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UNIVERSITÉ DE VARSOVIE
INSTITUT
DES PAYS EN DÉVELOPPEMENT

ASIA & PACIFIC STUDIES

1

Warszawa
2004



1/2004, p. 83–96

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AID OPERATIONS IN RUSSIA

Key words: *aid operations, NGOs, Russia, Siberia*

Abstract: the paper discusses aid operations in Russia, which are implemented in different ways, depending on the degree of development of democratic structures. In the paper's initial part, the relationships between the state and the civic society in the Soviet Union are described. Their specific nature was due to the lack of any genuine involvement of individuals in the social sphere. Further, changes taking place after the collapse of the Soviet Union are discussed by sectors of activity, including voluntary sector initiatives at the local, regional and national levels. Also, certain aid organisations are described, such as the Helsinki Group in Moscow and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia. In addition, the paper discusses forms of organising assistance in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Finally, prospects for assistance activities in Russia are outlined.

Aid operations are carried out throughout the world in a variety of ways, depending on the advancement of democratic structures in a given country. In each society, there exist three sectors – the public, the private and the voluntary. The latter is the most interested of all in undertaking remedial measures directed towards those who are in direst need. Such measures are implemented on various levels of activity – in the sphere of education, culture, as well as observance of human rights. The voluntary sector, quite commonly known under the term of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is regarded as the foundation of the democratic texture of every society. It is made up of non-profit organisations built on voluntary association, capable of making decisions

independently of public authorities. The functioning of these three components is the fullest expression of a civic society (Woźniak, 1998).

Aid operations in Russia were carried out differently in the era of the Soviet Union, since at that time the interactions between the individual sectors had a peculiar form. Although their nature utterly changed following the collapse of the empire, the feature the two periods have in common is the adage put into practice by the Russian populace: "When in Russia, you're on your own".

Relationships between the state and the civic society in the Soviet Union

In the time of the Soviet Union, the range and the role played by the public sector gradually increased. Property owned by private people was quickly seized by the dynamically developing state holdings. Centres of business activity, e.g. factories and repair plants were nationalised, while land estates were collectivised. The property owned by the society was taken over by the state, with the growing popular conviction that, over time, everything will fall into the hands of the state. The voluntary sector was also developing, but the mode of its operation had little in common with other civic initiatives of the time.

The overriding feature that largely determined the shape and the functions of the Soviet society was the lack of any possibility of genuine involvement of people in the social sphere through the establishment of intermediary structures between the individual and the state. People were not able to organise themselves with a view to satisfying their basic needs and rights. For this reason, individual behaviours were characterised by distrust in the possibility of solving various difficult problems using other assistance than that offered by the state. People deprived of private property were encouraged, and frequently even forced, to join social organisations, which were in fact government agencies, highly bureaucratic institutions with limited initiative. Any attempts at undertaking spontaneous activities, in which people's individuality would be distinctly manifested, were very quickly suppressed. People participating in the voluntary sector formed uniform collective bodies, where the only chance to make a mark was shock working. It consisted in the participation in various social and cultural actions, in a dimension exceeding the agreed standards of time and productivity. Those who would distinguish themselves in the development of the voluntary sector received praise, diplomas, medals, and sometimes even financial benefits (Robertson, 1985).

The existence of a distinctly dominating public authority did not mean that there were no non-governmental organisations in the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, their operation considerably differed from the principles generally acknowledged elsewhere in the world.

Pardon divides NGOs into those which, in their operations, focused on three levels of activity. The first, functioning at the local level, comprised self-help activities that were obviously controlled by the central authorities. They would seldom implement projects on their own initiative, more frequently so in distinct cooperation with the representatives of the state authorities. The second group – organisations at the national level – to some extent dealt with preparing and implementing projects, but primarily were involved in intermediation between the local and the international level organisations. The development of the latter was of paramount importance to the authorities, as it proved that, in a state with a centrally planned economy, there is also room for other forms of social and economic activity. The main tasks of such organisations included implementation of projects, coordination, training, advisory services and financing of initiatives in the countries organised into international non-governmental associations.

