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Organisational Capacity Building in Central Asia: Reflections from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

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with Hannah Warren

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Executive Summary

Civil society in Central Asia has developed significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A more open and enabling environment, and the urgent need to plug gaps in social service provision caused by withdrawal of state support, has led to the mushrooming of civil society. Fledgling non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been aided by a range of multilateral and bilateral agencies and international NGOs (INGOs). They have not only provided funds, but have also worked to build the capacity and strengthen the voice of the sector and individual agencies within it. This paper focuses on the history and current context of civil society in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, presenting information on key civil society capacity building actors and their activities and approaches. It provides an assessment of key issues and challenges many of which have relevance not only to Central Asia, but to capacity building elsewhere.

Within Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan support has been provided not only to build the capacity of CSOs, but also to enable the sector to itself contribute to building local capacity. An encouraging result has been the growth of a range of local support organisations, each offering specialised services to CSOs and advocating for greater strengthening of civil society. However, despite these gains significant challenges remain in a region which lacks financial stability and is highly donor dependent. Inherited authoritarian organisational cultures have left an unfortunate legacy. There is a lack of critical analysis and pragmatism and a dearth of *tailored* capacity building interventions. Far too often, focus on implementing and reporting on projects distracts attention from the need to develop local capacity.

The paper — which was written by an experienced local practitioner — emphasises that effective capacity building relies on responding to the culture and context in which work is undertaken. It argues that approaches and methods utilised must be flexible, appropriate and context specific.

Acknowledgments

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Lola Abdusalyamova

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1 Introduction

This Praxis Paper explores the origins and practical applications of capacity building approaches in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan** and, hopefully, contributes to better understanding of constraints to development of civil society organisations (CSOs) in ex-Soviet states. Rather than providing a fully representative description and analysis of CSO development, the paper explores successes and failures and examines organisational capacity building issues facing local CSOs. It provides practical recommendations for future regional capacity building as well as replicable lessons for capacity building elsewhere.

The choice of focus on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was to provide an overview of capacity building in two very different nations. Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest Central Asian states. Kazakhstan, by contrast, is classified by the World Bank as middle income, a status which may result in termination of donor funding. The aim of our study was not to provide a comparative analysis between the two nations, but, rather, to use them in order to present an overview of capacity building which is relevant to the whole region and reflects its diversity of civil society development.

The paper begins with background information on Central Asia (Section 2) and analysis of the evolution and current context of civil society in the region (Section 3). It goes on to detail capacity building actors and their activities (Section 4). Key issues and challenges are explored in the fifth section, before presentation of conclusions (Section 6).

The paper stresses that effective capacity building relies on responding to the culture and context in which work is undertaken. Approaches and methods must be flexible, appropriate and context specific. Local NGOs and those who help them need holistic whole-organisation approaches. They must find better ways to reflect on, and challenge, existing and established ways of working.

The paper is one of a series of Praxis Papers, *Recognising and Responding to Culture and Context*, which offer geographical reflections of capacity building practice.¹ INTRAC's Praxis Programme aims to enable CSOs to more effectively fulfil their mission through increased generation, access to, and exchange of, innovative and contextually appropriate practice and research in organisational capacity building. The author advances these aspirations by exploring how the notion of capacity

¹ Previous papers in the series have examined contextual influences on capacity building in France (Praxis Paper 1 'Capacity Building from a French Perspective', Sorgenfrei, 2004), Spain (Praxis Paper 5 'NGO Capacity Building: Perspectives from the NGO Sector in Spain', Hursey, 2005), Iran (Praxis Paper 8 'Building Organisational Capacity in Iranian Civil Society: Mapping the Progress of CSOs', Squire, 2006) and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (Praxis Paper 9 'Civil Society Capacity Building in Post-Conflict Societies: The Experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo', Sterland, 2006).

building is understood and applied in practice in Central Asia. She proceeds to suggest globally applicable insights relevant to strengthening CSOs elsewhere.

The paper is based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in September 2005 with local NGOs, the support organisations which are helping them build capacity, INGOs and with donors. Our dialogues focused on exploring the experience of both recipients and providers of capacity building services and identifying lessons learnt in how to build real capacity. Our information and analysis was strengthened by analysis of the, relatively small, amount of available documentation on the region. (The methodology is further described in appendix 1.)

Lola Abdusalyamova, from Uzbekistan, has worked with CSOs throughout Central Asia for over a decade. From 2001 to 2005 she was INTRAC country manager for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and is now an INTRAC Associate. Lola drew deeply on her knowledge and experience of the region to write this paper. She hopes it may offer an insight into the challenges of organisational capacity building in Central Asia.

2 Background to Central Asia

This section sketches relevant events in the history of Central Asia, particularly **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan**, which are required in order to analyse the emergence and development of civil society and the environment in which it now operates.

The populations of **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** in 2005 were approximately 15 million and five million respectively. Both countries are multi-ethnic as a result of a series of migrations resulting from Stalin's purges, collectivisation-induced famine, Second World War evacuations, post-war deportations of those alleged to have collaborated with Nazi Germany and migration of those who responded to Soviet calls to settle the 'Virgin Lands' of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Soviet ideology depicted diverse nationalities living together in harmony but inter-ethnic frictions periodically surfaced, including tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern **Kyrgyzstan** in 1990. Today many people are bilingual. Russian was taught alongside national languages in the Soviet era and has become the lingua franca in urban areas — a factor helping to contribute to urban/rural differences. Most people are Muslim, predominantly Sunni but with a Shī'a minority in Tajikistan. Islam has become a renewed source of identity in the post-Soviet era as new mosques have opened and suppressed Sufi orders have re-emerged. The main Christian denominations are Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox.

2.1 Pre-Soviet Era

Central Asia was long dominated by nomadic horsemen. When charismatic leaders persuaded tribes to unite their forces they had an impact on settled peoples over a vast area. Genghis Khan, who united the tribes of Mongolia, and Timur (a Turkic leader known in the West as Tamerlane) conquered Central Asia, and many areas beyond, in the fourteenth century. Dominance of the nomads ended in the sixteenth century as the use of gunpowder and modern weaponry allowed settled people to defeat the steppe horsemen and gain control of the region.

Turkestan was an important strategic region for Tsarist Russia as trade routes joined Russia to the northwest frontiers of British India. Russian expansion in Central Asia was driven by military logic and the 'Great Game' with Britain for regional influence. By the end of the nineteenth century the Tsarist state had come to dominate most of Central Asia. Kazakhstan came under complete Russian control while the rest of the region was sub-divided into a series of small Khanates (including those of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand) which became Russian vassals.

Russian expropriation of Kazakh steppes did not go uncontested. There were several Kazakh revolts against Russian rule. Indigenous people were not considered full Russian citizens, did not receive the privileges associated with the status but also

were not obliged to perform military service. Attempts to conscript Kazakhs into army labour units in 1916 led to an anti-Russian uprising which was brutally suppressed.

Turkestan occupied a significant economic niche in the Russian Empire, especially as cotton became an important commodity following disruption to US supplies as a result of the American Civil War. Large swathes of land formerly utilised and owned by nomads became state property. The Tsarist state promoted programmes to encourage migration of Russians from destitute rural areas where arable land was in short supply. Annexation of Central Asia to Imperial Russia was followed by an influx of Russian goods, technical equipment, railway projects and expansion of manufacturing, most significantly cotton. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917 Central Asia was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

2.2 The Soviet Era

From the birth of the Soviet Union in 1922 until its collapse in 1991 the four Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan — the area which under the Tsar had been known as the Governorate-General of Turkestan — were formally part of the Soviet system. Kazakhstan, by contrast was usually described as a separate region. Under the USSR's Centrally Planned Economy System the union was divided into 18 economic zones. The Central Asian zone included the four other republics, while Kazakhstan constituted a zone in its own right.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union had multiple functions, determining all internal and external policy decisions and ensuring it was mandatory for all national governments to implement policy. The economy was centrally planned and directed. The state owned many enterprises and gained considerable market influence as a result of industrialisation as industries throughout the Soviet republics linked up. Central Asia's principal function was to supply raw materials. The legacy of this period helps explain contemporary events. The roots of many differences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be traced back to the Soviet era, a contrast between the rapidly industrialising and urbanised Kazakhstan and the more rural Kyrgyzstan.

