

Importing Civil Society: Foreign Aid and the Women's Movement in Russia

SARAH HENDERSON

In the heady rush following the collapse of communism in Russia, many observers felt that the gains of capitalism and democracy could be fairy godmother to the Russian citizenry: with the wave of a wand (and untold amounts of USAID dollars) former socialist workers and apathetic Communist Party members could be transformed into capitalist entrepreneurs and democratic citizens. Hypothetically, although these transformed citizens were no longer constructing socialism, one hoped that they would work with zeal to build a new utopia, a vibrant civil society within the framework of a free market economy and democratic political system. To encourage such an outcome, government agencies and nonprofit organizations have invested millions of Western dollars in the form of grants, training, and partnership programs to aid, encourage, and hasten the trinity of Western-style political, economic, and social structures.¹

Of particular interest to many Western funders has been the development of civil society, and more specifically the NGO (nongovernmental organization) sector. Robert Putnam and others have argued that the strength of civic associations is a crucial determinant for healthy democracies; civic associations contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government because they instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public spiritedness. Such networks, norms, and social trust (or social capital) facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit, which encourages citizens to articulate views, form goals, and work to achieve them in the democratic political process.² Perhaps taking civil society theorists to heart, Western funders have financed thousands of projects and distributed grants to various civic organizations to fund specific activities in the hope of strengthening "civil society."

Women's NGOs have been targeted by many Western funding agencies as a key component of a healthy and flourishing civil society. An additional motive of funders has been the desire to foster "Western-style" gender equality (perceived as progress toward modern political and social structures essential for democrat-

Sarah Henderson is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

ic societies) and to bolster women's sagging status in Russian society.³ Foundations and agencies such as Eurasia, Ford, Soros, and USAID have been active in assisting women's groups as they learn skills related to starting and running an NGO.⁴ Many of the organizations subsist solely on Western grants; fortunate ones also receive small subsidies from Russian sources.

What has foreign aid done for women's groups in Russia? Is it fostering civil society, or is aid merely skin deep, an expensive Band-Aid unable to heal deeper pathologies within Russia's emerging third sector, the nonprofit organizations that interact with state and market actors? Valerie Sperling has argued that foreign aid's positive influence has been marred by fractionalization and infighting within the movement.⁵ My findings support Sperling's research; in addition, I argue that funding is creating more severe, long lasting pathologies within the women's movement in three ways. While funded women's NGOs exhibit greater organizational and networking abilities, foreign aid undermines the movement's long-term sustainability by privileging Western-style feminist groups over other "social welfare" organizations. This has led to the creation of a "civic elite" within the women's movement. As a result, as Sperling has also argued, groups tend to reflect the orientation of the funder rather than the needs of the domestic population.⁶ In fact, despite its aims, foreign funding may subvert the development of "deep" civil society.

In this paper, I look at the role of Western funders in affecting the organization, activities, and goals of women's groups in Russia by analyzing survey data from over 130 women's groups. I also draw from over forty interviews conducted with leaders of women's organizations in Moscow, program officers from various Western funding agencies, and other individuals involved in working in the third sector.

Overview: NGO Development and Foreign Foundations in Russia

Women's NGOs are one branch of the growing third sector in Russia. The "non-profit sector," or "third sector" in Russia is multiplying rapidly, demonstrating explosive growth over the past ten years.⁷ Currently, there are between 58,000 and 70,000 NGOs in Russia.⁸ These organizations often provide social services to vulnerable groups, serve as self-help groups in the face of persistent economic and political deterioration, or advocate for various individuals.⁹ Many of these are based in the two largest cities in Russia, Moscow and St. Petersburg, although organizations have also been growing rapidly in provincial cities such as Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, and Samara.¹⁰

Within this context, women's groups have emerged as one of the potential "new social movements" in Russia and have received much monetary encouragement from the West. Although independent women's organizations did not begin to surface until Gorbachev's ascension to power (in 1985 the Soviet Women's Committee was the only officially recognized women's organization in Russia), the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation has registered almost 600 women's organizations.¹¹ These organizations cover the gamut of political activism, ranging from academic feminist groups in Petersburg and Moscow, to

single-issue organizations such as rape crisis centers and domestic abuse hotlines, to a political party/movement such as Women of Russia.¹²

Against this backdrop, funding from foreign agencies to NGOs started to arrive in the early 1990s. Many of the programs were funded by USAID, and USAID money continues to be a consistent and large aid source. Other early funding groups included the MacArthur Foundation, the Eurasia Foundation, the Soros Foundation, United Way International, ISAR (formerly the Institute for Soviet-American Relations), and IREX (International Research and Exchange Board).¹³ The next wave of foreign donors (1994–96) signaled the arrival of organizations such as World Learning and a consortium of American organizations, the Civic Initiatives Program.¹⁴ Both of these

organizations tended to give grants for much larger sums of money (\$300,000–\$400,000) and focused on partnership programs between Russian and American organizations. In 1996 the Ford Foundation opened its doors in Moscow and focuses on human rights projects, education, women's organizations, and the development of local initiatives.¹⁵ Other organizations, such as the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation or the National Endowment for Democracy, have an interest in the development of civil society but have not opened Russian offices; they operate their grants from home offices in the United States.

