

Developing Sustainable NGOs in Kazakhstan

Aliya Kabdiyeva¹

¹ College of Social Sciences, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Correspondence: Aliya Kabdiyeva, College of Social Sciences, KIMEP University, 4, Abay Ave., Almaty, 050010, Republic of Kazakhstan. E-mail: alia@kimep.kz

Received: March 17, 2013 Accepted: April 10, 2013 Online Published: June 1, 2013

doi:10.5539/ass.v9n7p299

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n7p299>

Abstract

In Kazakhstan the NGO sector has experienced significant changes since its early stages of development. The NGOs in the country function in different areas including education, human rights, health care, environment, assistance to the disabled, and many others. This article aims to explore and evaluate opportunities for sustainable development of NGOs in Kazakhstan. The paper gives an overview of the NGOs in Kazakhstan, concentrates on issues of sustainable development of NGOs. For promoting sustainable development NGOs need to develop funding opportunities, collaborate with states, business organizations, develop human resource management. Since there is relatively little information about NGOs' activities in Kazakhstan, the paper helps to understand this area of scientific inquiry.

Keywords: non-governmental organizations, development, sustainability

1. Introduction

In the development of a civil society NGOs play a crucial role. The major challenges faced by NGOs: sustainability, opportunities for renewal, results based agendas, new alliances and networks, understanding the nexus between civil society, the private sector and government (INTRAC, 2011). The role of NGOs is particularly important in Kazakhstan. Since its independence, Kazakhstan has been undergoing significant political, economic, and social changes, amongst which is the growth of NGOs. The activities of NGOs in Kazakhstan are especially important as means of developing civil society in the region.

The concept of NGO varies among countries with different cultures. NGOs are private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to serve particular social interests by focusing advocacy and/or operational efforts on social, political and economic goals (Teegen et al., 2004) NGO is a broad term including a wide set of diverse organizations. NGOs can be private agencies that support international development, or local or religious groups organized nationally or regionally (Nalinakumari & MacLean, 2005). Gray and Bebbington (2006) describe NGOs as autonomous, non-profit-making, self-governing and campaigning organizations with a focus on the well-being of others. As they note, NGOs exhibit considerable heterogeneity in size, functions, views, standards, strategy and tactics (Gray, Bebbington, 2006). Salamon and Anheier (1999) identify the following five key characteristics of NGOs: NGOs are organized and as a result possess some degree of internal organizational structure and organizational boundaries; they are private and thus are institutionally separate from government; they are self-governing and able to control and manage their own affairs; NGOs are non-profit making; and finally NGOs involves some degree of voluntary participation in the conduct or management of the organization.

One of the greatest challenges confronting Kazakhstan's NGOs is the long-term sustainability of their activities. (Alymkulova & Seipulnik, 2005). The issue of NGO sustainability is important because it provides a basis for understanding the level of development and allows for examination of factors that would enhance its capacity. Sustainable development creates challenges for different sectors including governments, business, and civil society.

2. Overview of the NGO Sector in Kazakhstan

There were 36,815 registered non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan in accordance with data from the Ministry of Justice. Of these, 8,134 are public associations, 4,831 are foundations, 1,288 are associations of legal entities, 1,331 are religious groups, and 7,965 are cooperatives, private institutions, non-commercial joint stock companies, and other organizations make up the remainder. (USAID, 2011).

NGO sector in Kazakhstan is diverse in terms of activity and geographic area. NGOs provide a range of services, ranging from education and health care provision to rehabilitation work for the disabled. NGOs are especially active in education, child and youth policy, and culture. Many active NGOs also work on gender, legal rights, and social issues (Buxton, 2011).

In terms of geographical location, most NGOs operate in the southern part of the country and Almaty, followed by the eastern and northern parts of the country. A minimal number of NGOs is registered in western Kazakhstan. The number and type of NGOs registered in a specific geographic area is dependent on the size of the population and investment in that area. For example, the large number of international projects concentrated in Almaty influences the growing number of NGOs there (USAID 2011).