In all five Central Asian Republics agriculture remained the key livelihoods source for a large proportion of the population. Land management underwent a number of reforms, including collectivisation in the mid-1930s. Russia's peasantry, and in particular those dubbed 'kulaks' (by virtue of owning larger farms and employing hired labour) were most resistant to the reforms. Forced to give up their private plots and work for collective farms, they had to sell their produce to the state at artificially low and centrally determined rates. Nomadic life was dramatically altered as rangelands and livestock were confiscated and nomads urged to sedentarise. Those who refused to do so left in their thousands as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz migrated to other regions of Central Asia such as China and Mongolia.

It is generally agreed the Soviet era brought about significant growth, transforming Central Asia from an underdeveloped peasant region to a network of sovereign republics with developed industrial economies. The Soviet Union built physical and social infrastructure, made rail and air transport available and oversaw impressive achievements in public education, leaving the region at independence a literacy rate of 90%. The state-guaranteed public health system eradicated widespread diseases such as typhus, cholera and malaria. Women had equal access to education, rights to employment and participation in social life.

2.3 The Late 1980s and the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The centrally planned economy continued until the late 1980s when it was challenged by Mikhail Gorbachev. The last Soviet leader introduced fundamental reforms. *Perestroika* (economic restructuring) was linked, to general public acclaim, to a new policy of *glasnost* which pledged to make space for open debate and transparency. Gorbachev proposed participation of the Soviet people in economic development and restructuring. Such freedom of expression had been unthinkable in even the most recent past. A series of amendments to USSR's constitution opened space for a multi-party system and political pluralism. As the Communist Party lost its control of the media an atmosphere of free speech allowed criticism of government. Journalists and writers began to reveal the horrors of the Stalinist era and to highlight festering social and economic problems long ignored or covered up by Soviet leaders. Key issues of housing, food shortages, alcoholism and environmental pollution could now be discussed and publicly debated. As anti-government discontent spread across the Soviet Union in 1986 young ethnic Kazakhs organised demonstrations in the (then) Kazakh capital, Almaty. Resistance was sparked by Moscow's appointment of a Russian as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Suddenly the Soviet Union's bright public image was no more. Illusions of the official media had been exposed and negative aspects of Soviet life come to the fore. Disillusionment and the effects of economic crisis began to undermine public faith in the communist system and led to its final collapse in 1991.

2.4 The Post-Soviet Period

In 1990 both **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** declared their sovereignty and became, along with other countries in the region independent states. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are now permanent members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an alliance formed by 11 former Soviet Republics. All the ex-Soviet republics inherited economies not designed to function outside a centrally directed system. Traditional supplier-producer relationships broke down and unemployment soared. A dramatic reduction of state public services led to deterioration of living standards, especially in rural areas.

Each of the five Central Asian republics had different methods and resources to cope and to plan future development. They all suddenly faced massive tasks of nation building and forging viable economies in a region previously structured around specialised production for the larger Soviet economy (Giffen et al 2005). Many sought to do so by restructuring centrally planned economies to market economies through privatisation of state-owned production units and land.

Kazakhstan has had significant economic growth, mainly due to large reserves of gas, oil and minerals. In comparison with other Central Asian nations overall living standards are high. However, economic liberalisation has led to inequalities and increased poverty in both rural and urban areas (UNDP, 2004). There is a significant Russian population, mainly in the north of the country and in larger cities.

Kyrgyzstan is one of Central Asia's poorest states. It is a landlocked country and the major economic and demographic centres are widely separated by mountains. In the northern Chui valley and the southern Fergana valley there are substantial communities of ethnic Uzbeks. Highly dependent on state subsidies, Kyrgyzstan's economy was greatly affected by the loss of trading markets following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Both **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**, in contrast to other Central Asian states, are relatively more reform-minded, have an independent media and are multi-party democracies. NGOs and civil society have been generally allowed to freely develop over the past decade.²

2.5 The War on Terror and Islamic Extremism

Central Asia has always been of strategic interest, situated as it is on ancient trade routes and living in proximity to a series of great Eurasian powers. US analysts argue that the regions' energy resources and location make it a potential point of conflict with Russia and China. Its long, mountainous borders provide openings for entry of radicalism from Iran and Afghanistan and transshipment of arms and drugs (USAID, 2000). Central Asia became a hive of activity following the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001. The US targeted Afghanistan for invasion, reconstruction and drug eradication. A string of US military bases have been established in Uzbekistan³ and Kyrgyzstan as a part of the 'war on terror'.

Isolated from traditional contacts with the rest of the Muslim world for the seven decades of communist rule, Central Asian Muslims now have the opportunity to study abroad, particularly in Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. As in other regions religious literature from the wider Islamic world has become available. Some propagate a very different form of Islam. Wahhabism — a legalistic and puritanical

² USAID's Assistance Strategy for Central Asia 2001-2005

³ In 2005 the US military base was removed following a breakdown in relations with the Uzbek government

theology which prohibits television, music, photography and any visual representation of living forms — has gained a foothold.

Fears of Islamic extremism have led Central Asian governments to revert to Soviet patterns of control over religion. In Kyrgyzstan restrictions have been mainly aimed at religious movements such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, an underground political group seeking to replace the existing countries of Central Asia with an Islamic caliphate. The International Crisis Group has shown how governments in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan monitor mosques and view expression of any religious elements as an overt threat to the regime's secular nature (ICG, 2003).

3 Civil Society in Central Asia

3.1 History and Evolution

In the pre-Soviet period economic and social life was organised around clans, tribes and communities of neighbours. As Milienkontakt (2004) notes, private ownership, free self-ruling cities and commodity-money relations did not exist in pre-Soviet Central Asia, depriving the new states of foundations for democracy and civil society. In traditionally nomadic communities kin-based bonds regulated relations with the outside world and provided a guarantee of physical security. Tsarist leaders and officials were apprehensive of Islam, fearing its potential to unite Muslim opinion in the region. They recognised, however, the obedience of the Muslim masses could only be obtained with the support of religious leaders. Religious leaders thus played a prominent role in informing public opinion. Islamic courts and education systems remained intact throughout the pre-Soviet era.

The Soviet government, with its powerful ruling Communist Party, played a significant role in determining, as well as leading, 'civil society'. Throughout Central Asia 'volunteer associations', part-owned by the Soviet state, were coordinated by centralised bodies with clear-cut values and defined goals (UNDP 2002). They linked recreational groups, consumers' co-operatives, trade unions and professional societies. It was compulsory to belong to a trade union or a professional association. Those who worked for state-run enterprises were offered incentives such as vouchers for medical treatment in a sanatorium, holiday tours, free or subsidised Pioneers' Camps for children, occupation of a state-owned apartment or permission to buy a car. Membership was a means of rewards and punishments. Communist ideology penetrated all voluntary organisations. It was accompanied by a firm censorship policy and harassment of faith-based associations or opposition movements. The most ideological organisations were the Leninist Young Communist League (*Komsomol*) and the Pioneers' League (for children aged 10–14). The secondary education system served to train future loyal leaders of trade unions, *Komsomol* and the Communist Party.

Perestroika and *glasnost* promoted pluralism, allowing people to unite together to express different political views and to give birth to an authentic civil society. Bottom-up citizen-led initiatives and public associations emerged. They provided entry points for active non-governmental involvement in awareness raising and lobbying for enforcement of international conventions (ACT CA, 2003). Today the political movements that aimed to popularise communist ideology among Soviet youth have withered away. However, a whole range of largely unreconstructed public organisations — such as the societies of disabled people, unions of composers or writers and sport clubs — still function in contemporary Central Asia. Alongside

them have grown new forms of public organisations including NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and self-governing institutions.⁴

During the period when most post-Soviet countries were keen to democratise the idea of an NGO was unknown. There was a lack of understanding of the role and purpose of NGOs, most of which were primarily supported by international donors. Introduced by Western donors, the term 'non-governmental organisation' was often seen a pre-condition for democratic transformation. Much of the recent growth in CSOs, including both NGOs and other citizens' organisations, is the result of international influence.

The definition of NGOs used by Kazakh researchers — 'open, not-for-profit civil society organisations which are not occupationally specific and do not seek state power' (UNDP 2002:11) — is common throughout the region. It reflects discussions on how to classify NGOs at a Regional Conference of Central Asian NGOs in 1995.⁵ It should be noted that this definition excludes both trade unions and political parties from civil society. The majority of NGOs emerging after independence were service providers, replacing former social service provision institutions destroyed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s NGOs were primarily seen as bodies undertaking functions no longer performed by government agencies.

Many NGOs in Central Asia were established and led by highly educated people. By joining NGOs, many individuals, especially women with leadership skills and a management background, found pathways to self-realisation and professional development. For some individuals, membership of NGOs became the only way to cope with the growing economic, social and psychological stresses of post-Soviet life.

