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Weaknesses and Capacities of Domestic NGOs

Murod Ismailov

CONCEPTUALIZING CRITIQUE OF NGOS

The contemporary literature, both domestic and foreign, on the state of non-governmental organizations in Uzbekistan does very little to help illuminate the nature and, ultimately, the broader impact of these entities on nurturing social capital in society. There are both ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ conditions that lead to this situation. On a micro level, it is noteworthy that the dubious nature of NGOs in Uzbekistan is a result of the lack of systemic data about these organizations and the absence of studies that put these data into the appropriate context. On a macro level, the key reason for the lack of clarity is a combination of mutually related tendencies: the academic and broader discourse on this matter goes hand in hand with the political processes that this Central Asian republic experiences, the coverage of these processes by the Western media and, to a lesser degree, the agenda-driven ratings by a number of global opinion-making entities. The key here is that this ‘macro-level’ perspective generally overlooks the ‘inner world’ of non-governmental organizations in societies facing political and economic transformation.

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After a review of some of the recent works on the state of the non-governmental sector in Uzbekistan and based on a recent survey of NGOs, we shall explore a number of aspects relating to the contribution, perceptions, connections and broader socio-political impact of Uzbekistan's NGOs. These kinds of topics happen to be regularly omitted by studies of NGOs. Effectively, the analysis will help shed light on the relationship between the domestic NGO sector and other societal actors, including the state, and its implications for nurturing social capital.

Despite some significant legislative, policy and constitutional changes introduced in the country in 2014 with the potential to increase the size, diversity, sustainability and role of civil society (USAID 2014), it is also true that in regard to the mainstream scholarship on the country's domestic NGOs, what is heard most often are words such as "weaknesses" and "failures".¹ Indeed, unlike non-governmental organizations in other parts of the post-Socialist world (Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, or even in Russia), the NGOs in this region are most likely to be viewed as fragile institutions lacking not only sustainable economic resources but also political, civic and social capital. Our analysis of existing works shows that there are at least four major perspectives focusing on various sources of failure associated with the NGO sector in Uzbekistan: *the post-Soviet institutionalist perspective, democratic institutionalist perspective, organizational perspective and communitarian perspective.*

POST-SOVIET INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The *post-Soviet institutionalist perspective* of NGO development in Uzbekistan emphasizes the importance of centrifugal forces that affect the way 'new' organizations were (re)created. In other words, Uzbekistan's NGOs have also come to be the integral part of the institutional framework that, in many ways, combines old-fashioned Soviet-looking entities, ineffective and resource-deficient 'palliative structures' and foreign-aid-driven projects (Kandiyoti 2004: iii). This can be illustrated by focusing on how Soviet successor institutions (e.g., Komsomol or Youth Committees) have steadily been transforming from the Communist party organs into government-sponsored NGOs (GONGOs). What is pointed out here is a triad of side effects that this 'new' institutional framework has brought to life, including the emergence of a set of cosmetic institutions featuring a broad network of participants from the provincial to the district levels with a shaky economic base, and "an ambiguous mandate whereby the protec-

tion of members' interests and performing the role of 'conveyor belt' for government directives and legislation are simultaneously held objectives" (Kandiyoti 2007, page 32).

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The *democratic institutionalist perspective* on NGO development is much more appealing to the majority of scholars studying civil society in post-Soviet Central Asia because the ideas of 'failed democratic reforms' and 'hard-pressing autocrats' at first glance seem to provide a comfortable explanation for the poor performance of voluntary associations and the lack of collective action in the society as a whole. It is not difficult to find studies viewing civil society development in Uzbekistan through the prism of democratic institutionalism or, to be specific, the lack of it. In particular, Uzbekistan is shown as a post-Soviet republic in which the political elite and the bureaucracy failed to abandon control of the society and the economy (Ilkhamov 2002). This also means that regimes such as this usually created democratic-looking organizations, yet imposed huge restrictions on civil associations and non-governmental structures.

Starting from mid-2000s, following the 'colored' uprisings in Ukraine, Georgia and neighboring Kyrgyzstan and, importantly, after a failed uprising in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, the nexus between the NGO sector and the status of democracy has become a larger source of discussions in the mainstream Western scholarship and the media. This occurred especially after the country's political establishment turned against the West, accusing it not only of using external aid and NGOs to undermine Uzbekistan's sovereignty but also of being complicit in terrorism and internal destabilization. With a sudden disruption of development assistance for the non-governmental sector, the capacities and agendas of the remaining organizations were severely and negatively affected. In Howell and Lind's views, "the Uzbekistan case demonstrates the complex ways in which Western diplomacy and aid intersect with regional politics and the effects this has on the trajectory of civil society" (Howell and Lind 2010).

A closer look at the existing literature reveals that the democratic institutionalist perspective is not only about the failure of democratic reforms affecting the performance of civic and voluntary organizations in Uzbekistan but also about the role of external aid by donor agencies,

which turned out to come at a high cost while still being ineffective. The bottom line is that there has been a huge gap between the vision of democratic institutions being promoted and the actual results achieved by the West's civil society assistance programs in Uzbekistan. One study suggests that democracy assistance programs, regardless of their good intentions, have not been successful in penetrating deep into society, and many have interacted with local conditions in ways that unintentionally aggravated a number of problems, including corruption, income inequality and aid dependence. This process, only partly beneficial to some opposing political groups, had overall negative consequences for the development of the non-governmental sector and prospects for democratic consolidation in Uzbekistan (Adamson 2002; Grodsky 2007).

