

**The Emerging Powers and the Changing Landscape of Foreign Aid and Development Cooperation
Public Perceptions of Development Cooperation**

Summary Paper 4: RUSSIA

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Project Background

Most DAC¹ donor governments and development NGOs have a strong interest in the public face of development: that is, domestic perceptions of international development. Key issues include:

- Do people think foreign aid is a legitimate expenditure of taxpayer money?
- How much foreign aid do people believe is given, and to whom, in which countries?
- How effective do people think aid is in humanitarian crises, or for poverty reduction, enhancing human development or contributing to security?
- Do people believe that foreign aid provides value for money?
- What purposes do people believe foreign aid serves: moral, humanitarian, developmental, security, commercial and/or geopolitical?

DAC donor governments have to convince an array of taxpayers, voters, parliamentarians, journalists and civil society watchdogs that ODA is a just and effective expenditure. Interest in the public face of development has led to investment in a large number of national and cross-national surveys of how people perceive 'development' and how they understand the 'less developed' world more generally. Critics suggest that we need to be cautious about what these surveys actually measure, e.g., knowledge about development or commitment to aid expenditure. There are also doubts about the validity of cross-national data.

However, to date there has been little or no analysis of what various publics within the range of 'non-DAC' countries think about their foreign aid/development cooperation activities. In this project, we researched the public face of development in **China, India, Poland, Russia and South Africa**. These diverse 'southern' and 'eastern' development partners have a range of historical and contemporary development cooperation policies and practices. In each case, we examined the extent of public awareness of their official development cooperation policies and activities; how this and perceptions of the purpose and legitimacy of development cooperation varied between different segments of the public; and whether or not official development actors and agencies sought to engage with the public.

Research conduct and methodologies

Given the size of this project it was not feasible to conduct large surveys. In Poland and Russia we were able to draw upon existing surveys, but none to date exist in China, India or South Africa. We conducted interviews with government officials; academics and think tank personnel; development NGO workers; private sector interests; and journalists and editors. The balance varied between country settings because of context; for example, in Poland the very heavy involvement of NGOs contrasted to China and India, and shaped our choice of respondents. The second shared approach was print and Internet media analysis. Given the scale of the project and the very different country contexts, this was not standardized across the case studies, but shaped to the circumstances of each one. The project has benefited enormously from the discussions we have had across our five case study countries, but it was not designed to be formally comparative. All of our respondents were interviewed with informed consent, and anonymity was guaranteed unless otherwise agreed.

Full project details can be found at:

<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/foreignaidperceptions/>

This website also has details of longer academic papers

¹The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) comprises 23 industrialised countries plus the European Union. All are western other than Japan, and since 2010, South Korea.

Russia's development cooperation at a glance

History: The Soviet Union was a significant donor of development assistance during the twentieth century, offering a socialist model of development to compete with a capitalist model in the context of the Cold War. Because at that time many of Russia's current development partners were incorporated within the Soviet Union, its foreign assistance was directed farther afield – to strategic partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Russia is today the only G8 member that is not also a member of the DAC, but it has been rebuilding its aid programme, especially since its presidency of the G8 in 2006.

Institutions: The functionality of Russia's development assistance has been dispersed through a number of ministries, primarily the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Education & Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry for Emergency Situations (known externally as EMERCOM). Although the creation of a dedicated development agency has been officially proposed since 2007, it was not until August 2011 that the Ministry of Finance announced that a Russian Agency for International Development would be established in January 2012. Russia's EximBank was formed in 1994, and in 2007, all of its securities were assigned as a contribution to the charter capital of the state-controlled Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Activities (Vneshekonombank).

Modalities: Russia's development assistance is primarily channelled through multilateral programmes (e.g. UNDP), but it has also begun to (re)develop channels of bilateral aid, including debt relief and lines of credit (in 2010, Russia provided \$472 million in ODA according to the Ministry of Finance). More attention grabbing is Russian's humanitarian assistance for emergency relief, channelled through EMERCOM. Priority areas for Russia's emerging multilateral aid programme are food security (UN World Food programme) and global health (Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; Global Polio Eradication Initiative). There is some continuity with the Soviet legacy of providing training/education and technical assistance, particularly health-related.

Partners: Russia's key development partners are found among the former Soviet republics, especially the members of the Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzES), which include Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, and observer states Ukraine, Moldova, and Armenia. In 2006, Russia and Kazakhstan together established the Eurasian Development Bank, whose members now also include Armenia, Tadjikistan and Belarus. Some of Russia's recent activities include lines of credit to Venezuela and Indonesia; development financing for Tadjikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua and Nauru; debt cancellation in Africa; and humanitarian aid to Haiti, China, Kosovo, Gaza, N. Korea, and for Libyan refugees in Tunisia.

Recent debates: Russia is unique in terms of having been a "superpower" that subsequently experienced being a recipient of ODA and then began a return to donor status. Russia's hosting of the G8 summit in St. Petersburg in 2006 was something of a formative moment for Russia's national persona as an aid donor, taking up its place in the "donors' club". Russian discourse exhibits no terminological discomfort or euphemistic framing around development aid – the term "donor" is not avoided, and the terminology of OECD is adopted wholesale. Although Russia is sometimes portrayed as something of a rogue donor that lacks transparency and accountability, it shows no animosity toward the DAC, and in fact many Russian experts are favourably disposed to eventual membership, expressing a quiet confidence that Russia could bring positive changes once it is inside.

Project Findings

What do the public know about Russia's development cooperation?

Awareness of Russia's involvement as an aid donor is unquestionably very low across all regions, across all demographics. There are a number of factors contributing to this.

