Emerging Donors and the Changing Landscape of Foreign Aid:

Where does Russia fit?

Patty A. Gray
Department of Anthropology
National University of Ireland Maynooth
patty.gray@nuim.ie

For more details on this research, see my article “Looking ‘The Gift’ in the mouth: Russia as donor.” *Anthropology Today* 27(2):5-8.

“The non-DAC states and the role of public perspectives in shaping the future of development cooperation”

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- **China**: Dr May Tan-Mullins (University of Nottingham, Ningbo Campus, China/International Studies)
- **India**: Dr Emma Mawdsley (University of Cambridge/Geography)
- **Poland**: Ela Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka (University of Cambridge/Anthropology)
- **Russia**: Dr Patty Gray (National University of Ireland Maynooth/Anthropology)
- **South Africa**: Dr Helen Yanacopulos (Open University/Development Policy & Practice)

This presentation reflects research I did within the context of this collaborative project.

Summary papers may be downloaded from: http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/foreignaidperceptions/
Basic project aim:

- Investigate what various publics in a range of non-DAC countries think about their foreign aid/development cooperation activities

Methodology

- Field-based
- Interviews with government officials; academics and think tank personnel; development NGO workers; private sector interests; and journalists and editors
- Media analysis

Note: I am an anthropologist, and therefore my approach – my goals, the questions I ask – differs from those who approach these issues from the perspective of development studies or international relations. In investigating Russia’s participation in development assistance, I am interested in the social practices involved and the way they emerge from a Russian cultural context.
What to do with Russia?

- It is non-DAC
- It is non-South
- But it is the ‘R’ in BRICS
Like most “emerging donors”, Russia actually has a long history of aid donorship – in its incarnation as the Soviet Union. This tends to be framed in the context of the Cold War and for the most part forgotten. However, that era could be cast as a competition between two models of development, one socialist, one capitalist.

“No colonies” – Since 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. It is significant that the Soviet Union could boast of (technically) never having established colonies in Africa, and as historian Maxim Matusevish has pointed out (personal communication 2011.), this gave the Soviet Union a certain cachet during the period of decolonisation in Africa, which coincided with the Krushchevian thaw and was precisely when Soviet-era foreign aid activities intensified. To some extent, the Soviet Union felt it could claim the moral high ground in Africa.

The Soviet Union had traditional strengths in health care and education – a couple of examples:

• Soviet Red Cross built hospital in Ethiopia in 1947 - It was an important symbol of Soviet-Ethiopian Cooperation (the hospital still operates, staffed by Russian doctors)
• The Soviet Union’s Peoples’ Friendship University in Moscow, whose purpose was to educate students from the Third World, was named after Patrice Lumumba, first Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo. The university linked the Soviet Union with the idealized context of Soviet Solidarity with the Third World, and the memory of this remains salient in some quarters in Russia today. (This university still operates, although fewer Third World students now attend.)
The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the first and last Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1991 opened the way for a radical disjuncture, i.e. the transformation of formerly Soviet Russia from a donor state to a recipient state, in the midst of Western triumphal rhetoric about the winning of the Cold War (to this day, *The Economist* magazine’s online glossary begins its definition of the term “capitalism” with the statement: “The winner, at least for now, of the battle of economic ‘isms’.”)

Russia was targeted by multiple aid programmes starting early 1990s – but there was some awkwardness in the traditional development approach because the Soviet economy was not exactly undeveloped, it was just developed according to the “wrong model”, so to speak. So a vocabulary of “transitioning economy” was devised rather than “developing economy”.

Experientially, being made into a recipient is a demeaning subject position, especially when you had once been a superpower. There is some interesting anthropological research on Russian experiences and Russian responses to this; a common phrase heard in the 1990s was: “We are not starving Africans!”

Russia is therefore unique in the world in terms of having been a “superpower” that experienced being a recipient of ODA for a period of time (from 1991 and continuing until the present in some ways), and then began a return to being a donor.