In the times of the Soviet Union, cooperation evolved between Soviet non-governmental organisations and non-state (non-governmental) groups from other parts of the world. The Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) established a permanent system of cooperation with all international socialist non-state organisations, which formed economic associations. The system was based not only on unilateral decisions of COMECON; mutual cooperation involved much closer interactions. Such activities were unique to this part of the world. Cooperation between international NGOs and COMECON focused on two distinct spheres. The first, nuclear sector, focused its activities between COMECON and the International Economic Association for Nuclear Devices and Supplies, Equipment and Technical Cooperation in Nuclear Plants. The second sphere of activity included those NGOs whose cooperation aimed to step up the process of industrialisation. In this sphere, contacts were established between COMECON and such entities as the International Economic Association for Chemical Textiles; Technical Facilities for the Textile Industry.

Agreements between international NGOs and COMECON were possible under Article XII of the statutes of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, which generally stipulated the possibility to conclude agreements with other organisations. Cooperation between these bodies was rather peculiar, as COMECON had to be informed about such issues as work plans for the coming year, maintaining regular contacts during the preparation of materials and documents concerning matters of common interest; also, these associations

were obliged to observe COMECON guidelines concerning their operations (Doliwa-Klepacki, 1997).

Therefore, it can be said that although formally there existed various non-state associations in the Soviet Union, they were governed by their own inimitable rules, which did not have much in common with generally acknowledged operational standards followed by their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The voluntary sector was represented not so much by non-governmental organisations as by the civic society, a factor which additionally contributed to the reinforcement of the huge public sector.

Relationships between the state and the civic society after the collapse of the Soviet Union

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a process of transforming the role of individual sectors of social activity began in Russia. Particularly in the initial period after the downfall of the empire, the public sector, built over the decades, still remained strong. It is widely considered, however, that its significance will diminish in the subsequent years of systemic transformation. On the other hand, the private sector, totally eliminated in the Soviet Union period, is being reborn. Additionally, the role of the voluntary sector, developing together with the civic society and NGOs, is growing. Decentralisation is now a matter of top priority for the authorities; it is understood as having resources and possibilities to implement social initiatives at the lowest possible level. This means a departure from the former model, involving the implementation of assumptions and guidelines by individual state administration bodies.

The change of the political and economic system exerted a strong influence on the administration of territorial units. In Russia, the conversion from centrally planned to market economy, as well as the overall transformation of the global economy, brought about the need for changes in the legislation defining the competencies, obligations and reporting hierarchy of territorial units at different levels, as well as in the management methods.

If assistance operations are to be properly implemented at the local level in Russia, several regulations must be in place. The first is the principle of subsidiarity, understood as assuming only those rights and competencies by higher level bodies which can, owing to the national status or other conditions (legal or financial), be exercised at the local and regional levels. This means a heavy decentralisation and autonomy of many lower-level entities in the

Russian Federation. Secondly, the principle of partnership must be implemented in practice; the rules existing between the public authorities of various levels as well as social and economic entities must be defined. This means that the so-called PPP – public-private partnership - must be operational. What is also needed in Russia is the implementation of the principle of development programming, the consequence of which is providing financial assistance to projects only in those regions of the country which will have prepared strategic programmes. Cooperation of public authorities with the local community is extremely important in view of the democratisation of not only political, but also economic life. It leads to the mobilisation of the social potential which, when combined with public measures, helps better satisfy the needs of the population. In this respect, the operation of auxiliary entities, which are frequently vested with various powers by the higher-level authorities, is of great importance for the development of such cooperation. Their efficient operation in Russia would allow smaller communities to express their views on matters of interest for them (Kot, 1998).

For non-governmental organisations, it is very difficult to operate in Russia. This is due to the fact that they started their activity in a specific political and economic context and a specific awareness. Russian citizens were subject to a process of the destruction of certain values by their forced participation in the co-called “community work”. Therefore, many people, when confronted with a request to do something as a contribution for the community, express strong refusal. The term “community work” elicits negative associations. Russians frequently have associations concerning many activities they perform to an order or instruction. The authorities made vigorous efforts to discourage people from organising into groups having a distinctly individual character. Voluntary, spontaneous initiatives were not seen as a positive phenomenon, unlike organisation of group activity. In the opinion of the authorities, the collective body was a social group characterised by positive principles and deriving joy from overcoming difficulties. Thus, being in a community was positively assessed, while remaining “outside” could not be viewed with any appreciation. Unwillingness to organise and the autonomy of the individual, its freedom and independence of thought and action, so frequently emphasised, was the popular reaction to collective thinking.