3.2 Current Context and Characteristics of Civil Society

This section investigates three dimensions of civil society:

1. the diversity and main types of CSOs in the two countries (and Central Asia in general)
2. their size, components and funding
3. the environment in which civil society operates (legal, political, fiscal and socio-cultural) and the impact it has had on development, rights and welfare provision.⁶

⁴ Central governments adopted a strategy of decentralization and development of local self-governance. As a result, self-governing institutions emerged in each country in different forms. For example, in Uzbekistan a Citizens' Assembly called the Makhalla Committee and in Kyrgyzstan a Public Self-Governing Board called the *ayil okmotu* were formed.

⁵ Sponsored by USAID, the regional conference on NGO legislation had a decisive impact on development of NGO legislation in each of the Central Asian states.

⁶ These dimensions are based on the CIVICUS framework of the dimensions of civil society. See CIVICUS' Civil Society Index see Holloway (2001) and Hienrich (2004).

3.2.1 Diversity and Funding of CSOs

It is difficult to judge how many active actors are in the NGO sector. In 2004 there were 8,000 registered NGOs in **Kyrgyzstan** of which about 2,000 were active, and a similar number in **Kazakhstan** of which only half were active (USAID 2004). The manner in which easy access to donor funds has spurred rapid growth of NGOs raises concern. In **Kyrgyzstan** there are jokes that each community will soon have its own NGO. There are grave doubts about their sustainability. As in many other countries, NGOs in Central Asia primarily depend on external donor assistance. Only a few have demonstrated capacity to raise funds from fee-based and other sources.

Legal frameworks generally allow NGOs to receive government funding and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to participate in public procurement procedures (Moore, 2004). However, many NGOs complain that most state funding goes to quasi-NGOs, state-sponsored organisations linked to government officials and created by government institutions in order to access public funds and state subsidies. In **Kazakhstan** such government-created associations are far better positioned to obtain state contracts to deliver social services. There are risks in funding some NGOs while spurning others (UNDP, 2002).

Organisational capacity, the size of their assets and the public image of NGOs have improved in both countries. More and more NGOs have the know-how to provide services and to tap into local resources. As a result the sector has expanded its focus of activities, moving beyond social service delivery (although NGOs with this focus remain most common) to advocacy and human rights protection.

The term 'community based organisation' is of recent origin in Central Asia. More common in the 1990s were references to 'initiative groups' of like-minded people coming together to tackle local issues or traditional mutual help groups with various purposes and functions. Community groups are usually less formal than NGOs, generally lacking written mission statements, formal structures and systems. Studies carried out by INTRAC in the region in 2003–04 suggested the best local definition of a CBO to be 'a group of people living in the same locality who organise for their common interests (as opposed to a NGO which operates for a wider network)'. (Buxton and Prewitt 2004: 8). The success of a CBO often depends on its leader and in particular his/her level of education and experience. Close collaboration with local government is crucial. CBOs are often considered as competitors, even when their leader has been elected by community members with the approval of local officials. However, in some cases CBO leaders (such as the local self-governing institutions in Kyrgyzstan) also occupy senior positions in the local administration. This may lead to dual loyalties and confusion over whether they represent the government or a CBO. There is current debate in **Kyrgyzstan's** civil society over whether NGOs should work directly with local administrations and spurn those bogus CBOs used by officials to funnel donor funds for their own purposes.

There are many differences in how NGOs operate in the region. In **Kyrgyzstan** a disproportionately large number of major NGOs are based in the capital, Bishkek, while in **Kazakhstan** the first NGOs emerged in Almaty and other developed administrative centres. Though still overwhelmingly concentrated in cities and towns the NGO community is gradually expanding into rural areas. This is particularly rapid in Kyrgyzstan as a result of donor targetting of support to strengthen citizens' groups in small towns and villages. NGOs have thus become active in creating rural CBOs and encouraging their involvement in local development and service delivery (Herman, 2004).

Another important factor influencing civil society dynamics in both countries is tribe and clan relationships. These are particularly strong in rural communities and in southern **Kyrgyzstan**. Solidarity and trust between villagers in remote areas far from the capital, Bishkek, means that an individual approach can be used when reaching out to poor families and collecting contributions for joint community initiatives. Age and seniority are of great importance in rural societies. In **Kyrgyzstan** community decisions are often made by those representing powerful groups, while socially vulnerable groups — such as the young, women or poor families — are often excluded from decision making processes.

3.2.2 Civil Society's Operating Environment

The legal framework regulating the activities of public or social organisations in the Soviet Union was based on a decree on Volunteer Associations and Unions adopted in 1932 (Karimov Sh. 2004). In 1989 a new law on Public Associations was adopted providing a general legal framework for non-profit and membership-based organisations and associations. This formed the basis of similar laws adopted in the Central Asian Republics following the collapse of the Soviet Union. **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan** each adopted a law on non-commercial organisations, in 1999 and 2001 respectively, which regulate the various forms of CSOs (Borjelli 2005). As the definition of non-governmental and non-commercial organisations excludes political parties, trade unions and religious organisations they have their own separate regulatory frameworks. According to the International Centre for Not-for Profit Law (ICNL),⁷ **Kyrgyz** Law on Non-Commercial Organisations creates the most favourable environment within the region. It permits organisations to operate without registration, and if they choose to do so within 10 days to pay no fee.

Attempts have been made by the government in **Kyrgyzstan** to formulate a separate law relating to CBOs. A campaign organised by leading NGOs successfully blocked this by pointing out contradictions with other regulatory documents, the unclear status of organisations described in the law and the degree of authority given to local administrations to control CBOs (InterBilim, 2004). A new law on CBOs

⁷ See <http://www.icnl.org>

is unlikely to create favourable conditions for their development. While it may legalise their ability to raise income, it may also make them liable to expenditure tax. Civil society in **Kazakhstan** is concerned about defining the status of CBOs under the current legislation. For once they are officially registered they are deemed to have become NGOs and thus lose their previous status and character as informal CBOs.

NGO relations with government have evolved from subservience to collaborative partnerships now that it is recognised NGOs reach a large proportion of the population. Governments tend to be more supportive of those NGOs engaged in service delivery (filling gaps in state social protection), but less well disposed towards those advocating respect for human rights. The global threat of terrorism, and the knock-on effects of the 'colour revolutions' — the Rose revolution which toppled Eduard Shevardnadze as Georgian President in 2003, the Orange Revolution protesting electoral fraud in Ukraine in 2004 and the Tulip Revolution, the anti-government protests which followed disputed election in **Kyrgyzstan** in March 2005 have soured NGO–government relations across the region. Many local politicians argue these events could not have taken place without the support of international and local NGOs, particularly blaming the Soros Foundation for financing the Georgian opposition. Amidst this climate of mistrust the government of **Kazakhstan** took steps to increase control of NGOs, particularly those working on human rights issues. Many commentators note that a recently introduced national security policy gives the authorities more freedom to control NGOs, especially those receiving funding from foreign NGOs. This has negatively impacted the work of those NGOs which focus on strengthening democracy and monitoring election processes.

3.2.3 Contribution of Civil Society to Development

Following independence the emergent civil society sought to fill the gap left by Soviet social services, protect civil rights and address growing income inequalities and poverty. Table 1 provides a summary of the areas in which CSOs are working in Kazakhstan. This can be considered as representative of CSO activities throughout the region.

Due to the paucity of data it is hard to quantify the economic impact of CSOs on development processes. It is clear, however, that NGOs have helped improve the lives of ordinary people. They are ensuring aid reaches beneficiaries in genuine need. Many NGOs in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan work closely with their target groups, assess their needs and flexibly respond to them. NGOs provide moral support and unite people with similar problems, build their self-confidence and engage them in self-help activities. Local NGOs have helped citizens to become more active and better informed about civil rights and opportunities. CSOs are playing a key role in mobilising local communities around such issues as social service provision and environmental protection.

