

Civil society development in the post-Soviet space: Pitfalls and Prospects for health and welfare NGOs

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Outline

- Civil society development post-1991
- Recent developments and their implications
- Levels of trust in NGOs
- Partnering with the state: opportunities and risks for health and welfare NGOs
- Conclusions

Stages of civil society development in the post-Soviet space:

- Late 1980s – early 1990s: growth in number of public associations and grassroots initiatives based around environmental/cultural/human rights issues
- Mid-late 1990s: influx of international donor agencies e.g. USAID, UNDP, TACIS, Soros and promotion of civil society development; influence of democratisation theory
→ proliferation of domestic and international NGOs; focus on issues of interest to donors
- Late 1990s-early 2000s: consolidation of civil society organisations and increasing professionalization; inter-sectoral cooperation; major international funding for social projects
- Mid-2000s onwards: increasing cooperation between state and NGOs; greater state attention towards civil society, not all of it welcome

Recent developments and their implications I:

- Legislation: ongoing impact of Russia's 'foreign agent' law and Kazakhstan's decision to pass similar legislation in late 2014 – in Russian case has had detrimental effect in terms of funding and collaboration
- Distinction between 'social' and 'political' work of NGOs
- Rise in volunteering and new methods of fundraising/PR: crowdfunding, social enterprise, social media and direct donations

Recent developments and their implications II

- Ukraine crisis: civil society played key role in EuroMaidan protests and have coordinated conflict relief efforts since conflict in Donbass broke out
- → major increase in volunteering and/or donations to army and other causes
- → increased interest from international donors in funding good governance and civil society development projects in Ukraine

Trust in NGOs:

- Russia, 2015: 38% trusted NGOs, 86% think NGOs should assist government in resolving social problems (HSE 2016)
- Ukraine, 2014, 43.6% trusted NGOs (BTI 2016)

'Partnering with the state': risks and opportunities

- Increased emphasis in region on involving health and welfare NGOs in social service delivery e.g Federal Law 442 in Russia

Benefits of partnership:

- Access to more reliable sources of funding
- Chance to influence policy implementation/delivery and greater interaction with state agencies
- Encourages professionalization of NGOs
- Can lead to higher quality of services for clients

- **Risks:**

- Do NGOs have the capacity/resources/experience to provide social services?
- Will they simply become part of the state bureaucracy/lose ability to provide innovative services?
- Loss of advocacy function?
- Bureaucratic resistance and competition with state providers and commercial entities
- Will clients trust NGOs and choose them over alternative providers?

Conclusions

- Civil society in the region continues to develop at a rapid pace, particularly where health and welfare NGOs are concerned
- Relationship between NGOs and the state is complex and changing
- NGOs will have to make tough decisions about their aims, relationship with government and advocacy v. service delivery function