In particular, Grodsky's study further elaborates why Uzbekistan's NGOs have had such a low level of trust in society and, as a result, extraordinarily weak domestic support. As happens in many other institutional and geographical settings, while organizations can benefit from external support, they can do so only at the expense of their own agendas, causes and domestic needs. What seems to be a universal phenomenon has had a similarly profound impact on NGO development in post-Soviet Uzbekistan in that the visible macro-level effects of foreign support before the colored uprisings resulted in splitting different civil society organizations apart rather than uniting them in a coherent civil society movement. A reliance on external financial support, particularly when such resources were not made available by the government, accelerates unhealthy competition and mistrust between organizations, which can only weaken the broader outlook of the civil society (Grodsky 2007). In a similar vein, by referring to the post-Soviet realities of NGO development, Henderson coined the term "principled clientelism," which implies that regardless of the aid agencies' intentions, their result is the emergence of imbalanced, vertical relationships between domestic groups and donors. In Henderson's words, "rather than fostering horizontal networks, small grassroots initiatives, and ultimately, civic development, foreign aid contributes to the emergence of a vertical, institutionalized, and isolated (although well-funded) civic community" (Henderson 2002).

It is also crucial to look on the other side of the spectrum, i.e., on how the 'democracy-civil society nexus' is discursively constructed by the domestic political establishment. In this regard, Pottenger analyzed a

number of statements made by president Karimov in which the key message boils down to “the paramount importance of political parties and other movements and organizations performing the functions of democratic institutions linking the citizens and the state” (cited in: Pottenger, J. R. 2004). Although, from an outsider’s point of view, there is nothing wrong with this message, a closer look at parallel statements suggests that “as the chief conductor of reforms, the state works in every possible way to lay the groundwork for an enduring democratic civil society” (ibid.). Many analysts would naturally conclude that both statements effectively serve one and the same goal, i.e., to justify the expansion of the state’s authority in shaping the civil society under the pretense of nurturing a democracy of its own kind.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Another explanation of the sources of weakness in Uzbekistan’s NGO sector can be referred to as the *organizational perspective*, which focuses primarily on the internal structural deficiencies of these organizations rather than on broader political circumstances and catalytic factors, such as democracy, the impact of Soviet and post-Soviet institutional forces, and so on. Although there could be direct and indirect effects of the post-Soviet institutionalist dynamics and processes of democratic consolidation on the organizational characteristics of Uzbekistani NGOs, we assume that this explanation has some important but unique features. While referring to organizational sources of NGO ineffectiveness, one can examine a number of issues that play a crucial role in shaping an NGO’s public profile and calibrating its goals and capabilities so that it can respond to people’s needs. Key among these are leadership, a lack of ‘NGO know-how’ resulting in inadequate fund-raising, the absence of long-term vision, poor staffing and a lack of resiliency at times of crisis or vis-à-vis administrative barriers.

Despite a widely held understanding of NGOs as ‘anti-governmental’ as opposed to ‘nongovernmental’ (Stevens 2005), or a prevailing image of them as ‘the Trojan horses that hide anti-governmental forces from abroad’ (Suda 2006), the abovementioned structural-organizational characteristics are symptomatic of the majority of voluntary organizations and civic associations irrespective of their attitude toward sensitive issues, such as human rights, governance and accountability, among others. The orga-

nizational perspective could hold some degree of truth in regard to the overall poor understanding of the concept of an NGO, despite occasional references to them in presidential speeches and parliamentary debates (Stevens 2005).

Based on existing studies, one could notice that the organizational weaknesses (including poor management, consolidation and inadequate material grounds) of NGOs in Uzbekistan have been the result of at least two factors. On one hand, the inability of NGOs to nurture professional managers and leaders who would then connect their organizations with a broader constituency of support for promoting reform. In Stevens' view, whilst the collective action and civic mobilization in many parts of the post-Soviet world managed to "combine the 'brains' of civil society and the 'brawn' of political society (mobilising the population)", this process occurred differently in Uzbekistan. (Stevens 2007).

On the other hand, the organizational capacities of Uzbekistan's NGO sector suffered in subsequent years as a result of being overly fascinated by the 'quantity' rather the 'quality' of the organizations. This took place at times of limited liberalization at the end of the 1990s until the 'colored' protests erupted in neighboring post-Soviet countries. According to Ilkhamov, this process was observed initially in the economic field, where small and medium-sized enterprises developed quickly, paving the way to the growth of NGOs. By 2004, according to the government's statistical data, 3500 NGOs were already registered. A closer look at these 'NGOs' reveals that only a tiny portion of them are voluntary or citizens' associations, while the remaining majority consist of Soviet-style public associations (overly bureaucratic trade unions, state-run youth and healthcare organizations, etc.), as well as the branches of the government-promoted NGOs ("*Soghlom avlod uchun*" / "For a healthy generation"), the Centre for '*Manaviyat va Marifat*' (Spirituality and enlightenment) and the like (Ilkhamov 2005).