It is estimated that approximately 42 percent of the NGOs in Kazakhstan offer services in the social sphere (education, public health, and culture), 24 percent protect the interests of socially vulnerable groups, while 34 percent concentrate on issues of human rights act, the environment, and gender policy (USAID 2010). More than two hundred thousand people are employed in the NGO sector, and roughly two million citizens enjoy the services of Kazakhstan's NGOs (Diachenko 2008). A survey of 271 NGOs in 2009 found that half of the NGOs consider the end users of their services as urban residents, while the remaining 50 percent include rural residents, local state bodies, local businesses, the national government, and international organizations (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011).

Development of community-based organizations and self-help groups is typical for some areas. Several NGO support organizations, especially in the north of the country, support community development activities and encourage the creation of community-based organizations and self-help groups. Examples of these organizations are the network of Civil Society Support Centers (in nine different provincial locations), the Decenta Public Association, headquartered in Pavlodar, and the Almaty-based NGOs Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network (CASDIN) and Institute for Development Cooperation (ADB, 2007). The International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) initiated a program of work in Central Asia entitled, "Strengthening NGOs to Support the Self-Help Movement". This program supports a network of more than 20 NGOs working on poverty and gender issues in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. Through this program, INTRAC provides capacity-building support, and works to prepare a group of national and local trainers and experts in community development (Buxton, 2011). NGO participation in the development of social sector gradually becomes effective. Many NGOs work closely with their target groups, provide support, and engage people in self-help activities. Local NGOs have helped citizens to become more active and better informed about civil rights and opportunities (Abdusalyamova & Warren, 2007).

Most of leaders and staff of NGOs are women. According to Starr (2011), voluntarism in Central Asia is dominated above all by a remarkable group of empowered and activist women. Many women's NGOs have been involved in key areas of providing women's well-being, including promoting women's economic development, helping to implement certain government programs, and supporting women victims of violence. Women's NGOs in Kazakhstan, led by Feminist League, the crisis center Podrugui, and others, are engaged in influencing government policy, and in developing reports for international agencies (Buxton, 2011). By joining NGOs, many individuals, especially women with leadership skills and a management background gained a self-realization and professional development (Abdusalyamova & Warren, 2007). Another characteristic of the NGO sector has been the dominance of organizations in urban areas, particularly Almaty. In the last few years, NGOs started to develop in the rural areas. However, effective rural NGOs are few (ADB, 2007;Giffen, 2005).

Collaboration between government councils and business entities is a good basis for the development of partnerships between the sectors. Especially good examples of these partnerships include the development that is seen with local city councils (maslikhats) and business in Enbekshi-Kazakhsky (with Philipp Morris Kazakhstan) and Ily rayon (with TengizChevroil). In 2010, about 6,000,000 tenge (\$41,000) was attracted through these councils for support of local resource centers, development of rural NGOs, and support of vulnerable groups (USAID, 2010).

However, development of the sector has slowed down in some areas. The number of active NGOs is rather small. Newly emerging organizations do not receive appropriate training in areas such as strategic planning and fundraising. Some organizations are established to take advantage of specific funding opportunities and therefore tend to be of a short-term and grant-oriented character. A survey conducted by Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan confirmed that a significant number of NGOs have a very short lifespan. Of the more than 200 NGOs polled by Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, 48.7 percent had been operating for less than five years, a quarter had been working for six to nine years, and only 21.8 percent were established at the end of the 1990s. Moreover, some

organizations are dormant and exist only on paper. (Non-Governmental Organizations of Kazakhstan: 20 years of Development, 2011).

Only few NGOs have strong support from their constituents. One of the reasons of this situation is low level of public awareness about activities of NGOs, another reason is lack of skills of NGOs' staff in identifying and addressing constituency needs. NGOs only partly connect their program areas with the needs and interests of the public. For example, according to recent research, over 50 percent of the public expects NGO activities in the areas of children and youth. At the same time less than 15 percent of NGOs in the country actually involved in children and youth issues (USAID, 2010).