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Foreign funding opened myriad possibilities to women's groups that would not exist without such funding. Assistance from the West can provide a wealth of experiences and opportunities not normally available to NGOs in Russia. Grants can bring much needed support for the development of basic organizational infrastructure as well as less-tangible moral support. They often supply such organizational basics as computer equipment, money for salaried employees, or office space. Grants are also made to fund domestic and international conferences on women's issues; they support training and seminars to teach women leaders practical skills about running an NGO. Grants have supported publications, such as the Russian version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (MacArthur Foundation), and research on the gender aspects of proposed laws (Gender Expertise Project, USAID). Grants also provide funding for travel to international conferences, such as the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China (MacArthur Foundation) and allow women to network and discuss issues on a global level.¹⁶ In 1997, the Eurasia Foundation assigned almost half a million dollars in grants specifically to women's groups or for projects that have a women-only focus.¹⁷ Similarly, last year, the Ford Foundation distributed over \$600,000 to support seven projects on women's issues across Russia.¹⁸ Grants open up a world of opportunity inconceivable without such funding, especially when domestic funds for women's groups are so scarce.¹⁹

Expectations

I expected to find stark differences between groups that had received grants from foreign funders and ones that had received no such financial assistance. Overall, if foreign funders were in Russia with the mission "to facilitate civil society," I was interested in trying to quantify some of the differences between groups that had been beneficiaries of the funding and ones that had not.

Groups that had received funding, I hypothesized, would be more likely to have a more formal office structure, with paid full-time and part-time workers, office space, and some office equipment, such as computers and faxes. Organizational infrastructure is important in that it helps ensure long-term sustainability, essential for developing networks of communication with other groups.

I assumed that groups that had received funding would be more active because they had greater income at their disposal. I expected to find groups that had received funding better able to articulate their activities and engaging in them with greater frequency and regularity than groups that were without financial resources from the West.

Organizations such as Ford and Eurasia have stressed that grants are given with the hope of fostering long-term networks tying NGOs together. I therefore hypothesized that contact and funding from Western organizations would ensure that these groups would be more likely to work with other women's groups, other NGOs, and would more likely be aware of other groups' work. I also expected them to be more active in creating links to the state by making contacts with local, regional, or national political structures.

In sum, I expected the groups that had received funding to have the greatest potential for fostering civil society; possessing a strong organizational base, engaging frequently in a variety of activities; creating a denser web of communication with other groups.²⁰ In turn, I expected Western funding agencies to be funding projects that would encourage these activities.

To test my assumptions, I sent a mail survey to almost 400 women's organizations across Russia. Although over 600 women's groups are registered with the Ministry of Justice, I sent surveys only to groups that had reliable contact information; many of the registered groups are either defunct or inoperative. The survey was four pages long and consisted of forty-one questions covering a variety of topics: (a) basic informational questions; (b) questions on membership and leadership of the organization; (c) questions on resources; (d) questions regarding activities and goals of the group; and (e) questions on networking and communication with other sectors of society. I attempted to make the survey as easy to fill out as possible; respondents were given choices and asked to check off answers rather than write lengthy essays on open-ended questions.²¹ I sent out 379 surveys in June 1998; I received 184 answers, a response rate of 52 percent.²² I also conducted more than sixty interviews with leaders of women's organizations in Moscow, with program officers of various Western foundations, and with other individuals involved in non-profit work in Russia.²³ In addition, I drew on the literature from various women's organizations and from foreign funders to obtain additional background on organizational goals, activities, and guiding philosophies.

Survey Responses and Results: Women's Groups

Resources

A major concern for women's groups, indeed for all NGOs, is survival. Given the current economic environment in Russia, for many activists funding is a constant struggle from year to year, especially for those without access to foreign assistance. When asked about their budgets, 40 percent of the women's groups reported having no budget. For many groups, their financial resources waxed and waned, depending on what meager scraps of support they could wangle here and there. One group simply wrote "1991–1994 without money. 1995–1996 assistance from the oblast' administration. 1997–1998 grant."²⁴ One activist painted the following picture: "Only the chairperson works now because it is not possible for members of the committee to work unpaid. There is no money to buy paper or envelopes."²⁵ Another commented: "I am refused office space, and communicate with my home phone. I have no resources in general."²⁶

Not surprisingly, the largest source of support for women's groups is volunteer labor; 62 percent of women's groups reported using unpaid labor as a resource for their group. Many groups subsist off the personal dedication of the leader, who often supplies and runs the organization from her own meager funds. One woman trying to revive the tradition of public defenders wrote: "Our work is based on the charity of all, sometimes we get small grants. For seven years the organization has existed on my own contributions."²⁷ Foreign assistance is the largest wellspring of monetary support for women's groups; overall, 50 percent of the respondents reported having received some form of assistance from Western sources such as foreign foundations (36 percent), foreign governments (18 percent), or foreign NGOs (15 percent).²⁸

Domestically, local and regional administration also proved to be a reliable source of at least meager support (32 percent). The Russian government rarely gives grants; only 2 percent of groups had received any kind of aid from federal sources. However, groups did receive some support from their fellow citizens; almost a third of the groups (32 percent) reported having received some sort of contribution or donation from Russian businesses, and almost one-fifth (19 percent) relied on membership fees of some sort to provide them with a little bit of funding. In addition, 15 percent of groups reported receiving some income as "fees for services provided," although often there was no set fee; rather, it was up to the person to contribute some small amount. Although groups have access to domestic sources of funding, many groups wrote in the margins that these contributions were minimal, spotty, and were not a steady source of income.

