'A Social Rights Approach to Democratic Development:

Scenes from Azerbaijan'

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Introduction

Democracy is a goal that every free society aims to achieve. After years of communist rule, transition and post-conflict recovery, I believe that Azerbaijan is in the new position of having the potential for democratic rule but is affected by a society which does not adequately understand how to use its new freedom.

Fundamentally, people want access to opportunity to feed their families, a roof over their heads and access to good social services, including health and education. They need a government that can respond to their needs. I believe that linking the development of service provision with civil society empowerment can have a powerful effect on the democratic process because social rights of citizens are equally as important as fulfillment of civil and political rights and, in countries which are new to democracy, may be more influential.

Democracy also needs a system of accountability to be in place. Accountability is one of the major elements missing in this post-soviet society and needs to be grown from the bottom-up if it is to be respected and sustainable. In other words, it needs to be seen to be believed. Civil society actors can play a powerful role in creating conditions for accountability and promoting a new awareness of what it means in practice.

During 10 years of program development, the NGO, United Aid For Azerbaijan (UAFA), has developed a working model of accountability which is contributing to:
- Growing, non-threatening civil society participation in policy-making
- Improved governance based on greater equality of rights and citizenship
- Growth in social movements for change

UAFA has focused its attention on working with children with disabilities (CWD) and their families, because the problems that face them as a population group mirror the problems hindering democracy on a national and international scale – stigma, lack of voice, poverty and exclusion. I will explore UAFA's model in terms of its capacity to meet social rights, arguing that in advocating for social rights, civil society organizations can contribute more effectively to promoting democracy in a country that has embraced market capitalism and introduced civil and political rights, than if they focus solely on promoting the typical institutions of democracy as defined by western ideology.

This leads me to the question that will be answered in this discourse: if national and international actors wish to promote democracy in the Former Soviet Union, **would they be likely to experience better success if they gave more attention to supporting civil society organizations that are specialists in meeting the social rights of citizens?**

The format of this dissertation will explore the question based on the background of ideas that I have raised in this introduction, beginning with a literature review that ranges from the history and current economic, political and social context in Azerbaijan; progressing on to an investigation of relevant concepts in relation to this question, including democratic development, theory of civil, political and social rights and civil society development,. I will then illustrate the relevance of these concepts through a detailed analysis of both UAFA's working model in Azerbaijan and various interviews with stakeholders in this process. The concluding remarks will evaluate this theoretical and practical information in relation to the question given above.

Methodology

This dissertation follows an interpretive approach, in that I am attempting to understand the nature of democratic development from a subjective standpoint, having been living and working in Azerbaijan since 1998. My approach is inspired by ethnographic analysis, participatory research accompanied by consistent advocacy, and rich quantitative and qualitative data collection, combined with over 10 years of practical fieldwork with a team of local employees and volunteers.

Ethnography is defined as 'a research method in which the researcher immerses him or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the field-worker, and asking questions.' (p.693, Bryman) When I say that my approach is inspired by ethnography, I mean that I immersed myself in Azerbaijan without the original intention of building up an organization or a body of research but this outcome grew organically. It quickly became clear to me that the area of children's social welfare was neglected and so I started to research the field, embarking upon a 7-month study of children's residential institutions which led to an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis entitled 'Situation Analysis of Children's Institutions in Azerbaijan, 2000), which has subsequently been used by the State, international agencies and NGOs as data for studies and policy recommendations. This has been followed up by two more reports – 'Reasons for Institutionalization, 2002' and 'Situation Analysis of Children's Institutions in Azerbaijan, 2004'.[1]

Chambers gave me insight to my role and how it might be perceived. I was a western, white female, well-educated and from a comfortable background – I was aware that this could affect how people might understand my motivations so I was very careful to abide by lessons from Chambers. 'Power hinders learning……..it is with ourselves we must start' (p.32, Chambers), thus I felt it was important to listen and learn from those around me, keeping an open mind, not judging from my perspective. 'Imbalance is needed to establish balance. So children come before adults, women before men, the poor before the rich, the weak before the powerful, the vulnerable before the secure.' (p.211, Chambers). This argument is particularly relevant to the development field, in trying to find out the reality of people's lives from their perspective, rather than coming in with the idea that 'west is best' or 'I know what works'. I tried to bear this in mind and 'put myself last' during field visits, meetings and team building within UAFA in order to gain the trust needed to open relations, establish respect and build the motivation needed to generate a self-help ethic amongst people who have been left very vulnerable by the changes wrought by the break-up of the Soviet Union and consequent transition to market economy.

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[1] Please see www.uafa.org.uk to download these studies.

Data Collection:

For this study, I have completed a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to achieve a wider stakeholder view of social rights and democracy in Azerbaijan.