This process, of course, may have been the result of the government shaping the legal, political and socioeconomic environment for the evolution of the NGO sector, yet, as some studies suggest, its development as a potentially important driver of social change (the case of non-politicized environmental NGOs is appealing) was hindered by the lack of managerial skills, devoted leaders and sustainable material resources within these organizations.

COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Finally, there is one more approach to viewing the sources of underperformance by the country's NGOs, which we refer to as *communitarian perspective*. In comparison with the abovementioned streams of thought, this perspective looks closely at previously overlooked but deeply rooted traditional systems, including community-based organizations (mahalla), which in many ways performed the functions of NGOs.

There are dozens of studies that recognize that it is because of the existence of these very organizations that neo-liberal NGOs could not grow as organically as in other parts of the former Communist world. One study particularly mentions that following the demise of the Soviet system, the society in Central Asia managed to revive itself around the very element that had been designed to destroy it, the collective system. The study argues that "paradoxically, it is within these very structures that the elements of a local civil society could be found, rather than in the donor-led window-dressing evident in the nascent NGO sector" (Roy 2002). For the same reason, other studies suggest that recently, there has been a renewed interest in the work of these community-based organizations from aid and development agencies "because of their presumed familiarity with local needs as an indigenous, grass-roots, and long standing association of citizens" (Suda 2006). This process will, of course, further shift the focus away from the local NGOs. It is also argued that unless formal organizations and voluntary associations do not change their approach to work, community-based associations will remain the most attractive alternative in Uzbekistan (ibid.).

To examine the essential role that this traditional system plays in nurturing the civil society of Uzbekistan, one has to delve into the perceptions of the local people of what is important in their lives. As our previous research indicates, the 'family' ranks the highest in this survey in both of the questions regarding people's opinions on important social institutions. In one survey question, respondents were asked to rank the social institutions in their lives in order of importance; 98% chose the family as number one. Another question asked them to choose the single most important social institution in their lives, and again, an overwhelming majority (91%) chose the family it was mentioned earlier in this chapter, (Dadabaev 2004). Even with some of our data indicating that intra-societal confidence is weakening in Uzbekistan mainly due to the worsening of the economic and social situation and increasingly fierce competition

for scarce resources and opportunities (Dadabaev 2007), in general, organizations other than NGOs that sit deeply in the community have human resources, non-material power and authority over people to drive societal change from within.

In the next sections of this chapter, we somewhat detach ourselves from the abovementioned streams of thought, and we shall attempt to draw a bigger picture of NGOs' relationships with societal forces, including the government, in Uzbekistan. The bottom-line question is the extent of the social and political roles these organizations play in driving change and strengthening social cohesion. Specifically, based on the survey responses from the NGOs, we look into a number of sets of questions, which we chose to generalize as capacity, perceptions, connections and impact.

NGO CAPACITY

In terms of the capacity of NGOs, we closely examine the survey data, and, in particular, we focus on four questions that ask the NGOs about their core missions, their *modi operandi*, the interests they represent, as well as which fields they believed they make greater contributions to societal development compared with the government agencies.

It is useful to look at the core missions and the objectives to achieve them. Because the information was provided by the organizations themselves, we consider it essential in terms of identifying the key fields on which the organizations focus and the tools they that they use. The government-provided statistics so far have been far less clear. Nevertheless, the challenge of creating a big picture (as with a number of other issues) lies in the fact that many NGOs in the country indicated more than one mission to broaden their social significance. Nevertheless, our data show (see Fig. 7.1) that the missions stated by the NGOs themselves focus primarily on social, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

One of the features of domestic NGOs is their depoliticized nature, which translates into a small number of organizations that strive to engage in explicitly political activities. However, even in extreme cases when the surveyed NGOs stated their mission as the "protection of human rights", it does not mean that they are the same as human rights organizations in other parts of the world that can openly criticize any institutions that either abuse or fail to protect people's rights. Still, the majority of core fields in which they work cover more than a dozen areas, such as charitable

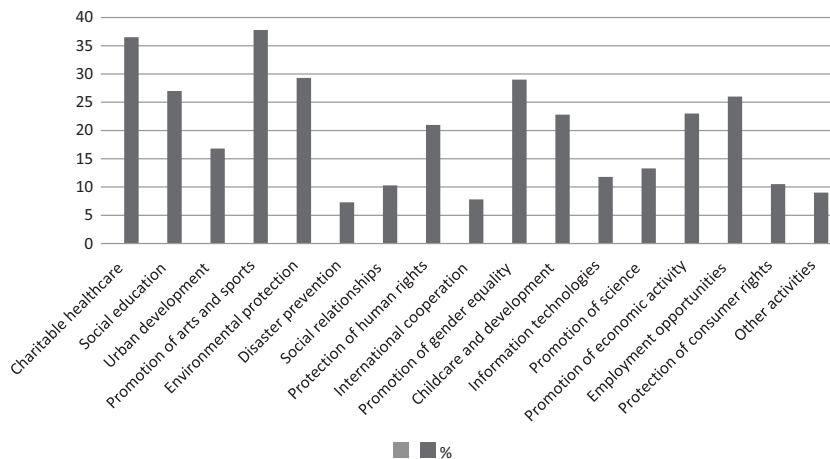


Fig. 7.1 Domestic NGOs and their stated core missions

healthcare, the promotion of arts and sports, environmental protection, the creation of employment opportunities, social education and the like. Additionally, a large proportion of NGOs are working to contribute to economic development by protecting consumer rights, creating employment opportunities and so on.