Organizational Structure

Women's groups, like many other NGOs, struggle to acquire the basics of organizational survival (such as office space, telephone, and so on), although 60 percent of my respondents reported having an office. Others managed to conduct activities out of their own home or by meeting in public buildings, such as the local library, a room in the administration, at work, and so forth.²⁹ In addition, 54 percent of respondents had a computer, 39 percent had a fax, and 31 percent had an e-mail account.³⁰ However, only about a third (32.4 percent) had the resources to have paid employees.

Groups either tended to be very small, comprising a close-knit band of devotees, or claimed to represent large masses of the population. Almost a third of the groups had less than twenty members; 46 percent claimed memberships of over fifty, and often wrote notes in the margins of the survey—"We represent over 5,000 women," or "over 1,000 families."

Goals and Activities

Many women's groups organized in response to Russia's economic crisis and the rapid reduction in social welfare benefits, performing tasks that the state had abandoned. Wrote one group: "The crisis situation in Russia, first and foremost, makes it necessary to help us all live through this. This takes all strength, time, and hope for better times."³¹ When asked to rate the importance of various goals, the protection of "weaker" groups received the most sympathy. Protection of children had the highest number of sympathizers; 53 percent of all groups said that this was a very important goal of their organization. Protection of the poor also attracted much support (45 percent of groups felt this was a very important goal), followed by protection of invalids (43 percent). The development of religious life (34 percent) and the development of cultural life (25 percent) in Russia also found many sympathizers, pointing to the fact that many Russian women's groups are still oriented around traditional/matriarchal activities.

Regarding goals specifically related to women, once again, the respondents supported a "traditional" role for women's activism. "Educating the public about women's issues" was rated very important by 55 percent of respondents, followed by "providing services to women" (48 percent), changing laws on women's issues (40 percent), increasing women's access to political power (40 percent), and increasing women's access to economic power (28 percent).

When asked to comment on their activities, many groups saw their role as one of support rather than one involving political confrontation. Eighty percent said they contacted the media often or very often to further their goals, and 79 percent said that they made contacts with other women's groups often or very often. Contacts with other NGOs also proved a popular activity (69 percent), as did mobilizing public opinion through disseminating information (67 percent), and organizing conferences for other groups interested in similar issues (53 percent). That the organizations often serve as support mechanisms is supported by the fact that 67 percent of groups engaged in building the identity of their fellow members often or very often.

Very few groups reported that they participated in government hearings or committees or made contact with administrators or civil servants "very often." Neither was "organizing demonstrations" a popular activity—only 6 percent of the groups used protests as an activity "often or very often." Supporting this non-political slant, only 9 percent of groups felt it was very effective to work with politicians and the political system to further their goals.

Networking

When estimating the dynamics of their contacts with other groups in society, women's groups felt that they had increased contact most with other women's

groups (60 percent), other NGOs (52 percent), and surprisingly, local administration (48 percent).³² Two-thirds of all the women's groups belonged to some coalition or network with other organizations. Some groups were wary of working with other women's groups. The council of one group bluntly stated: "I would like there to be one women's organization in Russia. The Russian Women's Union would have unified goals and tasks in addressing women's issues."³³ Another group from the Republic of Buryatia said that they didn't work with any women's groups in Russia, stating that they considered women's groups in Russia "too politicized."³⁴

Overall, my survey revealed a women's movement that is still steeped in the Russian tradition of viewing women as nurturers, whose appropriate sphere of activity is in "traditional" charitable activities. Commenting on women's activism, one respondent said "You are struck by the steadfastness, optimism of our women of various ages and nationalities, ready to unselfishly help one another, taking on their shoulders worries about friends, aged parents, and often unemployed men."³⁵ Although politically oriented groups do exist, the women's movement serves as a support network.

Differences between Funded and Unfunded Women's Groups

Given the dire straits facing women's groups, foreign aid does offer a respite from the travails of constantly finding financial support. Although groups without access to foreign aid have domestic sources of support, I refer to them as "unfunded" because domestic monetary aid pales in comparison to the benefits of a grant from the West. Almost one-half (49.5 percent) of the groups had received aid from a Western source, such as a foundation, nonprofit organization, foreign government, or international humanitarian agency. It is not possible to enumerate all the foreign foundations, NGOs, and other groups active in giving grants, workshops, and assistance in Russia. However, when asked to list their funding sources, the Soros Foundation received the most mention (thirty grants); the Eurasia Foundation also was a prolific patron (twenty-six grants) and Ford Foundation's efforts were widespread (twenty-two grants). The Global Fund for Women (thirteen grants), USAID (ten), TACIS³⁶ (seven), and MacArthur Foundation (seven) were also consistently mentioned funders.³⁷

Embassies of Western countries sometimes also had deep pockets. The British embassy occasionally found money to support women's initiatives, the Canadian embassy and Canadian agency for development gave money, and the northern European embassies were also mentioned by women's groups as providers of funding. Several groups had managed to develop ties with various departments of Germany's Green Party and had received some money from them.³⁸ The Mott Foundation, whose nearest office is in Prague, also gave a few grants to women's groups in Russia.