Table 1: Activity of the NGO sector in Kazakhstan (adapted from idc. 2002)

Activity Focus	Types of activities
Human Rights	Human rights protection (political rights); consumers' rights; rights of national and sexual minorities; rights of disabled people; information; participation in policy debates; monitoring of Human Rights
Gender	Feminism; problems faced by single mothers, internally displaced women and disabled women; sexual and domestic violence; development of female leadership and entrepreneurship; access to information
Poverty alleviation	Support to socially excluded people; small business development; equal access to resources; development of a culture of charity giving and philanthropy; information; research; participation in policy debates; monitoring and evaluation
Drug addiction	Preventive measures; promoting healthy lifestyles; rehabilitation centres; information; monitoring
AIDS/HIV	Preventive measures and promoting healthy lifestyles; social and psychological rehabilitation centres; information and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (with special focus on labour migrants); information dissemination and monitoring
Environment	Education and access to information; biodiversity; protection of water resources; development of new technologies; monitoring
Culture	Independent art galleries and contemporary art centres; folklore theatre and dance, literature and crafts
Agriculture	Organic farming; new technologies; access to credit and information; development of small and medium entrepreneurship in rural areas
Youth and Children	Leadership development; protection of children's rights and development of juvenile jurisprudence; access to information
Education	Development of creativeness; alternative education; development of holistic approaches to education
Health	Identifying and maintaining healthy lifestyles; Reproductive and sexual health and rights; formation and development of local professional associations of health workers; preventive measures against TB, AIDS/HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases and drug addiction
Others	Development and strengthening of civil society organisations; conflict prevention and cross-border issues

Without public awareness regarding rights and opportunities citizens cannot participate in change. NGOs are facilitating their entry into political, economic and social spheres and encouraging them to shape their own futures.

Local NGOs must consider how to integrate democratic norms and values while promoting dialogue between citizens and government. Progress is being made. Unlike their counterparts in neighbouring countries local NGOs in **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** are increasingly involved in the development of good governance, public participation mechanisms and procedures to hold governments to account. The box below illustrates the achievements of **Kazakh** NGOs in the development of accountability and public participation.

Three mechanisms of public participation in Kazakhstan

Civil society representatives' participation in drafting legislation at national, regional, and local levels. Representatives of NGOs are increasingly involved in consultative bodies helping draft new laws.

Consideration by the government of civil society initiatives. The most recent example is the decision by the Kazakh president to retract a proposed law on NGO in the face of concerted opposition by a wide range of NGOs across the country in 2005.

Participation of NGO representatives in councils situated within the executive. NGOs helped to create, and for the past three years have participated in Cooperation Councils that operate in five Oblasts (Provinces) of Kazakhstan. They advise the government on strategies of cooperation with civil society. Three NGOs (Confederation of NGOs of Kazakhstan, Diabetic Association of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Consumers Rights' Protection League) were included in the National Council, the presidential advisory board.

Source: Ovcharenko, V. (2005)

4 Capacity Building in Central Asia

Amongst the respondents and organisations consulted for this paper, capacity was defined as knowledge, skills, experience and the ability to transfer these to others. In Russian capacity can be translated as 'potential' or 'opportunity'. While the former can refer to factors both inside and outside of an organisation, the latter refers specifically to the external environment. It includes opportunities for self-help groups (SHGs) to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable people and scope for communities to forge effective coalitions to solve local problems.

In both **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan** *capacity building* was defined in a number of ways. Some find it hard to describe and see capacity building as anything that ensures the sustainability of organisation. Other use the term to refer to an agency's potential to operate in multiple arenas and to identify and grasp opportunities. Others see it in terms of organisational potential and enhanced ability to achieve set goals.

Two dimensions were specifically mentioned by those we interviewed: capacity building of organisations and of networks. Respondents' understanding of capacity building was closely connected to the actual work of the organisations interviewed. Many were involved in either training or consultancy for agency clients or engaged in network development. It must be recognised that capacity building takes place at a number of levels — individual, organisational, inter-organisational and societal.

1. **Capacity building of individuals.** For many who grew up in a society dominated by the top-down Soviet approach to development it is a challenge to adopt new ways of planning and management. Capacity building at the individual level means developing skills and acquiring new knowledge and experience required for personal and organisational development. However, changing people's mentality and ways of thinking is problematic. In addition to CSO workers, the primary beneficiaries of individual capacity building activities are the poor and disadvantaged. It is essential that they go on to develop self-confidence, new values and leadership skills. For without them they cannot play a stronger role in shaping their communities and achieving their basic rights.
2. **Organisational capacity building** refers to the development of organisational potential, how to strengthen and sustain organisations while ensuring that learning and increased capacity is integrated into an organisation's way of working. It includes:
 - strengthening of internal potential (strategy, systems, culture and resources)
 - developing core human resources and building ancillary financial, human resource management and quality assurance systems
 - systematic analysis of an organisation's performance

- effective institutional development, particularly external relationships with government, the business community, NGOs and communities.
3. **Capacity building of networks.** Competition for donor funds and lack of understanding and relevant skills in network development hindered early attempts to establish associations or networks of NGOs in Central Asia. However, today both **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** have many active NGO networks, many directly initiated and established with donor support. For example, the USAID Mission in Central Asia has developed a network of 'resource centres'; intermediate support organisations (ISOs), in each country. ISOs support and sustain the NGO sector and help CSOs engage more effectively with local communities.

Those involved in NGO networks saw capacity building as:

- development of networks of organisations, associations able to address common problems through joint projects, research, monitoring, and lobbying
 - strengthening the capacity of networks through sharing information, consultancy opportunities and training sessions
 - strengthening relationships and networks with stakeholders.
4. **Capacity building at community/societal level.** Unlike elsewhere in Central Asian some capacity building interventions in **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** have sought to enhance the ability of CSOs to take part in national level policy debates and processes of democratic reforms. Many international donors are increasingly focusing on community-based initiatives aimed at creating opportunities for local communities to make decisions and to develop a sense of ownership of development interventions. The thrust of community capacity building is to strengthen communities' ability to assess their own priorities and design and manage community action plans to address identified community needs.

An approach, particularly pursued in **Kyrgyzstan**, is encouraging individuals to group into democratically self-governing community organisations. Atwood (2001) has drawn attention to the range of organised groups, including CBOs, SHGs and Village Banks supported by donors. The focus of such interventions is often to provide training and micro-credit to assist groups to organise and manage collective safety nets and income generation activities. A World Bank study (2002) highlights that there are many potential community recipients in need of capacity building help. In some cases they are groups external to the community, such as intermediary organisations, NGOs, Project Management

Units and Project Implementation Units.⁸ They can also be local institutions within the community or newly created community-based groups.

4.1 Capacity Building Actors and Activities

The emergence of capacity building activities in Central Asia, and the cast of actors involved, has developed and changed over the years. In the early days there was considerable external support and influence — principally from Counterpart International, USAID and INTRAC — to develop local capability and expertise. Today there are a number of capacity building actors, some involved in direct provision while others provide support functions. There are in addition a range of academic institutions and private consultancy firms and business training centres⁹ whose activities could not be analysed due to time constraints.

4.1.1 Bilateral and Multilateral Agencies

A key group of stakeholders involved in supporting capacity building such agencies as the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), USAID and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Their investment in capacity building initiatives has been an integral part of their overall development assistance. The capacity building activities they have enabled have not been confined to civil society.

USAID is one of the key funding agencies of civil society development programmes in Central Asia. USAID aims to build strong and sustainable organisations able to play a crucial role in democratic development processes in transition countries. Their recent strategy has focused on strengthening the institutional, financial and representative capacity of a limited number of leading organisations who receive support on democratic governance, membership and constituency outreach, financial management and advocacy.

The **World Bank** contributes to capacity building at all levels: to agencies of central and local government; intermediary agencies such as NGOs and at community level. It supports local development processes that enhance good governance and civic participation in policy debates and decision-making. A specific component of World Bank funded poverty reduction programmes is promotion of community-driven development in order to ensure that community capacity is built on the back of project-based activities.

UNDP plays an important role in complementing the efforts of Central Asian governments to reduce poverty. UNDP is engaged in national development

⁸ For large community-based projects the financing agencies (e.g. UNDP and the World Bank) have tended to create local Project Management Units or Project Implementation Units for the lifetime of the project.

⁹ Lack of time meant that their activities could not be analysed for this paper.

programmes which include strengthening of, and support to, civil society as a channel for citizens' participation and human rights advocacy. In **Kyrgyzstan** UNDP focuses on the formation and development of SHGs and CSO capacity building (see box below).

UNDP — Self-Help Groups and Micro-Finance Institution Capacity Building

In 1998 UNDP in **Kyrgyzstan** introduced the concept of SHGs as an effective form of CBO able to tackle poverty through encouragement and promotion of income-generation activities. The main capacity building activities have been training sessions on how to set up village SHGs. Each newly created SHG passes through a cycle: initial formation of SHGs; establishment of SHG associations (SHGAs) and, finally, establishment of dedicated bodies providing specialist services to members and the wider community (UNDP 2003a:4).

Another capacity building programme implemented by UNDP has been the strengthening of micro-finance institutions in rural areas in **Kyrgyzstan**. This has involved training the Micro-credit Agency (MCA)¹⁰ in law, accountancy, financial management, management of micro-credit and formulation of project proposals. Advanced business and human resource management training has been provided for managers. (UNDP 2003b: 15).

