have little understanding of their role and specific, as civic organizations. The civic history of the country has led to excessive reliance on methods employed primarily by political parties, and to little trust in or use of methods specific to civic organizations. The main avenue used by civic organizations to influence public policy is by endorsing candidates, either their own, running as independents, or candidates of friendly parties who are looking for the organization's support and electoral services. It is hoped that, once these candidates elected, they will promote the civic organizations' interest and cause, and thus the NGO would have reached its goal. Little thought is given to how the NGO will continue to control and influence the candidates after they are elected, or what the organization could do if the candidates fail. Thus the main work is done in relation to elections, and around election time.

In all this electoral game, little attention is given to the public, from a civic point of view. While both parties and civic organizations campaign, little, if any, civic and voter education is carried out. People are told who to vote for, but not why – what the respective person is supposed to do in the elected position, what to expect, what to demand, what to change.

- *National networks*

There are a few civic organizations with a national network. However, these networks are characterized by loose ties, both between a “branch” and the center and between various branches. There are no formal procedures on communication or, even less, programming or evaluation. In many cases, the branches are, in fact, one person. There are very few nationwide programs or activities; even the organizations with developed networks do not implement coordinated, nationwide projects.

- *Use of resources*

Impressively, Russian civic organizations work with very limited resources. They access funds from foreign foundations and have also managed to tap into local resources, but their operations are modest. They maintain low key offices and pay small salaries, and, in general, they do not display lavish equipment or facilities, as seen in other neighboring

countries. Some organizations use volunteers, but this method is rather the exception than the rule.

- *Enthusiasm and genuine interest in the cause*

As mentioned before, the work of civic organizations rely on the enthusiasm and dedication of a core of activists. In itself, this is a plus for the organizations, although the exclusive reliance on enthusiasm, not doubled by professionalism, leads to limited results.

- *Use of Court Cases*

The organizations that do not employ political methods – running their own candidates – use legal methods extensively. They file Court Suits against local, regional or even Federal administrations and legislatures. In some instances, the cases have been won, but the legal decisions have had to be implemented by some administrative bodies – so the whole process boomerangs to the administration and the lack of mechanisms to put pressure on its activity. As a general note, the civic organizations seem to initiate various advocacy activities, but never follow them through until the ultimate goal has been reached. Rather, they undertake the respective activity (support candidates, file a law suit etc) and then expect that somebody else takes over the problem (the elected official, the Court) and solves it.

## **B. Civic organizations amongst themselves**

- *Working in coalition*

Civic organizations in Russia do form coalitions around issues of common interest – migrants, ecological issues etc. The same loose relation, however, is characteristic of these coalitions. The issue and the hardships keep them together, despite shortcomings in communication and program implementation. Very few coalitions are formed around issues of interest to civic organizations from various sectors.

- *Information on civic organizations' activity*

Civic organizations know little of each other. Despite the multitude of Resource Centers all over the country, the successes and failures of Civic organizations are not popularized, and they do not benefit of each other's experience. In most cases, the information is available, but the civic organizations do not know why and how to look for it.

## **C. Civic organizations and official bodies**

- *Transparency of government*

There is little transparency in public decision making, at all levels. The legislative process is closed and difficult to access for civic organizations, and the implementation of laws or regulations – even more so. Punctually, some administrators have opened up the process, and the civic organizations did get involved and did prove to be valuable resources. But all this is depending on the administrator's good will and knowledge.

- *Relation with government*

The relation between administrations, legislatures and civic organizations is characterized by informal and punctual ties. The relation is almost exclusively at a personal level, and depends on the two persons involved. It thus depends on the re-election of the transparent administrator, or the continuing leadership of the persuasive NGO activist. Moreover, while the importance of maintaining a good relation with the administration is obvious, the relation with the legislature is more subtle and longer-term vision is needed to understand its benefits.