Semi-structured interviews: 3 senior Government representatives

                              6 western donor agency representatives

Focus Group Discussions: 2 region-based Parents' Unions

The data from these interviews will be used to illustrate points of view in drawing out the theories that I have developed as a result of my research and practical work.

Evaluation:

This data is utilized in an evaluation of UAFA's model for democratic development, which has grown through trial and error, a fusion of national and international skills and experience.

Ethics:

The issue of ethics is pertinent to this study. Does the fact that I have been resident and working in Azerbaijan, have built up a relationship with the country, its people, and many of the research participants colour my findings? Have I 'gone native'? To a certain degree, this is true. However, I argue that this gives me a unique perspective for understanding the complex social, political, economic, historical and cultural dynamics in the country that play such a significant part in determining the path forwards in terms of democratic development and contributes to the validity of the theories espoused. At the same time, because I have grown up in a western country with its own understanding of democratic development, I am able to compare and contrast these contexts in my decisions to implement particular project objectives and activities.

Sampling:

I have conducted purposive sampling in order to select people who are relevant to the research question.

With regards to the Government representatives, two of them have been strong supporters of UAFA, promoters of social welfare reform and open to civil society involvement. I selected the third interviewee based on his seniority but lack of awareness about UAFA's work, to introduce some impartiality. The interviews were conducted in Azerbaijan language and translated to English so there may be disparity with some wording but the conceptual meaning is accurate and verified. Names of interviewees are confidential.

I selected six donor agencies working in Azerbaijan, representing a variety of western viewpoints to democratic development. Those I left out were for reasons of limited amount of funds provided for or attention given to democracy. These interviews were conducted in English language and individual names will remain confidential.

The two Parents' Unions, from Khachmaz and Yasamal, represent rural and urban perspectives. The Parents' Unions typically have membership of 150 members, with an average of 20 members attending monthly meetings.

The interviews were conducted in Azerbaijan language and translated to English so there may be disparity with some wording but the conceptual meaning is accurate and verified. Again, names remain confidential.

Introducing Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan, often referred to as 'land of fire', is located in the South Caucuses, bordering with Russia (Dagestan) to the North, Iran to the South and Armenia, Georgia and Turkey to the West. The Caspian Sea lies along the Eastern coastline. The history of Azerbaijan is rich due to its geopolitical position, a fact that continues to make it of international interest today. Politically, it is an independent, secular state, having gained its independence from the Former Soviet Union in 1991. Conflict with Armenia over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, which started in 1992, remains unresolved and has put considerable pressure on the newly independent state with an influx of approximately 1million refugees and internally displaced people. Economically, the country has oil and gas reserves which have boosted its economy significantly in recent years. The country has much potential in developing its non-oil sector, particularly in agriculture and tourism. Socially, the transition to a market economy has had some negative impact, with poverty and inequality growing in real terms, and public services have suffered from under-funding, brain drain and lack of reform as the government has concentrated its efforts of political and economic reform.

The President, currently Ilham Aliev, is elected for a 5-year term 'via universal, direct and equal elections by free, individual and secret ballot'[2]. In a report on the 2008 Presidential elections, OSCE made the following comments: 'The election took place in a peaceful environment, but was characterized by a lack of robust competition, a lack of vibrant political discourse and a restrictive media environment, and thus did not reflect some of the principles necessary for a meaningful and pluralistic democratic election.'[3]

Freedom House, an international NGO, has a mission to support freedom around the world, embedded in democratic, political systems. In its 'Nations in Transit' survey, it researches 29 Former Soviet and Eastern European countries on their approach to democracy under the following sections: national democratic governance, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, corruption. In the report on Azerbaijan, the author says 'While grassroots activity continues to flourish, the Aliev administration exerts a dominating influence on civil society organizations, particularly those critical of the government's democratic shortcomings, and the National Assembly has shown little willingness to engage NGOs in the legislative process or invite their input on draft legislation.'

Corruption is considered to be a major barrier to democracy, defined as the misuse of power for personal financial gain. Transparency International claim that their index on corruption is a tool to raise awareness of corruption and promote better governance. Azerbaijan is ranked 158 out

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[2] www.azerbaijan.az
[3] OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, October 2008 (page 1)

of 180 countries in the Corruption Perception Index. According to the TI Azerbaijan website[4], they approach the issue from a legal perspective, opening Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres in a number of areas, holding workshops to generate discussion and hold local awareness campaigns.

The reason that I have highlighted these examples is because they reflect a modern understanding of democracy and its institutions, based upon criterion for democracy that has developed historically from a western perspective. I believe that this perspective is narrow in its definitions yet it has a profound effect on external influences on democratic development which, in turn, influences the concept of democracy used by political elites and civil society organizations in Azerbaijan.

In this thesis, I will present evidence to support the view that by approaching democracy from a social rights perspective, it is possible to produce positive outcomes for democratic development that meets the interests of all stakeholders, whilst respecting the economic, political and historical context of the country.