Non-governmental organisations founded on the principle of voluntary association, which are currently operating in Russia, are extremely varied, depending on their objectives. For instance, there are NGOs aiding those who are in direst need, but also NGOs engaging in educational, cultural or sport activity, as well as pressure groups acting in the name and interests of specific communities.

The Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG) is the oldest human rights organisation in Russia, established in 1976. In the times of the Soviet Union, the MHG was an important body, which provided significant information about the observance of human rights. After the collapse of the empire, its responsibilities and problems did not at all diminish. The priorities of the Moscow Helsinki Group include providing support to regional human rights organisations and their activists and keeping the renewed, legendary Chronicle of Current Events. According to the MHG, both federal and local authorities solve problems related to human rights protection only to a small degree. The organisation ensures supervision of groups for improving conditions and observing freedom principles (<http://www.hro.org/ngo/mhg>).

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia was one of the many NGOs which came into being as an expression of protest against the way people are enlisted for the Soviet Army. In the mid-1980s, when the Soviet Union was in its decline phase, the army was still applying the criterion, introduced during the Afghan war, of enlisting students. The Committee's founder, Maria Ivanovna Kubasova, proved great determination in reaching initially 50 mothers whose sons, like hers, were sent for military service while at university. In the first years of its existence, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia organised demonstrations and protests and collected signatures for terminating students' compulsory military service (altogether over one million signatures). These activities indirectly contributed to the modification of this regulation by the Supreme Council in 1989. Following these events, the Committee organised further activities intended to promote the democratisation in the army.

Following the outbreak of the Chechen war, the public opinion learnt about the true power and function of such NGOs as the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia. Only during the first Chechen war, probably about 50 thousand Russian soldiers perished in battle, while the official figures quoted merely two thousand dead. News about soldiers fighting in the war was virtually impossible to obtain. Frequently, families would only receive laconic information about their child's death. The women associated in the Committee decided to take the initiative and find their sons, dead or alive, by themselves and bring them home. In this way, hundreds of Russian mothers appeared on the front line or in its direct vicinity. The activity of the women who are members of the Committee include collecting information, showing photographs of the children they are searching for, visiting hospitals, and even the army headquarters. At some point the military contemplated forbidding any activity to the members of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, but soon realised that the women are so desperate than nothing and no one could

possibly stop them. As a result of the deteriorating financial situation of the organisation, mothers who wanted to look for their sons on the front line were frequently not even able to pay their fare, sometimes from the remotest parts of Russia to the southern republics of the Russian Federation. Trips to Ingushetia or Chechnya were possible only due to contributions made by the families, employers and women's organisations which were established in various towns and cities. The presence of women in search of their sons is tolerated by Chechen fighters; they often talk, sharing the assumption that the war is fought somewhere at the high levels of state administration, and not between individuals. The prolonged stay of the soldiers' mothers (sometimes lasting over a hundred days) would not be possible without substantial assistance of the local population. During the first Chechen war, the presence of numerous representatives of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia caused disruptions in the functioning of many institutions in the republics bordering on the areas afflicted by war. For instance, the majority of schools in Ingushetia were not operating normally, since they served as accommodation for the desperate women.

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia struggles not only to end the war, but also to change the social mindset and the system of rewards and punishments, which is still reminiscent of the stigma the totalitarian system has left on the inhabitants of contemporary Russia. As a token of appreciation, mothers who lose their sons in battle receive an order of merit for service to the Russian Federation. They demand that medals and orders be replaced by a new approach to the Chechen conflict.

Amnesty International is also an entity that is very active in the struggle for observing human rights in Russia. On 30 October 2002, the AI published a report prepared by the staff of the organisation's international secretariat in London, who had collected information from non-governmental and social organisations operating in Russia. A global campaign for the observance of human rights in the Russian Federation was proclaimed. The description of the situation in Chechnya constitutes an important component of the report; there, human rights are violated both by the Russian forces and the Chechen fighters. In addition to the situation in Chechnya, threats existing in other parts of the country are described in the report. Amnesty International claims that about 14 thousand women in Russia fall victim to household violence every year. Minors who have committed an offence are sentenced to long periods of imprisonment, bearing no relation to the actual offence. It is hoped that as a consequence of the "Justice for Everybody" campaign human rights will, at long last, be genuinely observed, and many international treaties signed by Russia will be

really implemented. Another serious problem is the fact that representatives of ethnic minorities in various parts of the country are threatened by police persecutions. However, there are no assistance organisations in Russia which would protect the observance of the rights of ethnic groups, so numerous in the Russian Federation (<http://www.amnesty.org/russia>).