4.1.2 International NGOs

Until recently, capacity building of CSOs in Central Asia was the domain of INGOs working to help post-Soviet countries build democratic societies. As civil society develops, interactive training and exchange visits are occurring among newly established NGOs and coming to public attention. As most recently established NGOs are involved in service provision their capacity building interventions have had a very narrow focus on strengthening the ability of organisations to implement projects funded by donors. With increasing recognition of the role of CSOs as catalysts for democratisation there has been diversification in the kind of capacity building undertaken.

One of the pioneers of capacity building work in the region was **Counterpart International**, which joined with ICNL in 1994 to launch a USAID-funded NGO development programme. Responding to local NGOs' emerging needs, it aimed to provide an integrated package of services including training, technical assistance and small grants. Within the region there is widespread recognition of Counterpart International's pivotal role in the development of civil society. A number of local organisations regard it with gratitude as the mentor who guided their initial steps.

¹⁰ MCA's are specialised credit institutions established as non-commercial organisations. They must have a certificate from the National Bank to issue micro-credit to people and/or entities from their own funds.

Through the training of local trainers Counterpart International has contributed to the popularisation of interactive methods for teaching adults. It has forged a cadre of local trainers who have become proficient in designing and delivering training for CSO capacity building. Its activities were initially focused on developing basic project management skills but have expanded to consultancy on organisational and institutional development.

Another influential INGO is **INTRAC** (The International Training and Research Centre). Active in the region since 1995, it has built partnerships with a number of indigenous NGO support organisations, helping them to strengthen their capacity and improve performance. INTRAC is noted for disseminating innovative approaches to training and capacity building. Their use of modular courses combining theory and practice has enabled participants to apply skills and knowledge acquired over a period of time within a supported framework. In particular, the Education Training Support Programme (ETSP), a programme of five three-day training modules, enabled organisations to go beyond simply seeing themselves as service providers, to explore the role of NGOs and realise the importance of staff development. In the process they have developed better understanding of key NGO organisational issues, practical skills for working with CSOs, and learned how to think critically.¹¹

There is high recognition of the non-monetary inputs that INGOs and international volunteers have provided, imparting appropriate knowledge, skills and expertise to fledgling CSOs and their leaders. For example the volunteers of **Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)**, **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**, and the **Peace Corps** have had a huge impact on NGOs and their organisational performance. **UNV** has been involved in strengthening NGO networks and encouraging volunteerism in **Kyrgyzstan** and neighbouring countries. UNV volunteers have helped build skills in participatory development and encouraged their use in poverty reduction programmes.

4.1.3 Local Organisations

As noted, as a result of INGO interventions a number of local support organisations have emerged. There has been an encouraging increase in the number of organisations able to contribute to the development and strengthening of civil society through resource centres and specialised support. Their further development is crucial to ensure continued provision of capacity building expertise once INGOs withdraw from the region. The rapid growth of civil society throughout the region has led to greater need to develop and strengthen NGO support organisations.

¹¹ See final evaluation of ETSP, Barbara Brubacher, INTRAC, 2004

Civil Society Support Centres (CSSCs)

In the last five years one of the core activities of Counterpart International has been the establishment of 33 **Civil Society Support Centres (CSSCs)** throughout Central Asia and formation of Associations of CSSCs in both **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**, CSSCs have enabled emerging organisations, especially in remote areas, to benefit from Counterpart International's training and consultancy services hitherto only available to urban-based NGOs. In addition, it was a major step forward to develop local institutions with a particular expertise in providing support services to CSOs.

Some CSSCs developed from existing local NGOs that had already acquired multi-task capacities while others were created from scratch. CSSCs advise local CSOs and groups intending to register as organisations. In the early stages CSSC support was generally confined to training, dissemination of information, consultancy on project design and technical assistance in proposal writing. Today, however, support packages include nine components. These include organisational development, grant administration and project monitoring and evaluation.

Another example of a donor-initiated local support organisation based in **Kyrgyzstan** is Development and Cooperation in Central Asia (DCCA). Established in 2001, it succeeded Action by Churches Together, Central Asia (ACT CA) that had been acting as an Ecumenical Liaison Office in Kyrgyzstan since 1996. DCCA's activities include training partners in community and organisational development, consultations using international consultants, providing funds to micro-credit groups and networking to promote the self-help concept among local NGOs.

Among the best known local NGO support organisations in Central Asia are Centre InterBilim in **Kyrgyzstan** and Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network (CASDIN)¹² in **Kazakhstan**.

CASDIN

CASDIN has evolved out of an information project implemented by The Foundation for Ecological Education, a public association founded by young scientists and students in 1991. Since 1994 CASDIN has been working as an information network for environmentally focused NGOs in Central Asia. Support has now expanded to include NGOs working in other spheres. In 1998 CASDIN was formally registered and became a national NGO support organisation providing training, consultancy and information. CASDIN's newsletter *Sustainable Development* is widely read among organisations throughout the region. CASDIN currently focuses on building the capacity of NGOs working with socially excluded people in southern **Kazakhstan**.

¹² See <http://www.casdin.freenet.kz> or <http://www.casdin.os.kz>

4.2 Impact of Capacity Building

Early capacity building activities were mainly aimed at building skills and knowledge of NGO staff in relation to project management and donor relations. There was focus on training in project design, strategic planning, social partnership, fundraising, needs assessment and proposal development. At this time newly emerged NGOs were mainly problem and/or donor-driven. They did not systematically assess changes induced by capacity building practice. It was thus difficult to find details of concrete changes occurring at either organisational or civil society levels. The only exception being results from USAID's annual NGO Sustainability Index conducted in each Central Asian country.

Today, following investments in NGO training and professional growth by international donors and INGOs *organisational* capacity has improved. Though many NGOs are still to a large extent project-driven, and have weak institutional capacity a number of more mature organisations have begun to emerge. Such NGOs have professional staff, well-established management systems and functional governing bodies. As USAID (2002) reports, these tend to be NGOs with a more stable funding base. NGOs in long-term relationships with INGOs have been given the space in which to concentrate on development of internal structures and staff development.

Over time NGOs have become more specialised in such development domains as women's rights, the environment and education. Many have gained a reputation for their expertise. They are moving from a focus on narrow problems to broader understanding of the factors that give rise to local poverty (including non-income poverty), social exclusion and vulnerability. As the leader of the Centre Inter-Bilim in Kyrgyzstan has noted: 'NGOs in Central Asia first responded to the problems related to women, the environment and healthcare at micro level... NGOs are now trying to understand the context of the region better: how development is taking place in relation to democratisation, human rights, government behaviour... transparency, issues of corruption, legal processes, donors' influences on the country and so forth'. This is further evidence that capacity building interventions are shifting from basic training on project-related skills to building knowledge around wider development issues.

Capacity building efforts have also had an impact on the external relations of NGOs in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and their ability to participate in policy debates. In 1998 the attempts of Kazakh NGOs to build close contacts with policy makers were more successful at the local level and with parliamentarians than with ministries and staff of the office of the president. However, by 2005 several NGOs had become members of the National Council, a presidential advisory board. This change can be seen a positive illustration of the ability of local NGOs to lobby for their own interests. However, throughout the region it remains the case that advocacy and lobbying efforts are often led by one or two principal NGOs. There

have been many training sessions for NGOs on advocacy and policy dialogue with central government but many local organisations still use their own mechanisms to interact with different tiers of government. Personal relationships with civil servants and leaders remain important. According to USAID (2004) advocacy work is still reactive to bad legislation, and is not yet proactive.

5 Key Issues and Challenges in Capacity Building

Despite the progress made, there are still significant challenges facing Central Asian civil society. Major capacity building needs remain. This section details some of the main issues, challenges and priorities. Based on information gathered in interviews, it highlights common principles which have made capacity building interventions acceptable and applicable, areas in which improvements could be made, challenges faced and areas for future work and development. While this section does not provide a fully representative analysis of issues and challenges faced by civil society, it does offer a starting point for highlighting new priorities and needs and charting the way forward.

Key issues and challenges for capacity building have been divided into four sections:

- **Contextual factors**
- **Internal organisation and functioning**
- **External relations**
- **Capacity building practice**

5.1 Contextual Factors

In Central Asia these include insufficient understanding of civil society legislation, lack of transparency and accountability, lack of financial stability and high dependence on donor support.