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[4] www.transparency.az

History of Democracy

The origins of democracy are Greek, from the Latin roots of 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning rule. We need to reflect on what these words – people and rule – mean in different contexts, and how meanings are considered in the move between various models of democracy.

Held describes four classical models which have evolved since the first recognized model circa 400BC, in Athens. 'Development of democracy in Athens has been a central source of inspiration for modern political thought' (p.13, Held). It was based upon political equality amongst citizens (Athenian males over the age of 20 years), liberty, respect for the law and justice and introduced direct participation of citizens, elections and short terms of office.

The second classic model of democracy is known as 'protective republicanism' which emerged in late 11th century, associated with Italy. 'Political participation is an essential condition of personal liberty; if citizens do not rule themselves, they will be dominated by others.' (p.44, Held). It demanded mixed government of rulers and opposition, liberty of speech, expression and association, so forming the next step to modern definitions of democracy.

This model also was known as 'developmental republicanism' which differed in that it introduced economic equality as a condition of participation, reflecting the growing importance of international trade and ownership.

As time evolved, the influence of this model was significant in Britain, the US and France during the 17th and 18th centuries, shaped by the context of each country. The monarchy and religion held the balance of power in Britain and affected political and economic participation; whereas the US had a large population spread out over a vast territory, dominated by commercial networks. France, as evidenced by the Revolutions, was anti-monarchical and so democratic participation and institutions reflected this reality.

Moving into recent history come the classic definitions and institutions of democracy as utilized in political promotion today. 'Liberal democracy' is typified by protection of citizens and representation of their interests. It can be divided into 'protective democracy' in which 'citizens require protection from the governors, as well as from each other, to ensure that those who govern pursue politics that are commensurate with citizen's interest as a whole' (p.78, Held) and 'developmental democracy' in which 'participation in political life is necessary not only for the protection of individual interests but also for the creation of an informed, committed and developing citizenry. Political involvement is essential to the highest and harmonious expansion of individual capacities.' (p.92, Held) Now came the introduction of secret ballot, majority rule,

and constitution outlining civil and political rights, separation of state from civil society, political emancipation of women. Underscoring these institutions is a competitive market economy.

Finally, the fourth classic model of democracy, that is, 'direct democracy' in which the place of the individual in society, the role of property relations and the nature of capitalism are dominant themes. It is often referred to as a 'pure' democracy, giving all citizens opportunity to propose policies and legislation. It is typified by community-based participation, town hall meetings and referendums.

If we then compare these models of democracy with the approach by some western donor organizations in Azerbaijan, we can see the influence on their objectives:

Donor A promotes democracy according to five objectives - strengthening rule of law, promoting 'more genuine and competitive' elections, politically active civil society, accountable governance and media freedom. Donor B aims to 'create open, tolerant and democratic society, develop pluralistic communities and foster social responsibility', through promotion of free and fair elections, building civic responsibility and media freedom. Donor C focuses on private sector development, accountable governance and civil society development, with cross-cutting themes of anti-corruption, media freedom and increasing participation in political processes.

Donor D also focuses on electoral assistance, media freedom, accountable governance and civil society support. Donor E 'fosters the universality and indivisibility of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' This agency also recognizes the authority of each country to choose their own approach to democracy, as long as it is consistent with universal human rights principles. Donor F has the widest perspective in its approach to promoting democracy as it 'seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights through implementing a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health and independent media'. Nevertheless, the emphasis is still on the core tenets of democracy and, as with all these agencies mentioned, social rights approaches to democratic development are given scant attention.

Post-communist Democracy

The salient points of western definitions of democracy are the role of the individual citizen, ownership and market economy, and participation in decision-making. Looking to Azerbaijan, it is important to consider how recent history has produced such a different concept of citizenship, ownership and economy, and participation, and we need to explore how Azerbaijan's particular context affects the type of democratic development that is able to emerge at this current time.

As Nodia states, 'people and governments today assume that 1) democracy means something universal and general, and 2) the best models of it are to be found in the West' (p.3, Nodia). This statement is already reflected above in the history of democracy, criticisms of some agencies and objectives of others.

There is significant debate about the impact of the transition from communism upon democratic development and how this transition is playing out in the lives of the public. What impact has the collapse of the welfare system, universal during the Soviet era, had on the lives of ordinary people and does this have more significance in their lives than a right to vote?

The essence of communism was the abolition of private property. All citizens were equal participants in society, without class or religion and common owners of the means of production and property. The role of the state was in administering the centrally planned mechanisms for economic production and welfare. Individual autonomy and freedom of expression was limited and citizens rarely spoke out against the State for fear of persecution (Atlani-Dualt 2007; Millar & Wolchik 1994). Living under these circumstances has led to a distrust of public institutions, their employees and especially those that are not within the immediate social circle, commonly the extended family. Civil society organizations were an extension of the State, under their control, and continue today in the post-Soviet world, representing part of the political elite within the NGO field.