Many active NGOs, both in Russia and abroad, focus their activity on promoting social and political education, in addition to undertaking cultural and educational measures. Also, many charity actions are organised, serving to improve the knowledge of processes taking place during the transformation from a centrally planned economy into a modern, democratic state with a market economy, among the local communities.

Forms of organised aid in Siberia and the Russian Far East

Aid operations carried out by the government as well as non-governmental and social organisations are particularly needed for the population of Siberia and the Russian Far East. This huge area, covering 12,750,000 sq. km., needs – now just as in the times of the Soviet Union – an efficient organisation of power and human resources management. It also requires and expects assistance in many different issues concerning the region, and frequently seriously affecting the functioning of the entire state. Due to their remote location from Moscow, where key decisions are made concerning various parts of the country, Siberia and the Russian Far East frequently do not get the treatment they deserve. The interest of the central authorities in the region is mainly limited to deriving benefits from the numerous, and sometimes the world's richest deposits of natural resources. Aid operations of the authorities are definitely out of proportion in relation to the revenues the Russian Federation generates from the production and sale of diamonds of natural gas. The people living east of the Ural openly point out that the European part of the country is better financed and may hope for aid and assistance both in the problems at hand and in preventing the consequences of possible natural calamities.

Among many inconveniences of life in Siberia and the Russian Far East (such as heavy frosts, sometimes reaching below -60°C, numerous pests and insects, troubling not only people but also the animals they breed), high water stages are quite common. Huge Siberian rivers, such as the Lena, normally overflow twice a year, in spring and early summer. The first time is in May, when the snow and ice in the mountains violently thaw (this rise is dubbed “the white water” by the local population), and the second in June, when the rivers rapidly collect the water from the snow thawing in the taiga (“the black water”). Sometimes the

mass of water is so huge that it is difficult to distinguish a period of relative calm between the two raised water stages. This was the case in 1998 and in 2000, when a large part of the areas lying on the rivers was flooded. In a situation of limited financial resources, sometimes absurd things happen: while some people are helped, others are allowed to die. Frequently, relief measures carried out in various parts of Siberia and the Russian Far East were driven by political considerations. It was so in Yakutia, which suffered from the 2000 flood. In this republic, occupying an area of over 3,000,000 sq. km, and predominantly inhabited by Russians, Yakuts, accounting for 30% of the population, have dominated all the authorities and manage this area. During the flood the *ulus*¹ of Lensk, with mainly Russian population, suffered very heavy losses. Information available from the Russian and Polish press confirm that aid reached this area rather late, and the implemented measures were restricted. Such an attitude can certainly be explained by the fact that the area in question was very large, and the resources at the disposal of the local authorities were limited. Nonetheless, the decision not to bomb the ice-mass in the vicinity of Lensk using SU-24M fighter planes, was interpreted by many people as saving Yakutsk (the republic's capital) at the expense of the small Lensk. It is also true that the then President of Yakutia, Mikhail Nikolayev, lost in the election only in Lensk, and many observers were of the opinion that the aid policy was a response to the support he received in the presidential election. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the support to of the traditional Yakut clans, backed by the leaders of regional industrial centres, has been growing. Declaring divergent political view may not only more and more frequently destroy the prospects for a promotion at work, but may also affect such tragic situations as the flood.