- *Inheritance of concepts and models*

The Soviet model “encouraged” the administration to maintain a formal relation with the “civic organizations” through the creation of various councils on different issues – youth, women etc. The councils played no other role but to maintain the illusion of some sort of participation, openness and fairness. The model has been inherited and adapted by some governors or the City Administration, who have created Councils of Civic Organizations to act as consultants for the administration. In an environment unfriendly to NGO influence and advocacy, these councils work against the interest of civic organizations. The only result is the use, by the administration, of the Civic organizations as channels to the public, which offers the decision making process and the decisions a fake image of transparency and care for public input. The local civic organizations are split by the creation of these councils, with some organizations trusting them and joining in, while others reject any participation.

#### **D. Civic organizations and political parties**

- *No constructive opposition*

Organizations, as well as political parties, have little knowledge of constructive opposition. Many civic organizations are against the party and/or person in power, and it is their goal to change them. The only mean employed to this end is running candidates. There is little collaboration between Civic organizations and political parties in opposition, between elections.

- *Uncertain political situation*

In the last decade, political situation changed several times, unexpectedly. Each change generated surprising developments. The political situation changed once again, recently. Civic organizations do not know what to expect from the new politicians, some are pessimistic, some are optimistic, but nobody knows what changes the new politicians will bring about. While this situation is not unique, and changes do happen in other countries as well, the lack of any checks and balances makes it somewhat dangerous in Russia. Civic activists are well aware of the dangers, even if they do nothing to prevent them.

## **II. FUTURE NDI WORK**

In the last years, NDI’s civic work has focused on providing training to various civic organizations, especially the “national” ones, on organizing skills, advocacy campaigns

and working in coalition. To a less extent, the work has included collaboration between political parties and civic organizations. The practical side of the work has been materialized by the assistance provided to the creation and development of the VOICE coalition.

Taken into consideration the new environment and the characteristics of civic organizations, NDI needs to structure its civic work on two levels – (1) national and (2) local, and employ two complementary approaches – (a) theoretical (training and exchange of information) and (b) practical (work with the VOICE coalition, assist organizations in their dialog with the administration and promote examples of successful influence on public policy).

### **(a) TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

#### **(1) NATIONAL LEVEL**

NDI will continue to work with the national organizations, focusing on training and assisting them in better using their main asset – the network. While some theoretical elements are needed, and examples from other countries would be welcome, the practical spin has to be put on this activity, as well. The training will be constructed around issues which are of interest to the entire network of these organizations, and will attempt to help the organizations design and implement nationwide activities and/or campaigns.

#### **(2) LOCAL LEVEL**

- *Role of civic organizations and the relation with “the Power”*

Civic organizations have been provided training on skills – how to advocate, how to strategize etc – but not on fundamental issues – the Civic organizations’ role, their means of action, their relation to “the Power”, at all levels. The training should address these issues – help NGO activists get a broader picture of their activity and potential. As this picture is also poorly understood by the administration and legislatures, their representatives should be part of the audience. Examples of means employed in other countries to ensure an official, permanent and effective dialog between Civic organizations and administration will be shared with the participants.

- *Russia’s government and legislative system*

Although many NGO activists know – or at least have been taught – the Western organizing techniques, they do not know the realities and intricacies of the Russian governing and legislative system. They do not know how to influence the decision making process, because, to a certain extent, they do not know this process. They might know, in broad terms, how a bill becomes law, but they do not know the specific ways in which they can interfere in the process. The training should incorporate these issues, and try to help the NGO activists have a better understanding of the specific of the Russian government. Taken into consideration the specific of the Russian government, the focus should be on the administrative system, without excluding the legislative one.

- *Training on issues*

So far, the training of the NGO activists has been approached skill-wise. This should be changed and the training should be approached issue-wise, focusing on the three issues

that VOICE is undertaking (free and fair elections, transparency of the budget, formation of the corpus of jurors) and those undertaken by the parliamentary program (anticorruption, ). In this format, the training will include a presentation of the issue, the current situation, decision making factors, potential allies and opponents etc. Participants should be activists of those civic organizations who work on the respective issue. At the end of the training, the participants will have a better understanding of the real situation, and an idea of various tactics to address the issue. To the extent possible, the civic work should enhance and reiterate the messages and the issues approached by the political party and parliamentary NDI programs in Russia.