Grants often fund specific purchases or activities. The most popular purchase was office equipment—69 percent of groups reported that they used their grant for furniture, computers, TVs, VCRs, copying machines, and so on. The next most frequent use of grant money was for domestic conferences or training. Forty-four percent of groups used the money for salaries, 30 percent used their grants to trav-

el abroad for conferences, and 24 percent used the money to support publications, newsletters, or other research. Only 4 percent used it to fund some sort of protest, and 3 percent used their grants to collect and disperse information about legislation. Thus, grant money goes overwhelmingly for concrete activities, equipment, and conferences; grants do not necessarily have direct impact on more intangible organization aspects, such as unity, loyalty, or group cohesiveness.

Organizational Structure

Because grants are funding tangibles such as office equipment, salaries, and conferences, it is not surprising that a large divide separates funded from unfunded groups in terms of organizational stability. Funded groups were more likely to have office space (although only by a 10 percent margin—65 percent and 55 percent, respectively). However, only 38 percent of unfunded groups that had an office paid rent on it, implying that many use personal apartments as office space. Eighty-three percent of funded organizations had a computer, 58 percent had a fax, and 51 percent had e-mail. In contrast, well less than a third of unfunded groups had a computer (27 percent), faxes were even less frequent (20 percent), and e-mail trailed behind (12 percent). All the organizations, funded and unfunded, had a telephone (although many are simply personal home numbers).

Employees and Membership

Not surprisingly, funded groups were also more likely to have paid employees. Only 20 percent of unfunded groups were able to spare money to pay someone, while 44 percent of funded groups were able to support some kind of staff. Funded groups were also more likely to use volunteer labor; 73 percent of funded groups used volunteers, and 50 percent of unfunded groups did so. Funding does not seem to have affected membership—both groups reported approximately the same membership dynamics.

Goals and Activities

The two groups were equally dedicated to various goals pertaining to women's issues; there were no significant differences over the importance of educating the public about women's issues, changing laws on women's issues, providing services

TABLE 1
Organizational Infrastructure, Funded and Unfunded Groups (percentages)

Organizational infrastructure	Unfunded groups	Funded groups
Office space	55.3	65.2
Computer	25.6	82.6
Fax	20.2	57.6
E-mail	11.7	51.1
Web page	5.3	14.1

TABLE 2
Staffing (percentages)

Office staff	Unfunded groups	Funded groups
Paid employees	20.2	43.5
Paid full-time staff	17.0	43.5
Paid part-time staff	9.6	30.4
Volunteers	50.0	72.8

to women, and increasing women's access to political and economic power. Unfunded women's groups were more likely to identify with a wide range of community issues, while funded women's groups focused on issues specific to women. Unfunded women's groups were much more likely to support the defense of the rights of workers (22 percent versus 12 percent), economic development in Russia (23 percent to 12 percent), the development of religious life (39 percent to 29 percent), development of the political system (20 percent to 12 percent), development of cultural life (28 percent to 22 percent), protection of children (57 percent to 49 percent), and protection of invalids (37 percent to 22 percent).³⁹ Many women from unfunded groups wrote that they became involved in activism because they felt it was their duty to alleviate the pain and suffering of those around them.

However, funded groups were neither more political nor more likely to build ties with political partners; unfunded groups networked, lobbied, and worked on changing government policies as often as funded groups (although as a whole, women's groups remain nonpoliticized). Women's groups were more likely, as a whole, to become politically active if that involved developing personal contacts; the number of respondents who maintained contacts with members of local administration often or very often was higher (39 percent of funded groups and 36 percent of unfunded groups). Approximately one-third (37 percent of funded groups, 33 percent of unfunded groups) maintained contacts with members of the Duma often or very often, and about one-fifth of respondents from both groups maintained contacts with members of political parties.

Reliance on personal contacts did not spill over to affect larger, wider-reaching change within the legislative sphere. Neither of the groups worked often for needed legislation (only 5 percent of either grouping engaged in such activity very often), or for the election of specific individuals (7 percent of funded groups and 5 percent of unfunded groups).⁴⁰ Neither group thought that working within the political system was a particularly effective way to bring about the goals of their organization (12 percent of funded groups and 10 percent of unfunded groups).

Interestingly, funded groups tended to see the justice system as an avenue of change—17 percent of all funded groups used the courts “very often” as opposed to 6 percent of unfunded groups.⁴¹ Similarly, funded groups, although they did not resort to protests very often (only 9 percent), nonetheless outpaced unfunded groups, of which only 3 percent engaged in protests as a form of group activity.

Networking

Funded women's groups reported higher levels of networking with other segments of society, most significantly with other NGOs. Eighty-eight percent of funded groups claimed they worked very often or often with other women's groups, while only 72 percent of the unfunded groups engaged in such activities. Likewise, funded women's groups interacted much more frequently than unfunded groups with other NGOs outside of the women's movement (86 percent and 63 percent). Funded groups also attended conferences with much greater frequency. Funded groups were also more likely to belong to some sort of coalition (79 percent and 62 percent) and develop regular relationships with other groups. Seventy-one percent of funded groups could name three other groups with which they worked, while only 61 percent of unfunded groups could do the same.