The presence of non-governmental and aid organisations is particularly needed in regions where activities are restricted to some areas only, and relief measures are planned according to the “lesser evil” principle. As an example, a situation may be quoted when, in order to stop the ice-jam building up in the vicinity of Lensk, a decision was made to direct the ice mass towards the Saldykel village, with a population of 540. Of 170 farms existing there before the flood, only one has remained. The village residents pointed out that they had not been warned against the impending danger. The lack of any voluntary workers also affected the decisions taken by the local population. Every resident, despite the imminent danger, realised that at least one person from every family must stay and guard the property. The experience gained during earlier floods indicated

¹ The country's lower administrative level. *Ulusy* are equivalents of districts, functioning elsewhere in the Russian Federation.

that even if the water failed to destroy the buildings, they would be plundered. During an earlier flood, many people insured their farms in a local insurance company, which declared bankruptcy owing to insolvency. None of the insured could do anything about it; that is why people do not believe in honesty and seldom insure their belongings (Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia, 2002).

Many aid decisions are taken under the influence of the instructions from Moscow, and their implementation largely consists in adhering to an adopted plan, often purely theoretical and having nothing to do with reality. Aid frequently comes only when a decision is made on the visit of the head of state or government officials in an area directly afflicted by the calamity, or in order to hand over the rebuilt homes to the families. After the flood in Lensk, after President Putin's visit had been scheduled for 15 September 2001, many relief organisations significantly contributed to the reconstruction of the town. Eight thousand workers were brought here from all the corners of Russia, and in order to improve the efficiency of the works, a ban on alcoholic beverages was introduced. The town's reconstruction was so speedy as if done by Stakhanovites². 2700 new houses were built and nearly 5000 old apartments were renovated. It should be noted that not only the pace of works was Stakhanovite, but also that of thefts. The prosecutor proved that on the way to Lensk, 7,500 tonnes of pipes used for repairs of the heating system were stolen. The aid of voluntary workers would be particularly valuable in the distribution of goods for people who suffered during various natural calamities. Such workers could help supervise and justly distribute both material goods and money. A large part of the population who suffered in the flood was not able to move to the reconstructed households in their towns and villages and other parts of the country by the planned deadlines. For the victims of the flood, the federal authorities allocated 888 new apartments in the cities and towns of the European part of Russia. After their distribution by the Yakut authorities, it transpired that only 327 of the afflicted families moved out from Lensk, while the remaining ones were still waiting for their allocation. Later it turned out that the rest of the apartments were assigned to people who neither suffered from the flood nor ever lived in the endangered area.

Despite an observable decline in the population of this region of Russia, the central authorities do not take any measures which might better assess the situation in the areas spreading east of the Ural mountains. No actions are taken in order to retain the population in the areas where the living conditions

² Stakhanovism was an organisation of Communist shock workers existing in the times of the Soviet Union, named to honour Aleksei Stakhanov, a coal miner from the Donbas, who made history by exceeding the hard coal mining quotas by 1400%.

are extremely difficult. It seems that the actual policies increase the motivation of people to leave these areas. Practically every year the press writes about the so-called "breakdown of the heating season", when coal transports fail – for unknown reasons – to reach many Siberian towns in the time of very heavy frosts. The authorities in Moscow are mildly interested in the living conditions of the population of Siberia and the Russian Far East. Their activities aimed to explain the reasons for the lack of fuel in the heating season come down to disclosing numerous frauds at all levels of the state administration. Therefore people must rely on themselves and be able to cope with every situation. Sometimes it means extreme measures, when for instance people destroy and burn their own furniture and themselves organise transports of timber in order to keep their dwellings relatively warm. This is less surprising in the case of villages and small towns. However, expeditions for timber to the taiga are organised in large cities of the Far East, such as Vladivostok or Khabarovsk. People inhabiting this part of Russia have always had to cope in difficult conditions. They mastered to perfection such skills as, for instance, building warm, dry, wooden houses. Buildings built in the permafrost area do not have foundations, as, firstly, laying them would be difficult owing to the prevalent low temperatures and the frozen ground, and, secondly, cold would penetrate faster from the ground in the winter. That is why houses are built on the base made from logs or bricks. The inhabitants of Siberia emphasise their ability to cope in difficult conditions. For instance, several men can build a house for a family of four in just a week. The buildings, built with meticulous care, can withstand many dangers³. Despite the financial resources granted by the growing numbers of NGOs in Russia and other relief organisations reaching these areas in the recent years, the old adage still rings true: "In Siberia, you're one your own".