The latent character of Russia's aid programme. Russia has declared its intention to build an aid programme, but it has not yet fully launched it. In 2007, the Russian Government issued a "Concept on Russia's participation in international development assistance", which lays out a comprehensive plan, including establishing an aid agency and carrying out "a broad public awareness campaign"; however, no mechanisms have since been put in place to execute the plan, and there has been little coordination of effort across ministries. A few key individuals who are very knowledgeable and actively engaged on the issue of development cooperation are scattered throughout the relevant ministries (some of them jointly authored the Concept), but what seems to be lacking is a singular

vision from the Russian government.

Ambiguity of its aid delivery mechanisms. The Concept issued in 2007 called for the eventual creation of a “specialized government institution” for handling aid. This was seemingly fulfilled in September 2008 with the creation of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, or Russian Cooperation (short for Federal agency on affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, compatriots living abroad, and international humanitarian cooperation). However, *Rossotrudnichestvo*’s expressed aim is to carry forward the long legacy of Russian cultural centres abroad; the overseas aid function was attached to it literally as an afterthought. To date *Rossotrudnichestvo* has no active project aid programme, and experts consulted for this project were nearly unanimous in the view that it is not likely to ever carry out such a function.

Role of outside agencies in “pulling” Russia into the role of donor. In many ways, Russia is less an *emerging* donor than a *recruited* donor in a process that might be labeled “donor expansion”. The World Bank, Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID), and USAID have all been actively courting Russia to join the “donor’s club” and become a responsible and effective donor. This desired outcome has been pursued through sponsored workshops in Russia, training programmes abroad, and consulting, which targets a carefully selected assemblage of Russian ministry personnel, journalists, and representatives of NGOs and academic think tanks. In 2010, the World Bank commissioned the Russian public opinion research agency Levada Center to carry out a survey on public opinion of Russia’s participation in aid to poorer nations.

Who are ‘the public(s)’?

While income/class is a common way to categorize the public, there are more salient segmentations of the Russian population that are worth investigating further:

Moscow and St. Petersburg vs. “The regions”. Traditionally, as a result of strong centralization, there has been a gap between Russia’s “capitals” and the rest of the country in terms of power, opportunity, influence and perceived cultural sophistication. However, this gap is closing. Ironically, some of the experts consulted for this project pointed out that the regions were almost better positioned to make contributions to international development assistance than the capitals, because after nearly two decades of being targeted with aid by outside agencies, there are now hundreds of Russian NGOs that have a sophisticated sense of what it takes to deliver an aid programme.

Large urban centres vs. small towns, villages, rural areas. This is now probably a more salient division than that above; while large urban centres anywhere in Russia are well connected by improved transportation and communication infrastructure, rural areas remain isolated. This is especially the case in the Russian Far North, where some of Russia’s most severe poverty is found. The Levada Center survey indicates that those living in Moscow/St. Petersburg/large urban centres and with higher education showed “the greatest interest in international affairs and in information about aid to poorer nations” (Levada Center 2010, p.9).

Generational. As the generation who were very young or not yet born at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union comes of age, there is a growing segment of the Russian population who were not socialized in the Soviet context, and who were, moreover, raised in a society fairly saturated with INGOs targeting Russia with a broad spectrum of assistance programmes. Anecdotal evidence shows that this strongly affects their expectations about both Russia’s role in the world and their own professional aspirations, having implications for their attitudes to Russia’s role as a donor of international development assistance. This has not been sufficiently theorized or investigated.

Siloviki (bureaucrats) vs. Oligarchs (businessmen) vs. Reformers (intellectuals). While not necessarily mutually exclusive categories, these represent leading positions of power in Russian society. Only handfuls of people would technically fall into these categories, but they embody styles that potentially segment the Russian population in terms of sympathy and support. The word *siloviki* is from the Russian word *sila* (‘force’) and is a slang term for the current power brokers in Russia who were formerly in the military or security forces (e.g. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin). “Oligarchs” is the Russian label for entrepreneurs who profited on the privatization of state enterprise in the 1990s (e.g. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Roman Abramovich). “Reformers” here refers to intellectuals who took the lead in Russian society under former President Boris Yeltsin (e.g. Grigory Yavlinsky,

Boris Nemtsov) and to their ideological progeny in the current period.

Why inform the public? Almost without exception, everyone interviewed for this project opined that it did not make sense for the Russian government to pursue an active campaign of informing the public about its aid programme; however, this opinion took on various nuances:

- Some said it was simply too early because nothing concrete had happened yet in terms of Russia's active involvement in international development cooperation
- Some said it was not a good idea to make the programme too public, because it is intuitively understood that the Russian population generally reacts negatively to Russia sending aid abroad except when it is emergency relief (which has popular support and good media coverage).
- Some said that the Russian government never bothers to publicly campaign to gain support for any of its activities – it just does them, and (maybe) informs the public about it later. So why should it act any differently in this case?

The bottom line seems to be that there cannot be a clear message while there is no clear mandate or strategy – and that is what has so far been lacking.

Tapping the philanthropic community: Citizen charity/volunteering and oligarch philanthropy are growing phenomena in Russia, undergirded by NGOs such as The Donor's Forum, which seek to facilitate charitableness inside Russia. There are already indications that those active in this sector are favorably disposed to Russia taking on the role of providing development assistance abroad. Failure to connect with this community is a glaring oversight.

Conclusions: At this point, a great deal of solid groundwork has been laid for building the structures of international development cooperation in Russia, and there is a cohort of highly sophisticated and eagerly engaged Russian specialists distributed throughout government ministries, academic think tanks, and NGOs. The latter two categories in particular remain under-utilized and under-supported. The Russian government needs to be left now to make its own way forward in forming a vision and a plan of action for development cooperation. For its own part, the Russian government needs to more substantively draw upon the expertise in its own well-prepared academic and NGO sectors, and to provide the support that could consolidate these sectors into a formidable resource.

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