Correlations and Contradictions

In looking at the data, I found many of my initial hypotheses confirmed. On the surface, funded groups appear to be more institutionalized, more active, and more networked with other sectors of the NGO world. However, after I conducted interviews and visited individual organizations, the picture became murkier. Personal visits to many of the organizations' offices and interviews with program officers of various funding agencies portrayed a less "civic" women's movement. In fact, I found a rather confusing picture—although many foreign funders were working quite fervently to build civil society, the grants and financial assistance were sometimes unwittingly creating the opposite effect.

Foreign aid represents one of the few monetary sources of stability for most women's groups. However, as Sperling has argued, this causes women's groups to target Western funders as "the voice that matters" rather than the Russian population. As a result, the goals, agendas, and projects of women's groups that have received assistance from Western organizations have shifted over time to reflect the agenda of foreign assistance programs rather than "objective" domestic needs.⁴² This has undermined overall organizational stability, as groups struggle to supply projects to match the demands and funding priorities of foundations, and has widened, rather than bridged, the gap between women's groups and society. Western funding of women's groups has also created a new elite, increasing the distance between the "haves" and the "have nots" and centralizing resources in the hands of the few that have connections with the West.⁴³ In addition, it has privileged "Western" feminist groups over more traditional charitable organizations.

Dilemmas and Paradoxes

Grant Missions

Western funders have highlighted a number of issues that they see as central to continued stability in Russia's civil society: sustainability, increased community outreach, and strengthened relationships with business and government.⁴⁴ Although many Western funders concentrate on the issue of sustainability for NGOs, doing so has actually undermined the ability of women's groups to con-

tinue their work. Grant makers themselves, although they encourage the goal of sustainability, often change their own ideas of what constitutes a fundable project over the space of several years, causing groups to chase after various funding projects that have little or nothing to do with their original mission statement.

For example, since foreign funding became a presence in Russia in 1992, several different types of grant projects for women's groups have reigned as dominant methods of fostering networks: the data base, the journal/newsletter; women's rights as human rights information dissemination projects, and training sessions. These were all exceedingly "fundable" projects because they produced concrete results and reach a specified audience (150 people trained, 500 journals published, 50 documents collected).⁴⁵ This ensures, at least on paper, that links are being forged—people attend conferences, they send their newsletters to physical entities.

However, funders are constantly searching for new ways to foster civil society, and that often causes civic groups to alter their missions. Thus, groups that received large amounts of money several years ago are now looking for new funding options; projects that once were fundable are no longer "in style." One interviewee commented:

I have seen many organizations sit down with the grant requirements and stretch their organization's mission to fit within the bounds of requirements for new grants available. Practically speaking, this has been the ruin of many organizations after the second or third grant because it doesn't allow for stable growth and fulfillment of the NGO mission. ADL, the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, the St. Petersburg Center for Gender Issues are all cases where the organization split into multiple organizations due to the different missions with the organizations.⁴⁶

As a result, groups' long-term stability is threatened as they split over the strains of meeting Western demands.

In addition to undermining long-term stability, Western assistance has created a "false activism"; civic groups provide the projects that funders want to see, regardless of whether there is an intrinsic need for them. The current emphasis is on sustainability and funding projects that "build networks" with the regions. The result of this funding shift has been an unwillingness to continue to fund Moscow or St. Petersburg-based NGOs, on the grounds that these cities have already been saturated with money.⁴⁷ Eurasia Foundation does not "fund as a rule Moscow-based organizations unless their impact area is in the regions." St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, and Veliki Novgorod also were included as "unfundable cities" because of their levels of grant saturation.⁴⁸ Ford Foundation, due to its small staff at the Moscow office, also tries to spread its money by giving grants to groups that have networks across Russia rather than within one city, such as Moscow.

Thus groups that had become used to comfortable funding setups in the initial years of foreign funding scramble to change their mission to encompass working with groups in the regions to qualify for new funding. Groups based in the larger cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg have created projects to work with groups in the regions, even though they have no inherent interest in engaging in such

projects other than the ability to get funding.⁴⁹ Commented one Moscow-based funder who had financed networking projects:

Still, the real impact, especially a long-term one, was rather low. The reason, as I see it, is in the following: those organizations didn't concern themselves about the qualitative result of their activity, and in this respect their influence on the women's NGO community was passive and formal. Thus all attempts to create any sustainable network failed.⁵⁰

Alternatively, organizations in regional cities, such as Yekaterinburg, that have been hubs of NGO activity, can't understand why foreign funders were willing to support them three years ago but now are withdrawing their support for regions more distant.⁵¹

The New Civic Elite

Despite efforts to manipulate civic development by encouraging particular projects and focusing on various geographical areas, the result has been the creation of what I term the "new civic elite." Some groups have established viable records with previous grant experience and are able to gain a toehold in Western assistance. Commented one activist in Novosibirsk:

Organizations in Moscow have access to resources, information, power institutions that makes them able to get grants which seem to be able to contribute to major changes. This is what big grantors basically want—legislation, actions, etc. Knowledge of languages makes their applications valid and consistent.