Development of NGO sector is presented by NGO sustainability index. The composite NGO sustainability index for 2011 was 4.1 indicating a medium level of development (USAID, 2011). This suggests that there is a great need for improvement in all the categories that constitute the index. In order to improve NGO scores in all relevant areas of development, management capacity in such areas as financing, collaboration with government, business, and human resources need to be enhanced.

3. Sustainable Development of NGOs

3.1 Funding

The main sources of funding for NGOs were grants from international donors. Many of these donors decreased funding programs in recent years (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011). NGOs make attempts to diversify their sources of funding. Some NGOs have several sources of funding, including government agencies, international organizations, private businesses, other Kazakhstani NGOs, foreign companies, urban residents, educational institutions, Kazakhstani businesses and banks, religious groups, and NGOs from neighboring countries.

According to the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan (2009), NGOs should have financial independence from foreign donors, and the government looks likely to be a main provider of funding. State social contracts are currently the most significant source of funding for NGOs in Kazakhstan. Total funding for state social contracts in 2011 amounted to approximately 2 billion tenge (approximately \$13.5 million), compared to 1.9 billion tenge in 2010 (USAID, 2011).

The mechanisms for state contracting are not effective. Social contracts tend to be short-term and long-term orientation becomes problematic. Moreover, little information is available about projects carried out under state social contracts. There are some cases of ineffective spending of money by NGOs that have received state social financing (USAID, 2010). The increased number, scope of NGOs require more transparency and verification of NGOs' activities and performance.

3.2 Collaboration between NGOs and the State

Collaboration can be defined as the "process by which organizations with a stake in a problem seek a mutually determined solution [pursuing] objectives they could not achieve working alone" (Gazley & Brudney, 2007).

Government support influences the efficiency of Kazakhstan's NGOs' activities (Diachenko, 2008; Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011). The low level of support from the government in the 1990s resulted in a fact that Kazakhstan's NGOs started to seek comprehensive aid, primarily financial, from foreign sources. In the development of cooperation between the government and NGOs the adoption of the Conception of Government Support of NGOs in 2003 was a significant event. The Conception established the main goals, principles, assignments, and forms of government support of NGOs (Diachenko, 2008).

In order to foster cooperation between the government and NGOs a number of Civic Forums were held. In 2003 the first Civic Forum was held with the purpose of establishing a new model of partnership between the government, business, and the NGO sector. The second Civic Forum was held in Astana with the aim of creating a civil alliance of NGOs, introducing a government social order system, and drawing up proposals for interaction between the NGOs and the business sector (Diachenko, 2008; <http://missions.itu.int>). The third Civic Forum was organized in 2007 and this was the first time ministers publicly declared their cooperation with NGOs (www.mvd.kz). This resulted in implementing state-financed projects in different areas. The fourth Civic Forum was an important event for NGOs because several sessions of the Forum were organized in all regions of the country. Participants established working panels where NGOs could present the issues of their target groups through dialogue with representatives of state ministries, and develop solutions to issues of importance. On the basis of decisions of the Civic Forums, Interaction Councils were created. They serve as consultative bodies for the local governments and the central government. Representatives of NGOs are now members of the National Council under the President. They are also appointed to the Expert Councils, Human Rights Commission, and the Council for Sustainable Development (www.cap.online.kz). In 2011 the fifth Civic Forum was held in Astana.

This forum was organized on the 20th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan and brought together 600 delegates from across the country, as well as foreign CSO specialists, to review the development of civil society in the country and find out the main priorities for future development (USAID, 2011).

The effects of NGO-Government cooperation in Kazakhstan can be illustrated with a number of examples. One of the examples is the work of the Diabetics Association of the Republic of Kazakhstan (DARK), which aims to improve the quality of life for people with diabetes. During the early years of transition, the government implemented health sector reforms which only covered the cost of treatment but did not cover the costs of medication. At that time only 20 percent of the country's diabetics could afford insulin. Activists in the health sector created DARK to lobby the government in order to cover the cost of insulin. By 1996 the government recognized DARK as a partner in improving government's health policy for diabetics. In November 2000, after public hearings in different parts of the country, the Prime Minister approved DARK's proposal for a comprehensive three-year Diabetes Program. By 2003, compulsory provision of insulin free of charge was made law. (Alymkulova & Seipulnik, 2005).