- However, the recipient period was long enough so that a generation of European and American university students grew up to think of Russia as one of the parts of the world that exists on the receiving end of aid.
- At the same time, there is a generation of Russians of a certain age and experience – “specialists” of varying definitions – who see in their country a natural continuity of involvement in providing aid to the “Third World”. 

**BACKGROUND**

Russia as aid recipient

- Dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991
- “Transitioning economy” rather than “developing economy”
- Demeaning subject position: “We are not starving Africans!”
We are now in a period where Russia is re-emerging as a donor:

**First signs**, As early as 1994, Yeltsin issued decree creating a “Russian Agency for International Cooperation and Development” – but this did not pan out. The idea for such an agency re-emerged in 2004 – according to an anonymous consultant in the Russian government who has practical expertise in development programmes, the idea was to create an analogy to USAID (USAID has been active in encouraging Russia to do this, as well as providing training).

**2006 G8 Summit.** Russia’s presidency of the G8 and 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. In an article in *Parlamentskaia Gazeta* following the summit, a reporter commented, “Russia is currently the only G8 country that has not worked out a strategy for activity in the sphere of international development assistance.” Russia is today the only G8 member that is not also a member of the DAC.

**2007 Concept.** Following this event, in 2007, the Russian President issued the seminal document, “Concept on Russia’s Participation in International Development Assistance”.

- The authors were mainly key individuals in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The Concept outlines what should be the nature of cooperation among the various branches of the Russian government expected to be involved in international development assistance.
- Of particular relevance for this project is the statement that Russia’s activities in setting up a system for international development assistance “will be supported with a broad public awareness campaign”. To date, such a campaign has not been undertaken by the Russian government.
Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации
Департамент информации и печати
119991, Москва, Г-336, Солянка, Станислава Куницы, 3, 3-й этаж
Тел.: (0495) 984-1136, факс: (0495) 984-4872
e-mail: dp@min.ru, web-address: www.min.ru

Концепция участия Российской Федерации в содействии международному развитию

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Концепция участия Российской Федерации в содействии международному развитию (далее – СМР) представляет собой систему взглядов на содержание и основные направления политики Российской Федерации в области оказания зарубежным странам финансовой, технической, гуманитарной и иной помощи, призванной способствовать социально-экономическому развитию государств – реципиентов, урегулированию кризисных ситуаций, возникающих вследствие стихийных бедствий и/или международных конфликтов, а также укреплению международных позиций и авторитета Российской Федерации.

Настоящая Концепция призвана обеспечить системный подход федеральных органов исполнительной власти к участию Российской Федерации в СМР.

Концепция определяет основные цели, задачи и принципы политики Российской Федерации в области СМР.

Правовую базу Концепции составляет Конституция Российской Федерации, Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации, Концепция национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, Бюджетный кодекс Российской Федерации. Кроме того, Концепция основывается на положениях Устава ООН и других международных документов, таких как Декларация тысячелетия, Монтеррейский консенсус, Южно-брунейская декларация по выполнению региональной Всемирной конференции на высшем уровне по устойчивому развитию. Итоговый документ Военского саммита 2005 года, Приоритетная декларация по повышению эффективности внешней помощи 2006 года и другие.
1. The latent character of Russia’s aid programme: Russia is poised on the precipice of an aid programme, but –

- Although it has declared its intention, it has not yet put all the mechanisms in place to fully launch its programme

- Russia’s aid programme almost unknown among Russian publics
2. The ambiguity of its aid delivery mechanisms:

At the moment, there is no such thing as a “RussAid”. In practice, aid functionality is dispersed among several ministries. Although the creation of a dedicated development agency has been officially proposed since 2007 (in the Concept), it was not until August 2011 that the Ministry of Finance (in the person of Andrei Bokarev, Director of the Department of International Financial Relations) announced that a Russian Agency for International Development would be established in January 2012.
Some additional background: ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO

The Concept issued in 2007 called for the eventual creation of a “specialized government institution” for handling aid. I was expecting something functionally analogous to USAID, Irish Aid, or DFID, and I was not alone in this assumption – some of my Russian interlocutors expressed similar expectations on my first research trip in 2009; and one Russian Senator who is very active in this issue, Vasilii Likhachev, also described in the press his vision of what he called “a national agency of the Russian Federation for international development”.