While not blaming the feminist organizations for having the skills that get grants, she explained:

Suppose I am a reader and I have two applications—one is professionally written from Moscow and it says they will share the funds with the regions. The other is from a small provincial town and it is badly written and self-oriented. I think that very often the priority is given to the professionally done applications. That's it. One cannot resist this temptation—to prefer someone who sounds professional.⁵²

In addition, Valerie Sperling has argued that the "language" of grant writing—English—exacerbates the centralization of the movement into the hands of activists with connections to the West.⁵³

Foreign funding is obviously a necessary component in the development of civil society in Russia; at a rudimentary level it provides funding for much-needed services. The Russian government allocates little or no money for the NGO sector, and NGOs provide valuable social services that otherwise would not be provided in Russia's period of economic and political instability. It would also be extremely unfair to portray Western funding agencies as imperialistic, impositional, or culturally unaware. Funding agencies, such as Ford, IREX, Eurasia, CAF, and MacArthur are all heavily staffed by Russians; the director of the MacArthur office in Moscow is Russian while the other directors are all fluent in Russian. All of the directors were extremely careful to voice their concerns about imposing their thinking, their actions, or their grant planning on Russian organizations.⁵⁴ Many are simply trying to figure out how to stretch a small amount of

funds to a wide number of NGOs across Russia. In addition, many are constrained in their actions by “home” offices in Washington or New York that have different goals, needs, or pressures.⁵⁵

Neither would it be fair to categorize women’s NGOs as artificial, false, or inactive.⁵⁶ However, some foundations have targeted women’s groups, particularly feminist oriented groups, as a particularly weak and unorganized sector of the NGO world. Commented one program officer at Eurasia: “It seems to be that they [women’s organizations] are not very effective in operating. . . . They received a lot of funding but they were not able to choose the right goals or the right targets. . . . It’s not clear, it’s not aimed at concrete purposes or concrete needs of society.”⁵⁷

Others referred to what they saw as preferential treatment for feminist groups.⁵⁸ Commented one grant evaluator and former women’s group activist: “It has amazed me how often foundations are satisfied with the rather slim products of women’s organizations. This is probably due to foundations’ interest in supporting ‘legitimate’ women’s organizations and their lack of real knowledge about the NGO activities in this part of the Third Sector.”⁵⁹ In the early days of funding, feminist oriented groups that already had Western contacts and a grasp of the English language received grants before they were even clear on what their mission statement would be. However, because of their success in “getting grants,” they were often given more projects based “on their long record of funding rather than their history of success stories.”⁶⁰ While feminism is not the target, the balance between funding an ideal and funding an activity has not been reached.

A False Civil Society?

One of the issues that foreign funding introduces is the issue of audience. Funding from Ford, Eurasia, and MacArthur has gone almost exclusively to women’s groups that profess a feminist orientation, thus underfunding more traditional women’s groups that nonetheless may have greater connections with the public and the community.⁶¹ A women’s movement does exist in Russia, but it is a women’s movement that is often more comfortable at international conferences with fellow Western activists than at home, working among the community.⁶² Women’s groups such as the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, which are known among academic circles in America, are completely unknown to the average Russian, yet their budget is exponentially larger than that of the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers, which has a much larger following among the Russian population but receives less aid.

After a lengthy discussion on the women’s movement, one program officer at the Eurasia Foundation commented that “Foundations still have not learned to differentiate between two tasks: is their goal to support existing NGOs which form a movement, or is the goal to *create* the movement, which previously did not exist?”⁶³ He argued that the Eurasia Foundation still does not know what it wants to do with the women’s movement. Should it support groups that have little resonance within Russian society, but that profess Western feminist values? Or is it more fruitful to support women’s groups that have strong support within

society, such as the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers and League of Women Invalids, but do less on promoting Western, specifically feminist, values? He recognized the importance of feminism as a concept, but also suggested that perhaps the West should be funding the "uncivil" society; those groups that may not profess "democratic values," do not travel to international human rights conferences, do not understand the term "gender," but nonetheless have a strong connection or network within Russian society.

This brings us back to the topic of civil society, introduced so eloquently by Tocqueville's visit to America. It was the explosion of groups in variety and number that impressed him rather than their content. Thus he commented:

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations. These are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religions, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.⁶⁴

When Tocqueville was observing the rich fabric of civic associations in America, he was probably not referring to human rights groups, feminist groups, or environmental groups, although these are all worthy organizations deserving of attention and potential funding today. However, perhaps what is important to the development of civil society is the encouragement of groups all across the ideological spectrum rather than those that profess Western values and mores, for those groups, although less progressive, may also have deeper and more authentic connections with Russian society as a whole.

Conclusion

One of the larger issues involved with foreign funding and the women's movement in Russia is the question of the role of culture/history versus the power of the dollar. At the crudest level, the idea of aid to NGOs in democratizing societies poses the question: Can aid money help create in five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years lasting social structures that took several hundred years to evolve in the West? It remains to be seen how Russian culture will intersect with Western funding expectations; there have been and surely will continue to be cultural differences. A program officer at the National Democratic Institute commented, "I think our expectations were for things to happen quickly . . . but things aren't going to change for at least another twenty years."⁶⁵

However, several trends are emerging. Although funding has helped women create networks and office infrastructure, aid is creating a Western civic elite. Although unfunded groups may be more conservative in their orientations and less Western in their values, they nonetheless may represent a more authentic Russian civil society. In addition, although funding encourages a network of feminist activities to develop ties with each other and with the international community, ties between Russian feminists and Russian women are underdeveloped. An international civil society is developing, not in conjunction with, but perhaps at the expense of domestic civic development. The money earmarked to develop

civil society has created an infrastructure that serves to discourage the realization of that goal. Although Western aid continues to be invaluable, is a civil society based on training, workshops, and office equipment ever going to be more than skin deep? Perhaps in twenty years, we will know.