Despite some positive changes in the NGO-state relations, there are some deficiencies. A considerable amount of the government's social contracts are distributed through a relatively small number of NGOs and the procedures for state social funding are not transparent (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011). According to local NGO activists (Ruffin, 2011), in Kazakhstan the government does not view NGOs as strong partners. In these conditions NGOs use their resources for adapting to the changes in the environment. According to experts' opinion, along with recognizing the NGO sector as a social institution, the state underestimates the potential of NGOs. This strongly reduces the possibilities of NGOs development in Kazakhstan. All the interviewed experts state, that the NGO opinions are often taken into account only at the initial stage of decision making (when working out the agenda), but at the final stages of decision making the NGOs' opinions are usually neglected (Non-Governmental Organizations of Kazakhstan: 20 years of Development, 2011).

3.3 Cooperation between NGOs and Business

In Central Asia the relationship between NGOs and private sector is a relatively new phenomenon and hence has received very little attention.

The relationship between NGOs and the private sector in Kazakhstan takes different forms:

- opposition;
- sponsorship;
- rendering services; and
- partnership/co-operation (Heap, 2000).

A new Tax Code went into effect on January 1, 2009 and contains a very significant change contributing to NGO sustainability. This change provides a basis for valuation of donated goods and services. Prior law permitted such types of donations in principle but did not contain a method for determining value, which discouraged in-kind donations (USAID, 2010). This modification provides incentives for local businesses to make in-kind donations to NGOs.

Local philanthropy, including contributions from local foundations such as Seymar and Kus Zholy, is decreasing as a result of the financial crisis. The major companies involved in the extractive industry allocate significant resources to the social and economic development of the mineral extracting regions both through social obligations contained in their contracts and additional charitable programs. Companies fund social infrastructure projects, award grants to civil society organizations (CSOs), or make direct charitable donations to needy individuals. While businesses are prepared to work with CSOs, CSOs must improve their professionalism in order to develop an effective relationship with the business sector (USAID, 2011).

There are many ways to invest in the community, including partnerships with community-based organizations, employee-volunteer programs, membership on non-profit boards and in-kind donations of goods and professional services. The primary means for conducting business philanthropic strategies are public-relations campaigns, liaisons and publications about project implementation. The most favorable conditions for corporate/business philanthropy are found in the West Kazakhstan region, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Astana, Karaganda and Almaty cities (Alymkulova, & Seipulnik 2005).

Many large companies realize that it is essential not only to earn profits, but also to create a good image; reputation and profits are linked. It is very important for a company to strengthen the image as a corporate

citizen of the country. For example, the goal of Tengizchevroil is to be a company that is respected by the entire population of Kazakhstan. Their strategy is to help NGOs, not to concentrate wholly on increasing their business profits.

Different forms of collaboration can be found between NGOs and corporations. One of the examples here would be the Petroleum Advisory Forum (PAF). It was established by foreign oil companies in Russia in the early 1990s. One of the main objectives of this group was to work on Russian tax legislation, which at that time was underdeveloped. Oil companies realized usefulness of collaboration in some areas. But at the same time companies do not advertise their activities in sensitive areas (Gulbrandsen & Moe, 2005).

There are also two forums of particular importance to International Oil Companies (IOC) in Kazakhstan: the Kazakhstan Petroleum Association (KPA) and the Foreign Investors Council (FIC). But unfortunately NGOs and other stakeholders do not participate in these forums. At the same time there is a growing tendency to look for collaboration between NGOs and corporations with specific programs at the national level (Gulbrandsen & Moe, 2005).

USAID and Chevron are working together in the Central Asian Republics to improve oil field management and share best practices. Chevron supports local adoption of modern oil field waste management practices by allowing access to the Tengiz oil field and demonstrating management best practices. Those activities complement USAID/CAR's training of regulators, NGOs and local companies. Chevron is also working with USAID on health initiatives that benefit local communities. (Oil and gas and conflict development challenges and policy approaches, 2006).