The “institution” called for in the Concept seemed to have been created in September 2008, with the somewhat curious name Rossotrudnichestvo, or Russian Cooperation. This is actually more of an official nickname, for the full title of the agency is quite a mouthful: The Federal agency on affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, compatriots living abroad, and international humanitarian cooperation (Federal’noe agenstvo po delam Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv, sootechestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom, i po mezhdunarodnomu gumanitarnomu sotrudnichestvu).

In practice, Rossotrudnichestvo was created to carry on the legacy of Russian cultural centres abroad (something like the Goethe Institute for Germany), and this is its main function. The overseas aid function was attached to it as an afterthought, which one of my interlocutors suggested was because it ‘sounded sexy’. But this aid function was never consummated, and to date Rossotrudnichestvo has had no active project aid programme. The general consensus among my interlocutors in May 2011 was that it was not likely to ever carry out such a function. With Bokarev’s announcement in August 2011, Rossotrudnichestvo’s ‘aid’ function would appear to be defunct.
DAC membership?

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.

This slide shows a page from a research project of a Russian academic think tank on international organisations in which the DAC is carefully explained.
3. Role of outside agencies in “pulling” Russia into the role of donor:

The World Bank, DFID, USAID have all been heavily involved in cultivating Russia as a donor – there have been multiple seminars, training programmes, consultations, etc. (SEE NEXT 3 SLIDES)
Among the countries represented at this conference were Armenia, Colombia, Japan, Moldova, Poland, South Korea, Tadjikistan, Tanzania, and Turkey. World Bank and OECD were prominently involved.

http://www.mgdf.ru/
This “Strategic Communication” seminar was a culmination of a DFID programme known as the “Russia as a Donor Initiative” – which continues in spite of the fact that DFID officially closed its Russia programme in 2007; the World Bank has been the primary executor of this programme.

As part of that “Russia As A Donor” programme, the World Bank project commissioned the Levada Center to carry out survey on public opinion of Russia’s participation in aid to poorer nations – conducted in June-July 2010.

The January 2011 seminar on strategic communication was the venue chosen to present the results of that survey to Russian insiders – the results were not released publicly until April 2011.
Modalities of assistance

- **Primarily multilateral.** Russia’s development assistance is primarily channelled through multilateral programmes (UN, World Bank, G8, G20); it is only now beginning to develop channels of bilateral aid (in 2010, Russia provided $472.32 million in official development assistance, according to the Ministry of Finance.).

- **Most sophisticated in emergency humanitarian aid.** Far more active and visible is Russia’s humanitarian assistance for emergency relief, channelled through what is known in English-speaking contexts as EMERCOM (The Ministry of Emergency Situations)

  (SEE NEXT SLIDE ON THE 2010 HAITI EARTHQUAKE)

- **Priority areas food security & global health.** Aside from emergency humanitarian assistance, priority areas for Russia’s emerging aid programme are food security (UN World Food programme) and global health (Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the Global Polio Eradication Initiative).
HAITI EARTHQUAKE

Amidst all the humanitarian fervor to assist in Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake, Russia was also present, demonstrating its global role as a donor of international aid, although many media sources – professional journalists and bloggers alike – expressed doubts about Russia playing any role. An Agence France-Presse report stated that “even Moscow sent an airplane carrying search and rescue teams for quake-devastated Haiti” (emphasis added), reflecting the incredulity that was common in many reports. Yet not only did Russia send an airplane, within two days it had already sent three cargo planes carrying mobile hospitals and medical personnel and search-and-rescue personnel and equipment, and eventually also assisted the U.S. by making one of its cargo planes – one of the world’s largest – available to transport a mobile air traffic control tower from the U.S. to Haiti.