NOTES

1. For example, USAID funded activities focusing on civic initiatives and NGO sector support (from 1992-current) total over \$92 million. Much of this money was then allocated to organizations such as IREX, World Learning, and Eurasia to administer specific programs, such as the Institutional Partnerships Program, Sustaining Partnerships into the Next Century, democracy development programs under the National Democracy Institute.

2. Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* (July 1995).

3. Overall, women as a group have been the primary losers from the transition. In the realm of economics, women make up a much higher (but decreasing) proportion of the unemployed. In 1992, 72 percent of the registered unemployed were women. This figure decreased to 60.3 percent in 1996 (ILO, *Yearbook of Labor Statistics, 1996* and World Bank, *Statistical Handbook, 1996*). Women over the age of forty-five, women with small children, and women of childbearing age who do not have children are at greatest risk for unemployment. See Lyudmila Rzhantsyna, "Women's Attitudes Toward Economic Reforms and the Market Economy" in Valentina Koval, ed., *Women in Contemporary Russia* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 35–36. There is also widespread anecdotal evidence of discrimination in the job market. In the political sphere, women's quotas in representative bodies were abolished, and women's representation subsequently plummeted in the following elections. Numerous women have formed NGOs to fight these losses in the economic and political spheres.

4. Of course, the list of foreign funders is much longer. MacArthur is very active, as are the Global Fund for Women, League of Women Voters, FrauenAnstiftung, and the embassies of the Netherlands and Ireland.

5. Valerie Sperling. *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 248–92.

6. Sperling, "Foreign Funding of Social Movements in Russia," Policy Memo #26 (1998).

7. The concept of a civil society was not officially recognized until 1986, when the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministries adopted a resolution to create the first charitable foundations since the revolution. These included, among others, the Soviet Children's Foundation, the Foundation of Culture, and the Soviet Foundation of Mercy and Health. This resolution legalized the idea of charity in the USSR and provided the first step toward the further development of public initiatives. In 1990, the law "On Public Associations" gave a legal basis to the creation and existence of independent public associations and charitable organizations, at which point the nonprofit sector began to multiply. The new organizations focused on areas that the centrally controlled party organizations never touched, such as social support for disabled people, lonely pensioners, the homeless, protection of the environment, and the women's movement. Paul LeGendre, *The NonProfit Sector in Russia*, CAF/Russia, 1997.

8. A recent Charities Aid Foundation/Russia study estimated a total of 160,000 organizations, although 100,000 of them are religious groups, political parties, consumer cooperatives, and professional unions that are regulated by separate legislation. The director of the Institute for the Problems of Civil Society, Maria Slobodskaja, offered her own estimate at 58,000, while the Yeltsin administration officials peg the number slightly higher at 70,000. Lisa Petter, "USAID/Russia NGO Sector Analysis," draft.

9. Although the word “advocacy” is not translatable into Russian, the term usually refers to organizations that are involved in the defense of human rights, lobbying, or the development of legislation.

10. LeGendre, *The Non Profit Sector in Russia*.

11. “Zhenskiye Organizatsii v Rossiye Sevodnya,” in *Spravochnik: Zhenskiye Nepravitelstvenniye organizatsii v Rossii i SNG*.

12. Ibid.

13. The first wave of foundations tended to award small grants (less than \$5,000); The main grant recipients were groups that focused on human rights, the environment, education, the women’s movement, and legislative development.

14. The Civic Initiatives Program was implemented by a consortium of five U.S. NGOs: Educational Development Center, Counterpart Foundation, Johns Hopkins University/Institute for Policy Studies, Center for Democracy, and Save the Children. Each member of the consortium contributed specialized expertise to the program through training, workshops, consultations, and the development of resource materials and publications; overall program management and coordination was provided by Save the Children. Larry Dershem and Valeri Patsiorkovski, “Needs and Capacity Assessment of the Third Sector in Central Russia: Kaluga, Yaroslavl’, Smolensk, Tula, Tver’, Vladimir, Ryazan’, and Moscow Oblasts,” 1997.

15. Grants vary from \$40,000 to over \$200,000 and Ford attempts to build long-term partnerships with Russian organizations and give grants to cover a number of years of operating costs.

16. The MacArthur Foundation actually discontinued their travel grants program in 1997 because of the overwhelming administrative paperwork involved in filing grant papers. Interview, 11 August 1998.

17. The exact number I calculated from looking through their 1997 archives was \$462,479, distributed to eighteen separate projects.

18. Calculated from Ford’s “Grants Related to Russia—FY1996/97.”

19. NGOs as a whole are having difficulty learning how to “fundraise,” a new term unfamiliar to many in Russian society. Government support is usually minimal because of the economic condition of Russia and many NGOs rely on foreign assistance to survive.

20. Of course, I am looking at these organizations after the fact; thus it is impossible to state definitively cause and effect. Naturally, there is a process of self-selection—groups that receive funding can already have an advantage over groups that have not received funding. The criteria for receiving funding are such that more organized groups receive funding over those that are more isolated and have less access to information regarding grants.

21. This did not prevent organizations from sending lengthy letters explaining their answers, or from sending me more detailed information about their organization, thus providing me with invaluable insight and detail to individual organizations and their attitudes.