1. **Insufficient understanding of civil society legislation.** There is a need to develop understanding of the legal framework within which civil society operates. Regular training is needed for NGO leaders on the legal aspects of running organisations. Urgent attention must be given to issues related to the registration and operation of NGOs, financial management and accountability, ICL has drawn attention to the need for more awareness of the fact that activity by non-registered (informal) public associations remains prohibited in all countries except Kyrgyzstan. Organisations are required to register as local, regional or national entities. The authorities have the right to ban *national* activities of associations not registered as *national* organisations. Research conducted under the Civil Society Watch project¹³ has suggested publishing reference books and practical manuals on NGO management to improve understanding of the impact of local legislation. It is also important to build knowledge of legal frameworks under which microfinance providers have to operate (Lauer K. et al. 2002).
2. **Lack of transparency and accountability** has serious consequences for ill-managed NGOs. It can benefit government or other parties hostile to the non-

¹³ Joint project of the Open Society Institute and Eurasia Foundation on Legal Expertise of the Non-commercial Sector in Kokand (Uzbekistan) 2003

profit sector are make it easier for them to accuse an NGO of association with terrorists and/or money-launderers. NGOs need to build relationships with governments and be transparent and accountable in order to fend off the accusation that they are simply confrontational 'anti-governmental' organisations

3. **Lack of financial stability.** While **Kyrgyzstan** continues to receive international aid assistance through its poverty reduction strategy, many NGOs in **Kazakhstan** expressed profound concern for their financial sustainability in a worsening donor climate. Rapid economic growth in **Kazakhstan** has resulted in the belief amongst donors that opportunities exist for NGO support from business and government. However, there is a lack of effective mechanisms for the promotion of charitable giving; for example, no laws exist for providing tax exemption to charitable donations. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the business sector is weak also. While it is likely to grow, it is uncertain whether businessmen would be willing to provide funding support for the activities of CSOs, particularly for capacity building.
4. **High dependency on donor support.** There is a danger that funding conditions may limit organisational capacity building to areas directly connected to project performance. The real needs of organisations would thus remain undiscussed and neglected.

5.2 Internal Organisation and Functioning

Key issues here relate to debate about knowledge transfer within organisations; management styles and emphasis on the development of individual leaders as opposed to a broader base of those with leadership skills; lack of financial and strategic thinking skills and analytic and adaptive capacities; and, the lack of capacity building specifically tailored to CBOs.

1. **Lack of organisational learning and knowledge transfer.** Individual level capacity building is prevalent in Central Asia and many organisations, who have sufficient funds to pay, send staff to in-house and external training sessions and courses. There is concern, however, whether knowledge and insights from such general training are cascaded down from participants to the wider base of their agency colleagues. How is training applied in practice? Rapid staff turnover in NGOs makes it hard to train and encourage staff who are committed to understanding organisational learning culture. Agencies without an institutional memory risk failure to remember and apply the skills and knowledge they have gained. Many organisations lack a system for regular assessment of organisational training needs. Thus there is rarely appropriate structure for monitoring how new knowledge and skills are being applied in practice, both by individuals and by the organisations that employ them.

2. **Authoritarian organisational culture and management style.** The legacy of authoritarian culture remains prevalent in Central Asia. There are weak linkages between top management and junior staff. Managers place little value in human resource development and have poor relationships with the intended beneficiaries they attempt to support. With a few exceptions, most CSOs are driven by dominant personalities with little or no membership base. Most are averse to instituting democratic forms of governance. According to a UNDP (1998) study, 85 out of 110 NGOs respondents thought that operational management and decision-making power should rest with the leader and one or two permanent staff, including the executive director and bookkeeper. Collective and participatory management principles are unlikely to be applied in organisations as long as the hierarchy of power relations is so stark. It is common to find that NGO leaders who have been trained by the *Komsomol*, Trade Union or Communist Party are the strongest managers. They head relatively well-established organisations and have a range of beneficial external relationships, but discussion of internal problems remains taboo given the level of stifling of critical internal debate. Capacity building efforts need to be developed to address these issues and develop management styles which enhance the effective functioning of organisations.
3. **Over emphasis on the development of leaders?** It is felt by many in the sector that too much attention is being given to developing, leaders rather than the organisations they lead. Some informants emphasised that to build a strong civil society, consisting of organisations, it is important to invest in organisations as well their leadership. Often organisations are perceived as perfectly sound because they have strong leaders who attract donor funds while in reality their long-term future may be bleak. Staff working for civil society organisations may be highly qualified individuals, yet structures to build organisational unity are absent. . It is therefore essential to distinguish between the development of individual leaders and the challenges of ensuring that leadership skills are spread more widely within the organisation. To achieve this it is essential that individual and strategic management competencies, together with the training needs of all staff, should be openly discussed within organisations.
4. **Financial planning shortcomings.** The general lack of financial planning skills has serious consequences, especially when agencies have to plan ahead, forecast annual expenditures and realistically calculate overhead costs. Helping them learn how to do so should be an important focus of capacity building in the region.
5. **Limited vision.** Most CSOs are unable to think long-term and fail to consider the issue of sustainability. They are rarely able to look beyond the current projects they are implementing. In too many case lack of strategic thinking

hinders CSOs from considering themselves as organisations, rather than simply as groups set up for a particular time-bound project.

6. **Lack of analytical and adaptive capacity.** There is evidence that many NGOs are familiar with and frequently use analytical tools in strategic planning or project design. However, they need to strengthen their capacity to analyse and adjust to national, regional and global change. It is necessary to develop critical thinking which enables CSOs to question themselves and the ways in which they operate and to analyse the impact of their activities. In **Kyrgyzstan**, for example, NGOs have the capacity to raise funds for project implementation and to deliver a range of services to targeted clients. However, they rarely take an approach to programming which is based on consultation with their constituencies and an analysis of anticipated social changes (Tretiyakova, 2005). They are so busy with day-to-day work with their constituencies that they have no time in which to analyse how their micro-level activities contribute to development and democratisation initiatives at the national level. Few capacity building programmes focus on needs in this area. The single example is INTRAC's Analytical Skills Programme (ASTP) which assisted a limited number of organisations in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan**. Participants in ASTP found the programme timely and innovative, enabling them to strength their capacity to understand poverty issues and develop better programme strategies based on a critical analysis of their current activities¹⁴ .
7. **Lack of skills to produce analytical research and papers.** Some NGO leaders are active in writing reports, papers and articles on development issues which have been commissioned by international, and particularly UN, agencies. However, many local professionals from research institutions doubt whether most local NGOs have the analytic skills to carry out comprehensive and valid research. The Soros Foundation has begun working on skills for public and social policy development and a new initiative by USAID Central Asia intends to provide assistance to help local NGOs build research capacity.
8. **Lack of appropriate CBO capacity building.** In contrast to, usually more formal NGOs, CBOs are often flexible and informal and organised by community members. They may come or go, form and reform or remain an informal group. Capacity building initiatives undertaken with CBOs as opposed to NGOs need to reflect these different realities and not simply deliver a course identical with those used for NGO workshops. Whist many CBOs in **Kyrgyzstan** demonstrate strong skills in proposal writing and project implementation, their conceptual horizon does not extend beyond projects. They are often incapable of perceiving themselves as organisations which exist in their own right and not just as implementors of donor-funded activities. There must be a holistic approach

¹⁴ See Sorgenfrei, M. (2006)

towards working with CBOs. It is important to consider what makes them special, to encourage them to discuss and debate using understandable language free of complex jargon and terminology. Peer learning techniques must be promoted. (World Bank, 2002).

5.3 External Relations

It is important to understand and enhance the capacity of CSOs to interact and engage with their constituencies and vulnerable groups and to improve CSO networking.

1. **Lack of capacity to engage with local communities.** It is not uncommon in Central Asia for people to join a CSO in expectation of personal gain. Often there is a resulting gap between CSOs and those whose interests they profess to advance. The goals and values of powerful individuals continue to dominate (Tretiyakov, 2005). If CSOs are to be effective, they must have the capacity to build a good relationship with their stakeholders and work with them on genuinely pro-poor interventions.
2. **Lack of outreach to vulnerable groups of the population.** Leaders of NGOs talk much about participation and the mission of a CSO to involve everybody in change processes. They argue that increasing the capacity of community agencies can help 'to lift people up from their knees'. In practice, however, all too often local capacity building activities have failed to change existing practices.
3. **Insufficient capacity for networking.** There are networks coalescing around specific issues — including poverty reduction. There are few NGO associations with broader goals¹⁵ but those who do are demonstrating how membership in networks promotes peer learning, mutual support and improved performance. Sadly, most NGOs in the region have little motivation to work together in networks. Not only do they lack the funds to engage in national-level activities, but they may also lack the skills required to make networks more effective and to reduce damaging competition between civil society actors. Significant investments are being made by development agencies in order to promote the development of associations of CBOs or SHGs both in **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**. It is important to consider the long-term sustainability of networks/associations beyond the current funding phase. Ideally, capacity building interventions should be based on a needs assessment of networks.