Even in a situation of having the skill to survive in adverse conditions, the lack of essential activities both on the part of federal and, frequently, local authorities, negatively affects the deteriorating conditions of living of the Siberian and the Russian Far East population. It can be said that the inhospitable climate, not conducive to the development of human activity, as well as the deepening economic crisis in Russia, in addition to the absence of an efficient voluntary sector, slowly condemn Siberia to a gradual decline. The only people to stay here will be those who have no other place to go or those who, for various reasons, do not want to change the status quo.

³ During the more and more frequent floods in Siberia and the Russian Far East there were situations when a building, transported by the water 400 kilometres away, would be found intact.

Prospects of aid operations in Russia

The presence of efficient aid structures would certainly not suffice to solve all problems that the residents of the Russian Federation have to cope with on a daily basis. However, their functioning and effective operation might significantly improve and facilitate the living conditions of the population. Most probably, the biggest hindrance to implementing any remedial measures is the scepticism of the local communities concerning the *raison d'être* of assistance organisations. This is mainly due to the fact that many people are not even aware that in a truly democratic society the functioning of such entities as NGOs is an indispensable constituent of the state. Among many representatives of the Russian authorities, an observable tendency is manifested to treat cooperation with NGOs as an obstruction to their work, a hindrance consisting in restricting the efficiency of relevant state bodies. Often, the central state structures consider the existence of aid organisations as an undesirable element, which impairs their ability to rule in a given area. However, while pointing to difficulties in the cooperation between state authorities and aid organisations, mainly NGOs, it should be borne in mind that the local government reform in Russia is only a starting point for specific activities, aimed to normalise the functioning of the relevant structures of exercising power. The difficulties in the operations of the voluntary sector should not necessarily be seen as a dead end. It should be remembered that social organisations carrying out aid activity encounter problems also in countries with uninterrupted traditions of civic involvement. Russia still has a long way to go as far as systemic transformation is concerned. It is to be hoped that the consequences of this transformation will be as undamaging as possible to its citizens.

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Содержение

ВСПОМАГАТЕЛЬНЫЕ РАБОТЫ В РОССИИ

Вспомогательные работы проводятся иначе в разных частях сфета. Важным является также их различный характер на данной территории, которой зависит от вида существующих власти. В России они были реализованы иначе после обретения независимости. До 1991 г. существование доминирующей публичной власти вообще не означало, что не существовали в России внеправительственные организации. Функционирование их однако решительно отличалось от общих принятых принципов в мире. Своеобразно развивать сотрудничество международных советских организаций с внеправительственными группировками из государств принадлежащих к Совету Экономической Взаимопомощи (СЭВ). После обременения независимости приоритетом советских властей является детенрализация, которая имеет средства и возможности создавать на низшем уровне общественные инициативы. Функционирование разных внеправительственных и общественных организаций в России довольно тяжёлое. Однако они реализуют дифференцированную деятельность.

Существует например:

1. организации которые занимаются нуждающимися помощи
2. организации которые занимаются:
 - а) эдукацей
 - б) культурой

в) спортом

а также существуют группы, которые действуют под чьим-либо давлением и выступают они от имени и в интересах определённых групп. Самой старшей организацией защиты прав человека является Хельсинкская группа в Москве. Её главной задачей является:

- поддерживать региональные отделения и их членов, поскольку они реализуют деятельность, которая стремится соблюдать права человека, а также:
- вести обновлённую легендарную Хронику актуальных событий.

Одной из важных вспомогательных организаций в России является Комитет солдатских матерей России. Выступает он не только с инициативой связанной с войной в Чечни, но и борется за изменение общественного мышления и способа наказания наград, которые всё ещё напоминают о явном отпечатке, который оставил на жителях севодняшней России тоталитарная система. Активную деятельность в пользу соблюдения прав человека ведёт Amnesty International. Вспомогательные инициативы особенно нужны людям проживающим в Сибири и Дальнем Востоке. Принятые властью меры решительно являются неадекватными по сравнению с доходами, алмаз и природный газ. Этот район требует и ожидает помощи во многих делах касающихся Сибири, а части имеющих больше влияние на функционирование всего государства. Существование чётких вспомогательных структур наверняка не был бы в состоянии решить все проблемы, с которыми повседневно борются жители России. Всё таки их функционирование и эффективное действие в большой мере могли бы улучшить и облегчить жизнь людей.