Within three days, RIA Novosti, the Russian state-owned news agency, had issued online a series of photographs showing uniformed members of Russia’s emergency services rescuing Haitians from beneath the earthquake rubble and tenderly administering first aid and providing water (the story in the photos above is more complex, as the photos were taken by a U.N. photographer, who was also the one who discovered this Haitian man in distress and had called over a passing Russian medical team to help). Russia clearly wanted to demonstrate that it has a role to play in the global response to humanitarian crises, both by its presence on the ground and through its presence in media imagery.
Who are Russia’s key partners in international development cooperation and assistance? Just a few representative examples:

- Former Soviet republics, especially the members of the Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzES) which include Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadzhikistan, and observer states Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia. (SEE SLIDE FOLLOWING OF EVRAZES WEBSITE)

- In 2006, Russia and Kazakhstan together established the Eurasian Development Bank, whose members now also include Armenia, Tadzhikistan and Belarus. (SEE SLIDE FOLLOWING OF EURASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK WEBSITE)

- Russia has recently provided financing to Tadzhikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua and Nauru

- Besides Haiti, Russia has recently provided humanitarian aid to China, Kosovo, Gaza, and N. Korea.
http://www.evrazes.com/
Who are the ‘stakeholders’ in Russia’s re-emergence as a donor? There seem to be very few who recognize themselves as stakeholders, aside from a small circle of ministry people who are “in the loop”

- Private sector: Businesses have not yet grasped the implications of what, for example, “tied aid” could mean for them.

- Academics in universities and think tanks seem to have the best grasp of the implications – but there is inadequate government funding for the work they are doing, and insufficient external grant funding so far. (SEE SLIDE FOLLOWING OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE WEBSITE)

- 3. Some NGOs are starting to get it, but again – there is no government recognition of the role of NGOs, no concept of project aid that could be delegated to NGOs. (SEE SLIDE FOLLOWING OF EURASIA HERITAGE FOUNDATION WEBSITE)
The International Organisations Research Institute has excellent, well-trained personnel; they have a G8 research team; they have an externally-funded project called the Research Centre for International Cooperation and Development (see slide on the DAC, above); and they have a very good journal, the *International Organisations Research Journal*, which publishes in English as well as in Russian, and which ravenously translates key articles into Russian, thus playing an important role in disseminating information to Russian publics.

Key institute personnel are currently being trained at the IDS Sussex in development education – something that will be significantly empowering for them.
The Eurasia Heritage Foundation is one of the most well-informed and active Russian NGOs in the area of international development cooperation; with a primary focus on CIS countries, the foundation has taken the lead in investigating the possibilities for Russian business in development.
Some overall observations:

- Awareness of Russia’s involvement as an aid donor is unquestionably very low across all regions, across all demographics.

- In spite of the World Bank’s zeal in organizing a conference to drum up enthusiasm for strategic communication about Russia’s aid programme, almost without exception, everyone I interviewed said it does not make sense for the Russian government to pursue an active campaign of informing the public about its aid programme – but that had various nuances:
  
  1. Some said it is too early because nothing is really happening yet
  2. Some said it is not a good idea to make the programme too public because Russians will probably react negatively and say that there are still problems inside Russia that need to be addressed; the Russian pop. generally reacts negatively to Russia sending aid abroad EXCEPT for emergency relief – then Russians tend to be proud of Russia’s role, and those kinds of activities do get covered in the media.
  3. Some said that the Russian government never bothers to publicly campaign for support for its activities – it just does them, and (maybe) informs the public about it later.

- There cannot be a clear message while there is no clear mandate or strategy – and there isn’t; there is still fragmentation within the Russian government about aid

- These factors lead me to think of Russia less as an emerging donor, but more as recruited donor. I am tempted to think of this as “donor expansion” in a sense somewhat analogous
Thank you!
Questions / comments are welcome

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