As for the tools for achieving their stated mission, the majority of surveyed NGOs (see Fig. 7.2) choose such tools as information provision, the practical implementation of public initiatives and projects, organizing trainings and educational programs, and the provision of free services, such as consultancy, advocacy and even lobbying. Meanwhile, we observe a comparatively lower number of organizations involved in the distribution of project funds.

Some of the most appealing questions about the role of NGOs in Uzbek society are those focusing on the interests they represent. A quick look at the data shows that more than two-thirds of the organizations surveyed believed that they were representing community interests in the first place. Although others² also mentioned their own members, the broader citizenry, residents of a certain region and donors, it is not surprising that community-driven and community-oriented organizations are significantly larger in number. One reason is that despite bureau-

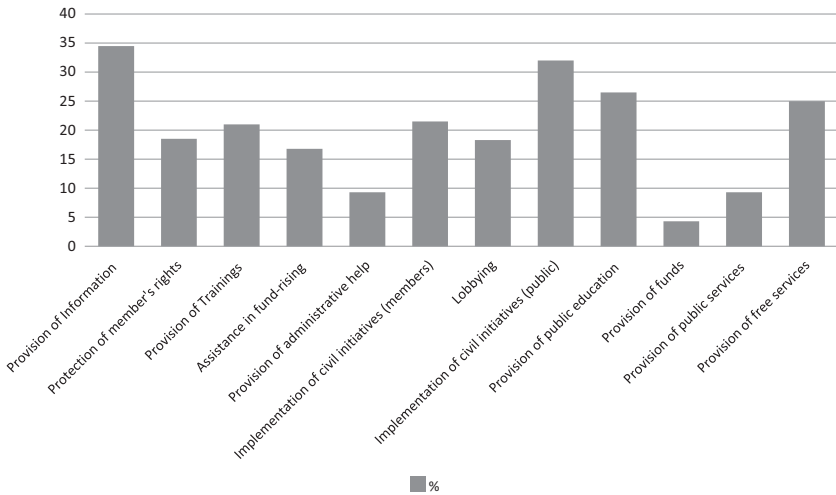


Fig. 7.2 Tools for achieving domestic NGO missions

cratic restrictions imposed by the state on NGOs, the community-based organizations provided convenient spaces for non-political, non-partisan activities.

While thinking about the contribution of NGOs, in the current analysis, we included a question that asked respondents to indicate the fields in which they thought NGOs would be more effective compared with the government agencies. Based on these responses, one can observe a rather interesting but symptomatic trend: there seem to be twice as many NGOs that unwittingly recognize their weak social role, especially when compared with the state (see Fig. 7.3). For example, more than 68% of surveyed organizations admitted that NGOs are not quick in responding to people's concerns. In terms of reflecting the people's values, 61% of surveyed groups mentioned that NGOs were far from representing the public values. Even regarding their roles in resolving some social problems, such as fighting corruption, more than 75% of groups viewed themselves to be considerably inferior versus the state. Based on the responses to other sub-questions, one can assume that despite the growing understanding in recent years of the need to decentralize the state, the actual presence and the impact of state agencies on the lives of the people is colossal and is hardly comparable with those of NGOs.

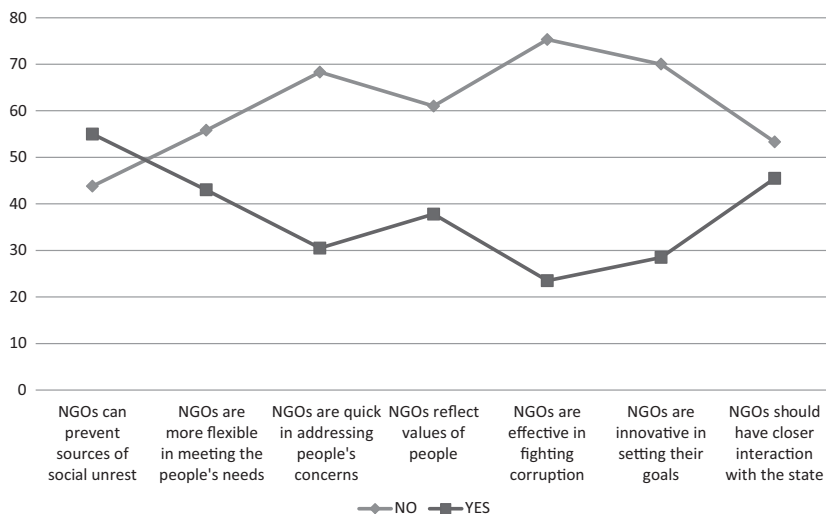


Fig. 7.3 Areas in which NGOs could provide better than the government (NGOs' views)