It has been found that the involvement of private associations and nonprofit organizations is extremely important for the success of any anti-corruption and transparency initiatives. Watchdog groups such as Transparency International or Kazakhstan Revenue Watch have an important role to play in Corporate Social Responsibility and Societal Governance monitoring and disseminating information, ensuring that larger development goals are obtained, influencing policy and training local civil society groups to understand the relevant issues (Frynas, 2010).

The corporations establish partnerships with UN agencies and NGOs. Firms such as BP Amoco in Angola, Chevron in Kazakhstan, and many others have used such development partnerships to increase their standing with local governments, improve their public image. NGOs are approaching these new relationships thoughtfully and cautiously. A number of complex and strategic "cross-sector alliances" have been created in recent years, such as between CARE and Starbucks and between ACCION International and Citibank, where complementarities of mission and values are identified and utilized to the benefit of both parties (Salamon, 2003).

The presence of major national and international oil companies has had a specific effect on the role of NGOs in the oil-producing regions of western Kazakhstan. One study found that the companies' role in the local communities had "decreased the demand for and appeal of environmental activism" in Kazakhstan. In fact, companies often have engaged the local population directly, thereby circumventing NGOs and lessening their roles. As a result, NGOs in the region have struggled to gain popular support in opposing the energy sector's development (Lee, 2007).

3.4 Human Resource Management

According to literature strategic management of human resources has an impact on organizational performance. NGOs need to think strategically, and human resource departments should take a proactive role in order to meet the changing demands of their environment (Guo et al., 2011). Very often leaders of NGOs are enthusiastic and dynamic people, but they need appropriate skills and expertise to manage organizations (Cooper, 2011). The weak sustainability of human resources can be seen as the result of limited financial opportunities and resources, as well as short term project-oriented activities (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011). NGOs in Kazakhstan need to develop organizational systems in the area of human resources. One of the main challenges is the lack of professional managers, and qualified staff and volunteers. According to survey of the country's NGOs 25 percent indicated lack of qualified and professional staff as the main factor leading to poor development and inefficiency, and 31 percent view lack of a tradition of volunteerism as one of the reasons of poor NGO development in the country. (Diachenko, 2008).

There is a need to improve human resources management through training programs for key staff members. Training is considered the most important way for employees in order to attain the knowledge, skills and attitude to perform their jobs. The creation of NGO Institutes to provide training in goal setting, managerial, fund raising

and implementation skills is highly desirable in the NGO sector (Peterson, 2010). Training is highly connected with employee development and learning. In order to be competitive, workplace learning and continuous improvement are considered extremely important for organizations (Benevene & Cortini, 2010).

4. Conclusion

This paper discussed important issues in the developing sustainable NGOs in Kazakhstan. During 20 years of independence certain positive results have been achieved in the development of NGOs: expanding intersectoral collaboration, establishing international contacts, improvement of state-NGO relationships, diversification of NGO sector. NGOs in Kazakhstan moved on a new level of development, gradually make progress.

Despite some positive results in state - NGO relationships, there is a need to provide a real collaboration of NGOs with government. In the current situation state social contracts are the most significant source of funding. The mechanisms for state contracting are not effective. The services provided by NGOs do not always reflect the needs of their constituents and are often tied to funding under the state social contract program. There is a need to provide transparency of social contracts, strengthen long-term collaboration between NGOs and the state, build institutional capacity of public sector agencies.

NGOs in Kazakhstan experience an early stage of developing collaboration with business sector. There is a need to move from short-term activities to strategy of the development. The obstacles to this development can be found in legal regulations, absence of a long-term vision. It was found that there is a gradual shift towards a collaboration between NGOs and private sector. However, it is too early to evaluate the effect of this shift on sustainable development.

Development of sustainable NGO sector requires increasing public awareness about the NGO sector, support of constituencies, developed human resource management, collaboration with government, strong partnership with business sector, diversifying sources of funding, developed mechanism for volunteering.

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