## TRAINING TECHNIQUES

- *Use of Russian case studies*

There are enough success stories within the Russian civic organizations which could be used in training. However, the failures are also a wonderful training tool, and they should also be used. The more Russian case studies used, the more the training will be Russian adapted, and the more NDI could contribute to the spread of information about the activity of civic organizations' amongst themselves.

- *Comparison with "similar" countries*

There are also lots of good and bad examples in countries in the region. When presenting an issue, a better perspective could be gained by comparing solutions adopted in neighboring countries, as well as in Western democracies.

## PARTICIPANTS

- *Focus on regions*

More attention should be given to the civic organizations in the regions, irrespective of their affiliation with a Moscow based organization. At the same time, it is important that the effort is not dissipated but concentrated on chosen regions. For better results and a coherent approach, the regions should be the same ones where NDI implements its political party program. The civic program, however, will try to bring together NGO activists from regions with different levels of sophistication of their civic life, in order to enable participants to learn from each other and exchange meaningful experience. In case the difference in skills and knowledge between the participants from various regions and organizations requires it, NDI will try to offer additional training, on organizing skills, to the less prepared civic activists.

In time, other regions may become the focus of the program. While it is difficult to foresee now which ones these will be, a few criteria will be used to determine them:

- few or no civic activity of other international organizations
- NGOs active in the region, in various fields
- No major, uncontrollable conflicts (i.e., war) or local disputes in the region
- A less efficient or no dialog between local civic organizations and administration in the region

- *Local, regional and federal government officials*

As one important topic would be the role of Civic organizations and their relation with “the Power”, representatives of administration and legislature should be part of the audience. They do not have a clear understanding of this role, and it is one reason of their mistrust in the civic organizations’ activities and efficiency. The Civic organizations and the administration/legislature representatives together could discover common goals and ways to cooperate.

### **(b) PROMOTION OF PRACTICAL EXAMPLES**

#### **(1), (2) NATIONAL AND LOCAL**

Besides training, NDI should try to promote (and/or help create) examples of successful Civic organizations, which have managed to have an impact in public decision making.

- *VOICE Coalition*

The coalition should be the best translation into practice of all notions and techniques promoted by NDI. The Institute’s continuous cooperation with the coalition should aim to help VOICE become a nationwide grassroots organization, with successful activity in promoting participation and accountability.

- *Successful advocacy campaigns in Vestnik*

The newsletter has become more and more widely read by the civic organizations. It is a good mean to distribute information about successful advocacy campaigns in Russia, in order to continuously prove the practical possibility of success in such an endeavor. Each issue should include a description of one Russian organization’s success in influencing public policy.

- *Assist organizations in their dialog with „The Power”*

In many regions, even the ones closer to Moscow, the practice of public hearings or town meetings is unknown. NDI will teach and assist local organizations and/or administration in organizing – not running – events of these types.

### **III. RELATION WITH OTHER NDI PROGRAMS IN RUSSIA**

- *Political parties*

Some of the issues adressed in training concern representatives of political parties, both those in power and those in opposition. Sections of the seminars should address a mixed audience, both Civic organizations and representatives of political parties. However, emphasis should be put on the participants’ official capacity, rather than that of party member/leader.

At the same time, sections of the training for political parties address the issue of relating with Civic organizations. The use of case studies – examples of successful Civic



organizations and successful dialog – will make the party members understand the importance of Civic organizations and the benefits of relating with them. The civic and the political party programs should share the successful examples and use them.

- *Parliamentary*

The issues used for training the NGO activists could be those addressed by the parliamentary program. While through the parliamentary program the Institute will assist MPs in communicating with constituents on these issues, the civic program will encourage Civic organizations to communicate with their MPs. This will ensure two complementary approaches to the same end.

Similarly, while the civic program will teach Civic organizations how to influence the legislative process, the parliamentary program should persuade MPs of the importance and benefits of allowing for Civic organizations' input.