¹⁵ For example the regional network 'Ishenim' funded by ICCO; a network of NGOs working with elderly people supported by Help Age International (Resource Centre for Elderly People, UMUT); and, a network of Kyrgyz NGOs supported through Tear Fund.

5.4 Capacity Building Practice

Our discussions highlighted many issues and challenges to capacity building practice in the region. These included: the methods utilised, in particular the focus on one-off training; the lack of linkage between practice and theory; the purpose and focus of capacity building practice; overemphasis on project focused capacity building and lack of donor support for general *organisational* capacity building. There is a need to build capacity of capacity builders, improve organisational capacity assessment skills and undertake more systematic monitoring and evaluation.

1. **High emphasis on training.** Training based on interactive methods is the most popular capacity building approach used. When first introduced into the region it was seen as a major pedagogic advance for adult education. It has diversified over time from one-off training sessions to modular training programmes. More recent training has been combined with longer-term consultancy support. Although useful, training has its limitations and in some cases may not be as effective as long term consultancy, for it often difficult to ensure that the capacity of the organisation is actually built. Follow-up work is crucial. The fact that most training is provided without cost to CSOs means, according to the common complaints of training providers, that some trainees attend for entertainment, with no intention to take part in a serious learning process. Those seeking funding to enhance longer term institutional stability may be side-tracked by training. Many attend training events out of a sense of sense of duty towards donors, when they have other work priorities.
2. **'Off-the-shelf' training has limited use.** Training is usually one-off, pre-designed and not shaped towards the needs of particular clients. Trainers routinely preside over sessions which diligently follow each step scrupulously described in the prescribed training manual and prompt students for anticipated answers. Creativity and critical thinking are crucial, as are the time and skills to refine existing and develop new training tailored to specific participants.
3. **Are trainers experienced and knowledgeable?** Research for this report suggests that most local trainers in **Kazakhstan** have little or no personal professional experience of the fields in which they offer training to others. This is a problem common throughout the region. Although armed with theory, lack of actual experience relevant to the training subject limits the trust and respect given to trainers. This could be addressed by more careful selection of those who are trained as trainers.
4. **Use of limited capacity building methods.** The methods used for capacity building have tended to be limited to traditional approaches including training, consultancy, study tours and inter and intra-country exchange visits. These can enable sharing of knowledge, information and

experience. They should not distract from the importance of developing other methods and technologies. Experience of action-learning, mentoring or coaching is needed in order to consolidate newly gained knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice in changing times.

5. **Lack of linkage of theory with practice.** The value of training or learning is in its application. However, even when organisations acquire capacity building theory, the transition to applying this in practice is rarely made. Many of those we interviewed in the region stressed the need for capacity building interventions to link theory with practice. This echoes with the conclusions of a UNDP study in Kyrgyzstan (1998) which highlights the necessity of replacing the classroom approach to training with a more learning-by-doing approach. The challenge is to replace theoretical classroom training with a cycle of teaching, application, review, reflection, exchange, feedback and improved application. This was achieved to some extent through modular courses such as INTRAC's ETSP which combine theory and practice enabling participants to apply skills and knowledge gained from courses in their daily work throughout the training. However, this approach is expensive and requires long-term commitment, which is often not available.
6. **Limitations of project focused capacity building.** Grants given to local CSOs mostly support project activities which have specific tangible outputs, with any capacity building seen as a means to achieving these results. However, project-focused capacity building is unlikely to lead to long-term and strategic changes within organisations. As a result leaders who only gain these skills will lack the ability and knowledge to be able to manage organisational changes over time.
7. **Donors must support organisational capacity building.** It is vital that they see building capacity as an essential end in itself. At the moment many local capacity building providers are disadvantaged — in comparison with NGOs focused on projects — when it comes to raising funds. Without external financial support it is difficult to provide capacity building services. In addition, CSOs themselves are not always concerned with overall organisational capacity unless it directly affects project implementation. They therefore rarely approach funding agencies for resources for general capacity building. There is a need for greater attention to be given to general organisational capacity building and enhancing the understanding of both local NGOs and their donors regarding the importance of organisational development. There is a need for commitment to a planned, systematic and participatory process of change intended to increase organisational effectiveness and develop continuing capacity for learning.
8. **Lack of capacity amongst capacity builders.** The process of developing local expertise and skills in capacity building has mainly been limited

to training delivery. Little support has been given to those involved in providing organisational capacity building advice. As a result, despite a growing recognition of the importance of organisational capacity building, there remains a lack of experienced local consultants. NGO support organisations need to strengthen their own capacity and skills in new technologies and innovative methods of capacity building. Joint work on this can be useful. Thus, a forum was created by practitioners in **Kazakhstan** to share experiences and ideas around capacity building. Another successful experience has been boosting the professional development of NGO support workers by giving them the opportunity to work alongside international trainers.

Capacity building of DCCA

The capacity of Development and Cooperation in Central Asia was built over two years with intensive support from external organisational specialists. This process highlighted the importance, when working in partnership with local support organisations, of developing ownership. Partners must be allowed flexibility and freedom to adapt new approaches and integrate them into their daily practice. DCCA's experience has brought out the need to develop ownership and to value participation, from both colleagues making collective decisions and external actors. Their capacity building programme was developed by the management team based on staff evaluation and feedback through annual appraisals and feedback. Suggestions from beneficiaries, stakeholders and partners fed into the process.

9. **Lack of organisational capacity assessment skills.** In general only well-established NGOs have introduced regular staff appraisals and go through periodic internal or external organisational assessments. Newer agencies have fallen far behind. Existing training programmes are often too focused on project performance issues and pay insufficient consideration to the internal organisational environment. Organisational assessment skills are urgently required across the region.
10. **Lack of monitoring and evaluation.** Little has been done to assess the impact of organisational capacity building in Central Asia. Ad hoc evaluations by funding agencies are commonplace, but there is no regular practice of monitoring and evaluation, no opportunity to pause and reflect on the impact of training workshops. A UNDP study (1998) on NGO capacity assessment in **Kyrgyzstan** revealed that:

‘...implementation of work plans within the planned time-frame and achieving planned targets is considered as effective criteria to determine the success of the training organisations. ... most training organisations use quantitative impact indicators such as the number of training programs conducted, number of people trained, number of NGOs

established after their training, utilization of training funds within their financial year etc. to evaluate their success'. (Chapter 5, p.3)

The INTRAC Central Asia Programme piloted an across-the-board participatory evaluation of its capacity building interventions in 2002 to 2004. Systematic evaluation and impact assessment of capacity building interventions would help practitioners to generate lessons learnt and to analyse and improve performance. UNDP suggests that qualitative aspects of measuring change needs particular attention. Resources need to be allocated to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of capacity building.

One such approach to evaluation of organisational capacity is the USAID NGO Thermometer Tool. Used primarily in USAID-funded programmes, this measures systematic changes, but throws little light on qualitative changes.

USAID's NGO Thermometer Tool

The USAID Office for Democratic Transition in the Central Asian Region uses the NGO Thermometer tool to gauge how Civil Society Support Centres strengthen local non-governmental organisations. Piloted in 2001, the intention was to administer it with the same NGOs annually over five years. The 'Thermometer' explores changes within organisations in areas such as strategic management, governance, leadership and management, financial sustainability, organisational potential, public relations and advocacy skills.

6 Conclusions

Civil society in Central Asia has grown considerably since independence. Governments of these newly independent states have recognised the role and contribution of CSOs to democratic transformation and socio-economic development. The numbers of newly created CSOs is continuously increasing. Activities being undertaken by local and international organisations are bolstering the financial and technical capacity of civil society actors, particularly emerging CSOs.

Interviews with a wide range of civil society actors indicated a felt need to improve the quality, strength and sustainability of CSOs. They must be helped to develop effective management systems and plan improvements in the performance and quality of services. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to developing the capacity to build external relations with project stakeholders and also with wider constituencies. Organisations providing capacity building services have a vital role to play in encouraging networking and advocacy for a more effective civil society voice.

Much capacity building is currently done on a project-by-project basis. Few organisations are interested in exploring an *organisational* development approach and many refuse offered capacity building advice and help. Encouragingly, there is growing understanding of the importance of *organisational* capacity building, learning how to respond to changing environments and to acquire and use analytical and adaptive skills. The involvement of international specialists in organisational development and capacity building has enabled the development of indigenous support organisations that have become an accessible resource for local CSOs. Joint activities have been mutually rewarding.