Contrary to this view, however, some studies suggest that among all forms of civil society in Uzbekistan, especially when compared with community-based associations, NGOs have stronger organizational and human resource capacities. Stevens (2005) mentions several capitals, including organizational and human capital, the possession of which gives domestic NGOs some advantages as a whole. In terms of organizational capacity, NGOs seem to be able to compensate their relatively small size and inability to work with large groups of people, with their intrinsic flexibility and target-oriented approach to project implementation. Stevens' study suggests that simple possession of the office equipment (PCs, fixed phone lines, copy machines, etc.) that many NGOs had received from foreign development agencies in certain periods provided them with the capacities that other civil society groups lacked due to shortages of funding. On the other hand, along with technical capacity, NGOs are better prepared to manage projects and lead people. The fact that an average NGO executive has a university degree, coupled with regular participation in capacity-building trainings to develop skills in management, organizational development, fundraising and IT, adds to

the effectiveness and dynamism of these organizations (*ibid.*: 288). For example, an average chairperson of the mahalla would probably build his reputation and influence based on other factors than educational background, such as negotiation skills, mediation and even age. For this reason, it is understandable that employment in the NGO sector may be attractive for some former public sector employees and intellectuals seeking an alternative career path.

NGO PERCEPTIONS

Although almost all questions in the JIGS survey were designed to reveal the world perceived by the interviewed organizations, there was also a set of specific questions aimed at disclosing Uzbek NGOs' opinions on a general set of issues and their satisfaction level with the policies of the government related and not related to NGOs' activities.

One set of questions asked the groups' opinion about a number of social and political issues, such as government efficiency, state intervention in larger society, restricting the rights for the sake of ensuring public safety, and trust in other social and political institutions. More NGOs seem to agree (80% combined) that the road to policy effectiveness and good governance lies through efficiency, *i.e.*, doing more and better while utilizing less financial and human resources. From the perspective of NGOs, this is a reasonable view, given that on a good day, most organizations consider themselves efficient social agents whose experiences and knowledge could be used in a wide range of government social projects. This question could also be linked to the problem of state intervention: *i.e.*, when government structures are large enough, their policies and agents can hardly resist the temptation to expand their control over other non-state institutions. With state interventionism (especially those stretching beyond macroeconomics) coming under constant criticism as the key source of a weak NGO sector in the post-Soviet space, it is surprising to see that not all local NGOs think of government interventionism as a source of societal problems. While 13% and 39% of respondents believe that less government intervention is better, approximately 36% of organizations think otherwise (see Fig. 7.4). Crucially, when we delve further into the data, there are a significant number of state-sponsored organizations that prefer less government intervention, and conversely, there are organizations that are relatively independent from the state, and they would still see the role

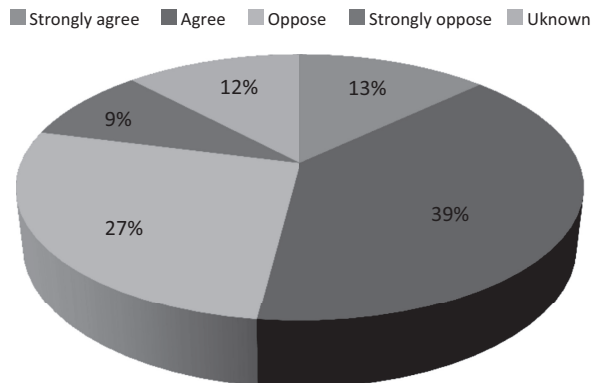


Fig. 7.4 There should be less government intervention (NGOs' views)

of shaping the organizational settings for NGO work as not necessarily harmful.

Another similarly controversial question was posed, which asked the surveyed organizations about the appropriateness of restricting people's rights and freedoms for the sake of insuring public safety. Although the situation has been changing in recent years, and with more organizations refusing to accept the validity of this popular discursive myth (more than 30% of respondents), the wider public opinion seems to be largely supportive of this discourse (see Fig. 7.5).

In a different set of questions, the NGOs were asked to talk about their satisfaction with policies of national and local governments and policies regarding the activity of an NGO. The respondents were asked to give their assessment in relation to two time frames: the current perception and that at the time of the NGO's establishment (Fig. 7.6). The perception of the central government's policy-making by individual civil society organizations does not seem to have changed over the years since their establishment, in spite of a higher number of unknown responses when the NGOs were asked to reflect on their past experiences. Thus, three-fourths of the surveyed NGOs expressed their current satisfaction with government policies, as opposed to 20% that are dissatisfied. The numbers are very close when considering the perception of the local government. Similarly, we can observe that there is no significant difference in the way that national and local policies are

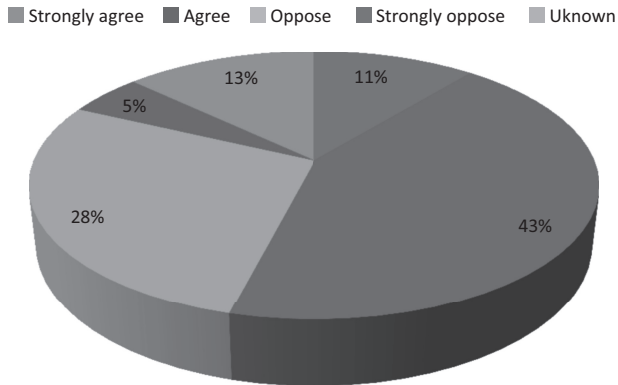


Fig. 7.5 Some rights could be compromised for the sake of public safety (NGOs' views)

assessed by non-governmental groups vis-à-vis the NGO sector. The overwhelming majority of responding groups voiced their satisfaction with such policies.