22. I received 144 surveys after the first mailing; in addition, 16 surveys were returned to me marked “return to sender: address unknown.” Nonrespondents were sent another survey; I received an additional 42 surveys, and 6 were returned to sender. Although I received a total of 184 surveys, 3 were duplicates, so my final count was 181.

23. This list of interviews does not include all the various informal conversations meetings, and seminars I have attended as well.

24. Volgograd Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers, Survey 12.

25. Survey 27.

26. Survey 27.

27. Lyubava, Survey 24.

28. The authors of the *Spravochnik* quote an even higher number, reporting that 63 percent of groups received money from foreign foundations. Part of the discrepancy could be explained by the fact that even though we used the same data base, different groups answered our respective requests for information.

29. One confusing aspect of the data is that groups who answered yes to having an office

were to skip to the next question, not needing to answer “If no, then where do you meet.” Seventy-four groups did not have an office, yet ninety-three groups answered the “If no, then where do you meet?”—an overlap of nineteen groups that supposedly had an office. This implies that some groups, even if they have an office, meet in other places, because many groups have different conceptions of what constitutes an “office.” For some groups it is a desk in a room for a few hours a week. Other groups have space that they rent. Other group leaders may consider their office their apartment, which could explain some of the overlap.

30. As with the office dilemma, it was unclear how groups were interpreting “Does your organization have a computer, e-mail,” etc. Again, groups scrawled in options in the margins, such as “at work,” “through another organization,” and so on.

31. Survey 20.

32. Given the aversion to politics, perhaps women activists feel much more comfortable developing personal relations with local level government. In addition, developing access is easier.

33. Liski Regional City Women’s Council, Survey 21.

34. Women’s Union of the Republic of Buryatia, Survey 20.

35. Survey 20.

36. TACIS, or Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, is the European Union’s version of USAID (roughly).

37. Of course, this does not represent the total amount of grants given by the organizations. In interviews, many groups were very secretive about their sources of money, or coyly would avoid listing all of the sources of their funding. A more accurate idea of the sizes and number of grants given to women’s groups can be found by poring through the records of annual reports and records for the past eight years for the major foundations (I did this for Eurasia in 1997 and Ford 1997). However, by asking the groups to list the organizations from which they had received funding, I was able to widen my knowledge of grant-making institutions that focus on women’s projects.

38. The German Greens used to have a section—Frauenanstiftung—that gave money. However, that department has since been reorganized.

39. Unfortunately, the difference washes out if one conflates important and very important.

40. Unfunded groups were more likely to check off “often” (23 percent), while funded groups registered at only 16 percent.

41. Again, the difference washes out when “often” and “very often” categories are conflated.

42. Sperling, “Foreign Funding of Social Movements in Russia.”

43. Sperling discusses a similar phenomena of fractionalization and centralization in *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia*, 265–69.

44. See mission statements of the Ford, Eurasia, and MacArthur Foundations on their strategies with NGOs.

45. The emphasis on tangible “results” (thus the reign of the data base, the journal, the conference) also inadvertently creates projects that tended to affect a small amount of women and ensures that grants usually circulate within a small elite of women who know “how to write grants.”

46. Interview, 11 August 1998.

47. Interview, 3 July 1998.

48. Interview, 3 July 1998.

49. Interview, 3 July 1998.

50. Personal correspondence, 28 July 1998.

51. E-mail correspondence, 1 September 1998.

52. Personal correspondence, 3 January 1999.

53. Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia*, 278–80.

54. Interview, 13 July 1998.

55. This is particularly true of organizations implementing USAID funded projects. Often, they feel that the Washington office is more considerate/engrossed with dealing with Congress than in understanding the current reality of NGO development in Russia. Thus, some funders are constrained in their ability to fund certain projects (for example, to explicitly gay or lesbian groups, or groups that want to work on a lobbying nature, because of the Washington USAID fears of congressional reaction.

56. To what degree are the problems reflected within the women's movement indicative of NGO development as a whole? To some extent, NGO development remains extremely uneven between sectors and across regions across Russia, and the same holds true for women's groups. Feminist oriented women's groups still predominate in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and central Russia represents the whole range of women's activism. In regions outside of central Russia, more traditional organizations (such as former Soviet Women's Committees, League of Women Invalids, and branches of the Movement of Russian Women) maintain their old networks while newer groups focused on a specific purpose (for example, Committee of Soldiers' Mothers) establish strong ties with the community. Women's activism varies from region to region and takes on different forms to meet the needs of the community and reflect the forms of funding received.

57. Interview, 3 July 1998.

58. Interview, 16 March 1998.

59. Interview, 11 August 1998.

60. Lena Kotchkina enforced this view when discussing the successes in obtaining grants of her own organization, Moscow Center for Gender Studies. She discussed the early projects as well as their ability to lay a track record, which ensured their ability to get even more grants through their connections. Interview, 25 July 1998.

61. However, there is self-selection at work here. Most traditional women's groups do not apply for foreign funding. However, mainstream charitable organizations complain that they are unable to get access to funds when other, feminist groups are able to get them.

62. This does not include one of the more recent developments in the women's movement in Russia, which is the crisis center movement, which has been getting increasing support among funders and is developing ties with the community. This is a submovement that is growing rapidly and is exhibiting tangible results.

63. Interview, 22 July 1998.

64. As quoted by Putnam in "Bowling Alone," 1.

65. Interview, 23 July 1998.