Although focused specifically on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, this paper raises a number of capacity building issues which need to be globally debated. Insights are not only applicable to the Central Asia region, but have wider relevance for the methodology of capacity building in other contexts.

1. **The importance of context.** Capacity building activities need to take into account the wider context in which CSOs operate and the local external culture that influences the way they work and relate as members of their organisation.
2. **Relevant and tailored capacity building interventions.** Capacity building interventions need to be designed to meet the specific needs of each client or type of organisation, whether this is an NGO or CBO or a newly created organisation. New actors in civil society need support as they determine their organisational mission, develop management systems and organisational structures and determine internal policy and procedures. Longer-established agencies need advice on to adapt, to comply with the legal and regulatory climate and to pass through complex change and growth processes.

3. **Balance between individual and organisational capacity building.** The impact of any capacity building intervention will be limited if it is not taken on, and owned by, the whole organisation. It is not just a question of sending an individual to a training course. Agencies need to recognise the danger that organisational skills to which an individual staff member has been exposed will not percolate through the organisation. Reflection and learning are constrained by ex-communist authoritarian organisational cultures
4. **The need for holistic organisational capacity building.** Capacity building interventions bound and limited to projects, often funded by donors, may divert focus from the real needs of an organisation. Organisation capacity building should focus on internal strengthening, developing an agreed strategy, setting out values, deciding how to engage with the wider world and interested in exploring how to improve programme and project management experience.
5. **The need for skilled local capacity building providers.** In order for effective and successful organisational capacity building to occur there needs to be a pool of skilled and experienced capacity building providers. The region requires sufficient numbers of trainers with expertise in organisational capacity assessment who are able to share learning and utilise a wide range of teaching and facilitation methods
6. **Systematic monitoring and evaluation and impact assessments.** Reflection and learning is impossible without evidence of results. Sufficient resources need to be allocated to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of capacity building interventions. Capacity building interventions can create space for reflection and learning by analysing current practice and helping agencies become better-organised advocates for democracy and civil society

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Appendix 1: Methodology

The research for this study, conducted in September 2005, involved semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and literature reviews in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. These were undertaken with local NGOs, NGO support organisations, international NGOs and development agencies and donors working to build CSO capacity.

Semi-structured interviews with agency representatives focused on exploring the experience of both recipients and providers of capacity building services and identifying lessons learnt. Successes and failures of capacity building interventions and current and future capacity building needs were discussed. Interviews sought to identify the meaning of capacity building in local contexts and key challenges faced by regional capacity building actors. Similar themes were explored in focus groups comprised of NGO support organisations, NGO networks and NGOs involved in rural development projects funded by a donor consortium. Documents used to add to this primary data included civil society needs and capacity assessments, programme evaluations, donor strategy papers and sector reviews .

Due to time constraints the study did not include meetings with government officials or the private sector. This was unfortunate as their views on civil society development and the strengthening of CSOs would have contributed a fruitful additional dimension to the study.

Appendix 2: List of Organisations Interviewed

Kyrgyzstan

Counterpart International
Branch Office in Kyrgyz Republic
204, Abdurakhmanov Str. (former Sovetskaya) 4th floor
Tel: +996 (312) 66 46 36, 66 21 88
<http://www.cango.net.kg>

Rural Women's NGO ALGA
Kant Office
35, Aidarbekov Str., Jerkazar village, Chui Valley
Tel: + 998 (0- 3132) 2 25 01
E-mail: alga@infotel.kg

Public Fund Development & Cooperation in Central Asia (DCCA)
1-2 Ap., 144 Toktogul Str., Bishkek 720001
Tel: +996 (312) 66 58 40, 66 62 68
<http://www.dcca.elcat.kg>

Initiative Centre 'Suyuu-Bulagy'
Apt. 62, 5 Manas Av. Bishkek 720017
Tel: +996 (312) 21 98 80
E-mail: bulakmanager@mail.ru

Prison Ministry Association of Kyrgyz Republic
84-8 Dushanbinskaya Str., Bishkek
Tel: +996 (312) 54 22 86
E-mail: ahmedkojo@yahoo.com

CarlBro
Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project
Room 431
114 Chui Prospect, Bishkek 720040
Tel: +996 (312) 62 02 97/8/9
E-mail: carlbro@elcat.kg

Help Age International
107, Kievskaya St., 5th floor
Bishkek 720001
Tel: +996 (312) 611 838
E-mail: helpagekg@mail.ru

Public Fund Rural Development Centre 'Elet'
286 Abdurakhmanova St.
Bishkek, 720030
Tel: +996 (312) 61 00 71, 61 15 21
E-mail: sllpc@elcat.kg

NGO UMUT

The Resource Centre for Elderly People
Balikchi, Kyrgyzstan
Tel: +996 (3944) 2 49 01
+996 (312) 42 89 29
E-mail: ymyt_bal@rambler.ru
<http://www.ymyt.host.net.kg>

Association of Civil Society Support Centres (CSSC)
204, Abdurakhmanov Str. (former Sovetskaya) 4th floor
Tel: +996 (312) 66 46 36, 66 21 88

Noriya Omurbekova
Capacity Building Consultant
E-mail: nuriya_aza@rambler.ru

Kazakhstan

Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network (CASDIN)
Appt. 249, 32 Moldogulova, Almaty
Tel: (3272) 73 86 10
E-mail: casdin@nursat.kz
<http://www.casdin.freenet.kz>

Counterpart Kazakhstan
36 Jandosov Str., Almaty 050057
Tel: +7 (3272) 50 19 50
<http://www.cpart.kz>

Civil Society Development Association (ARGO)
36 Jandosov Str., Almaty 050057
Tel: +7 (3272) 50 19 50
E-mail: larisa@cpart.kz

Institute for Development Cooperation (IDC)
Almaty
Tel: (3272) 43 00 76
E-mail: idc@nursat.kz
<http://www.idc.nursat.kz>

NGO 'ZHAN'
57 'A', Masanchi Str., Almaty
Tel: +7 (3272) 72 47 06/08
E-mail: aibek59@mail.ru

USAID Regional Mission
Park Palace Building
41 Kazbek Bi Street, Almaty 480100
Tel: +7 (3272) 50 76 12/17
<http://centralasia.usaid.gov>

Academy for Educational Development (AED)

14 L.Chaikina Str,
Almaty 050020
Tel: (3272) 59 77 12

Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan
5 Kasteyeva Str., Almaty
Tel: +7 (3272) 91 35 00
<http://www.misk.kz>

VSO Kazakhstan
58 'A', Abilaikhana Str., Office 608
Almaty 480004
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<http://www.vso.org.uk>

UNV Kazakhstan
United Nations Office
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Almaty 050000
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And SGH Federation 'Karakoz'
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Appendix 3: Acronyms

ACT CA	Action by Churches Together Central Asia
ASTP	Analytical Skills Training Programme
CASDIN	Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network
CBO	Community based organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DCCA	Development Cooperation in Central Asia
ETSP	Education Training Support Programme
ICNL	International Centre for Not-for Profit Law
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
INTRAC	International Training and Research Centre
ISO	Intermediate Support Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SHG	Self help group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WB	World Bank

Praxis Paper No. 15

Organisational Capacity Building in Central Asia: Reflections from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

By Lola Abdusalyamova and Hannah Warren

This paper focuses on the history and current context of civil society in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Civil society in Central Asia has developed significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A more open and enabling environment has permitted previously unimagined discussion of social problems resulting from the sudden absence of state social services. Growth of civil society has been supported by a range of multilateral and bilateral agencies and international NGOs. They have not only provided project funds but had a determination to build sector and organisational capacity. This paper identifies key civil society capacity building actors and sketches their activities and approaches. It provides an assessment of key issues and challenges with relevance for capacity building in Central Asia and beyond.

Within Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, external support has built the capacity of civil society organisations and enabled the sector to itself provide local capacity building support. As a result, a number of local support organisations have emerged which offer specialised services and contribute to consolidation of civil society. However, great challenges remain — financial instability, dependence on donors, authoritarian organisational cultures, paucity of critical analysis and failure to devise contextually tailored capacity building interventions. There is still an unfortunate tendency for project implementation to take precedence over capacity building.

The paper's chief message is that effective capacity building hinges on thought-out responses based on knowledge of the culture and context in which work is undertaken. Approaches to capacity building and the methods employed must at all times be flexible, appropriate and context specific.

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