One of the crucial questions, especially in the context of understanding the role of NGOs in generating social capital in Uzbekistan, was concerned with the level of these groups' trust in individual and influential social agents.

The survey data show that the overall trustworthiness of various organizations and social institutions among the majority of contacted NGOs is considerably high. More than 70% of NGOs showed that they trust the parliament, government, local authorities, and non-state entities, such as public opinion and other domestic non-governmental organizations. This number stands against approximately 15–20% of organizations that distrust these social and political institutions (Fig. 7.7). Because the concept of trust is not well defined and can imply a broad range of issues, we do not see these numbers as necessarily representing the true picture.

It is especially appropriate to compare these data with the findings of one our past studies that looked into the state of intra-societal trust in Uzbek society (Dadabaev 2007). Despite Uzbekistani society being well known in the former Soviet space for preserving social harmony, hospitality and friendliness, over the past several decades, there have been signs

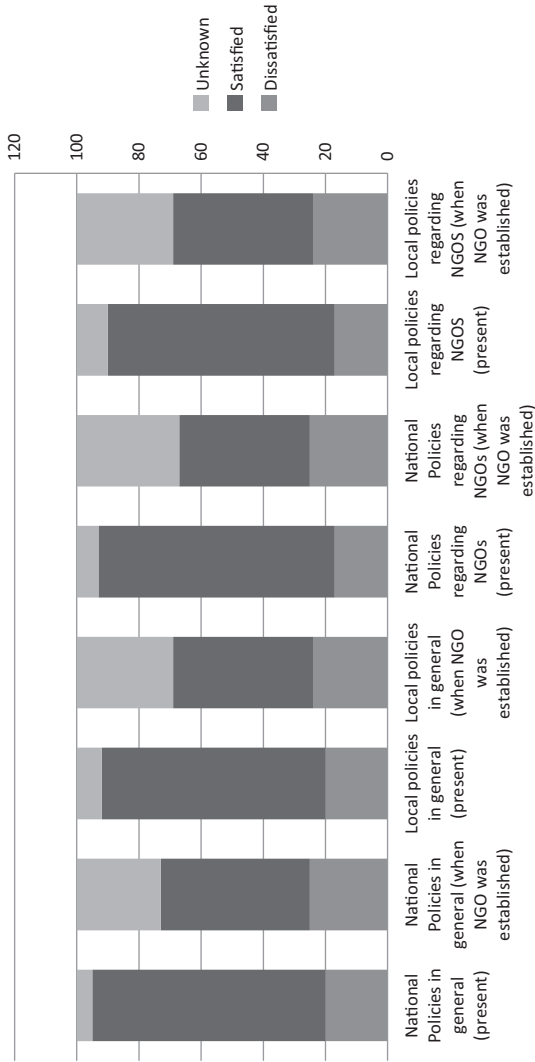


Fig. 7.6 NGOs' satisfaction with government policies

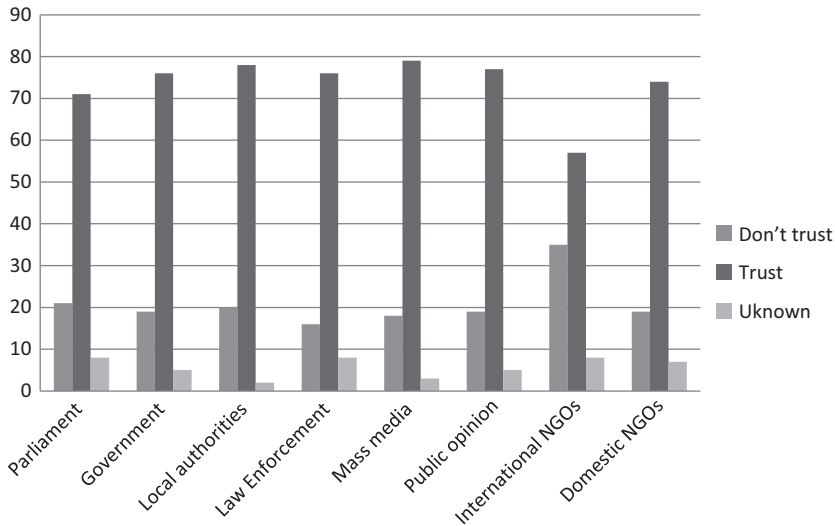


Fig. 7.7 NGOs' trust in institutions (%)

of declining intra-societal confidence. Accordingly, a small number of people in Uzbekistan (19.2%) admit that people are trustworthy, while the remaining majority of over 80% do not trust others. In the same vein, one-fourth of the people in Uzbekistan (25.4%) think that people make efforts to help those in need. The rest (74.6%) believe that the majority of people live a selfish life. The worsening economic and social situations and fierce competition for scarce resources and opportunities after the collapse of the socialist system resulted in increasing crime rates, and as such, people's overall reliance on and trust in one another weakened considerably (*ibid.*: 416).

NGO CONNECTIONS

Connections have traditionally played an important role in Uzbekistani society, and they played a much greater role during Soviet times. Given that the social contract between citizens and the Communist party (the state) was not clearly outlined, the people often chose to address their everyday problems by exploiting their family ties, networking or private connections (Dadabaev 2007). Unless these tendencies are mani-

fested in criminal acts, such as bribery for seeking employment and business opportunities or the misuse of power entrusted to public leaders, using connections to achieve one's goals is not considered unlawful elsewhere. However, how does it relate to the activities of NGOs in Uzbekistan?

The reality is that because NGOs face the same kinds of bureaucratic and institutional challenges in running everyday business as corporations and/or ordinary citizens, they cannot achieve goals without using their connections to various institutions. Currently, we often hear the term 'networking,' which is slowly replacing the term 'connections'. Both terms are directly linked to the concept of social capital because the two often constitute a combination of social relationships, as well as the skills to develop and utilize them when necessary.

Given the sociopolitical and economic conditions in Uzbekistan, it is safe to assume that the more connections an NGO or its managers have, the more its activities will be run effectively as a result. An informal talk with any of the currently functioning and successful NGOs in the country would reveal that there is an extensive network of and connections with various groups of individuals working for government agencies, branches of international organizations, mass media or local tax offices. This kind of support is essential to the NGOs' achievement of goals and objectives.

Our survey data show (Fig. 7.8) that more than 30% of organizations we approached maintained a stronger circle of connections with community-based organizations, local mass media and central government agencies. The existence of reliable connections with these three institutions could help an NGO to advance in such fields as the implementation of projects involving community-based stakeholders, the dissemination of information among the general public, and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles at a lesser administrative cost, or, in some instances, securing the approval of foreign-funded projects. Interestingly, the existence of a reliable connection with a specific institution is often supposed to execute a particular function or a set of functions. For example, the connections within local government agencies help NGOs to address organizational issues, safety inspections, taxation, and so on, and contacts with the expert community help in the implementation of projects that require specific expertise.

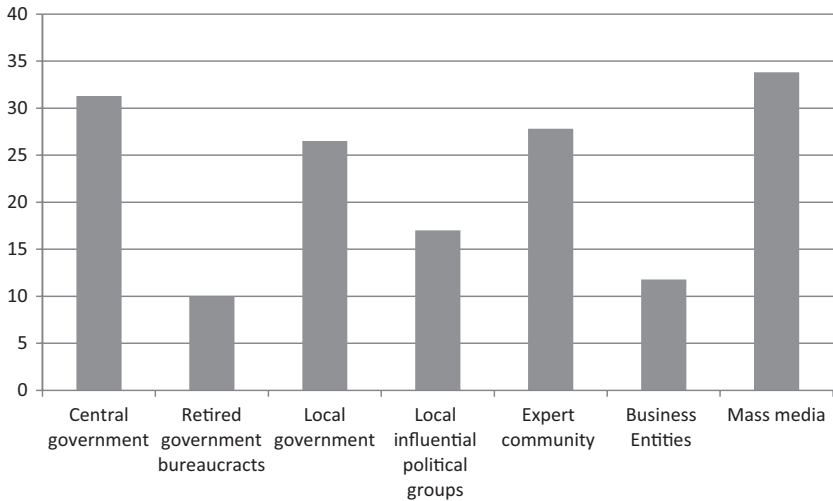


Fig. 7.8 NGOs' contacts with organizations and individuals (%)

The information about connections can help only a little without knowing the outcomes that these relationships actually generate. One way of looking at the mentioned data could be thoroughly examining the actual support received by the NGOs from organizations within which they have reliable connections. The next figure (see Fig. 7.9) shows that support (organizational, technical, material, administrative, etc.) from central and local government agencies were mentioned by almost half of the concerned NGOs. Other organizations were mentioned individually by less than 20% of NGOs. These two separate elements of a single rubric show that not all connections are actually similarly effective when correlated to the amount of goals realized.

The overall debate about connections and networks in the context of NGO activity boils down to the question of complementarity, i.e., the balance between complementary strengths and weaknesses on the part of non-state and state actors that, when taken together, create 'comprehensive capital' and drive sustainable development (Sievers 2003). Based on the idea of comprehensive capital and given that "deciding which actor is state and which actor is society is less relevant in this schema than the need for complementarity of inputs" (Stevens 2005:

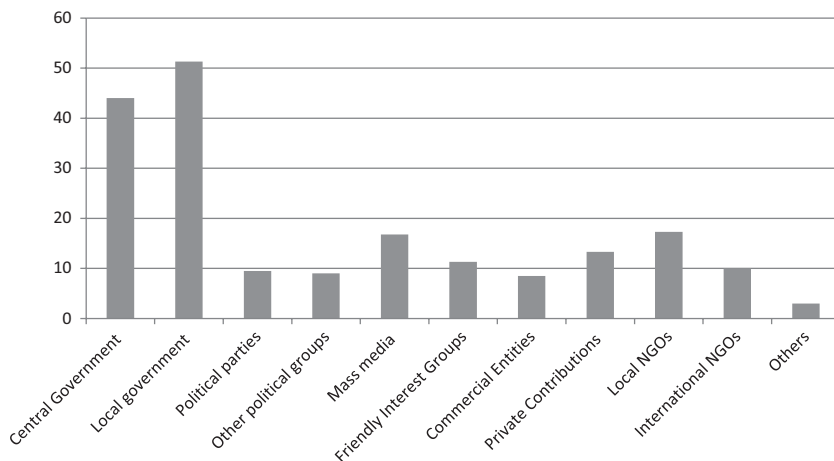


Fig. 7.9 Support received by the NGOs from other organizations (%)

289), we could argue that connections and networks, provided that they enhance the performance of the NGO sector, play a much greater role in bridging state and civil society, however unwittingly it happens to occur.

NGOs' IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL (IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION)

If there is one question that is critical to understanding the role of NGOs in the development of social capital in society, we can think of the impact that these organizations have in this regard compared with other social institutions discussed in this book. The general perception we have so far is that domestic NGOs are far from creating a sustainable amount of social capital, not least because the majority of genuine (i.e., not GONGO-styled organizations) are run by a very small group of individuals. This resonates with the view that people that work for the NGOs are more likely to be family members or former co-workers. As such, there are no conditions that would “indicate the creation of new networks of social capital or represent extensive social networks” (Stevens 2005: 288).

This can partly be noticed in the survey findings (see Fig. 7.10). We observe that although more people take part in the events or social gatherings organized by NGOs, far fewer people actually contribute to organiza-

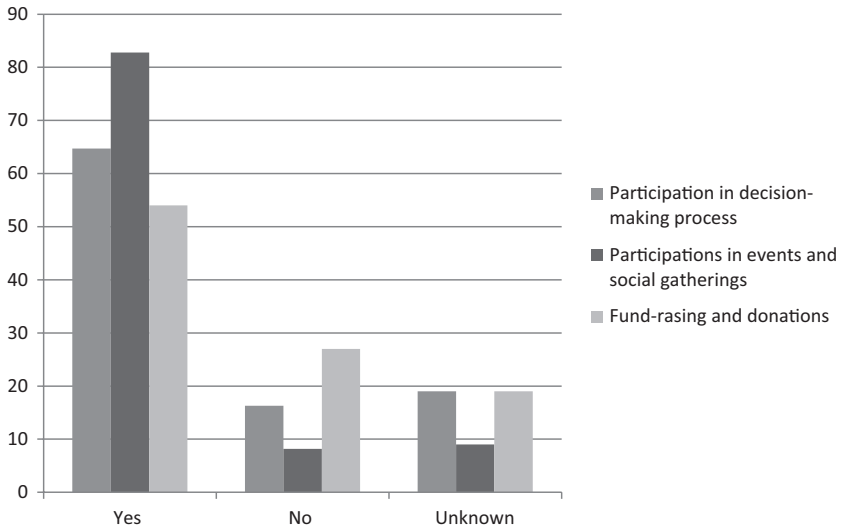


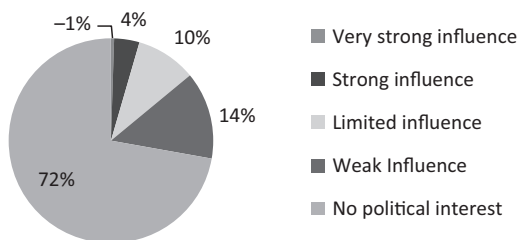
Fig. 7.10 Member participation in NGO activities

tional strength by donating or fundraising, and the case is the same when assessing the participation of the members in the decision-making process.

The greatest shortcoming on the part of NGOs' capacity to generate sufficient stocks of social capital is that what happens on a local, micro-level does not advance to build bigger bridges and facilitate more extensive social action on a scale that is politically and economically meaningful. In Stevens' words, "what is needed in Uzbekistan is not a patchwork quilt of localised projects, but more coordinated development enacted at the state level" (Stevens 2005: 291). This raises the question of whether domestic NGOs have enough political influence to drive those "politically and economically meaningful" projects on a larger scale. Our data below (Fig. 7.11) again show that by virtue of the bitter realities of post-Soviet institutionalism and for the sake of their own survival, these organizations prefer to remain apolitical and focus on less politically sensitive areas.

Given the deficiencies and strengths of Uzbek NGOs, we must agree with Robert Putnam's 'path dependence' thesis, which boils down to the idea that the reservoirs of social capital are collected over centuries rather

Fig. 7.11 Political influence of domestic NGOs



than within the short-term project cycles common in many development projects (Putnam et al. 1993). Perhaps, this gives us another reason to assume that in the context of Uzbekistan, the mahalla-generated social capital is far more sustainable and effective in meeting the needs of society compared to the state.

NOTES

1. The USAID's SCO Sustainability Index in 2014 mentions that such positive changes included improvements to the NGO registration process, the adoption of laws on government transparency, social partnership, and citizen appeals. Specifically, the law on social partnership is aimed at facilitating state support to NGOs at the local level, as well as the introduction of new mechanisms for involving citizens in government decision making.
2. It should be mentioned that more than one-third of organisations interviewed chose more than one group whose interests were represented by an NGO.

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