Nodia refers to the paranoia that is prevalent in former Soviet states today – 'since everything meaningful in communist political life happened behind the scenes, people developed a propensity for the paranoid style.' (Nodia, p.14) This paranoia destroys trust which is an essential element of democracy, or a by-product of democracy, echoed by Twigg & Schechter, writing about the breakdown of trust between family and friends in post-Soviet Russia (p.4, 2003). Either way, without trust, it is hard to build up the public interest in typical democratic institutions such as 'free and fair' elections, or transparent governance. This trust needs to be built from the bottom up, and enter into human relations through family dynamics, interactions with local authorities and into the wider community. Trust is the fundamental basis of a good relationship between people; so the emphasis must be on establishing relationships at all levels, to build this cornerstone of democracy.

The experiences in Eastern Europe, and some of the Former Soviet Republics, concentrate on civil society against the government, protest in defense of civil and political rights. Smolar terms this as 'moral civil society', organizations which led the protests and overturned power structures, only to disintegrate when 'faced with real political decisions'. (p.53, Smolar) He argues that this moral civil society was replaced with an imitation of western institutions of democracy and became anodyne, maybe as a reflection of the fact that the political elites who promoted this movement were not practitioners but theorists, unable to transfer the meaning of democracy in a real way to the ordinary public it was meant to positively affect.

What one owns defines one as a person, and the rights and laws that have been created to protect property are part of the foundations of democracy. However, this means little to the poorest people who own little or nothing and have been left even more vulnerable since the transition to a market economy, because the universal welfare system, guaranteed employment and accommodation is no longer available. This poverty is further compounded when a person does not have the freedom to function and achieve. Sen (1999) argues that economic need is often put ahead of political and civil liberties in the case of the poorest countries, because economic needs of the poorest people are paramount to their desire for democracy. Sen contests this, saying that there is little empirical evidence to suggest that authoritarian governance and suppression of rights improves economic development. Based on my experience in Azerbaijan, I would agree with Sen, because people need to feel that they are able to raise attention to their difficulties; their reality in terms of how economic deprivation affects them and could be alleviated is not the same reality of those in authority who have access to resources and power. Without hearing the voice of the poorest or most vulnerable, how can those in government develop and implement the mechanisms needed to support them? However, the freedom to express oneself in this situation might be compromised by disability, lack of education, lack of awareness of the processes to make oneself heard, gender or health issues. Are the NGOs and democratic institutions funded by foreign agencies addressing these issues?

What of other institutions that are left behind from communist era? Ideology can change but the institutions that were created remain monolithic. Institutions are not just physical but psychological, too. When I first visited one region in 2003 to set up a Family Support Centre for CWD, we asked the parents who participated in this first meeting if they would set up a Parents' Union to advocate for their children's rights. They immediately refused because they equated the formation of a community-based organization with being a civil offense for which they would be sent to prison. The psychological barriers to civil society development, to the ideology of 'self-help', must be challenged from the bottom-up with a social rights approach because these

same people are those that are incapacitated by the limits to freedom because of poverty, lack of ownership, disability and gender.

Rights & Democracy

It was T.H. Marshall (1950) who put forward the argument that citizenship can be divided into the civil, political and social rights which emerged in the UK over three centuries. Broadly, the 18th Century delivered civil rights, referring to civil liberties, property and legal rights; the 19th century brought political rights, referring to voting and democratic rights and the 20th century brought in social rights, referring to education, housing, health and income securities. Both civil and political rights are protected by institutions such as courts of justice, parliaments and local authorities; but the institutions related to social rights rarely attract donor agency attention in terms of democratic development, more from the point of reducing poverty, improving standards and equality. This implies a categorization of interests, a separation implying degrees of importance when, in reality, democracy and participation demands a holistic approach. To quote Marshall,

> 'In early times, these three strands were wound into a single thread. The rights were blended because the institutions were amalgamated.' (p.11, Marshall)

Historical analysis brings us to the issue that social rights, a man's social status, is determined by his level of participation in society. As history has evolved, the functions of democratic institutions have separated yet the need for fusion is essential if the socially excluded, poorest members of society are truly to be respected as an equal part of the process. Parliament can play a valuable part in this process, as its members represent the constituencies from which they were elected; in turn, these parliamentarians have a relationship with local authorities and the links between civil society, political society and the State start to emerge. How does Marshall's analogy for process of rights and its implications for citizenship and democracy stand up in a country such as Azerbaijan? The introduction of the market economy in post-Soviet countries led to obvious institutional changes – ownership of property, protected by civil rights, was introduced; establishment of a modern election system for the President, members of Parliament and municipality representatives (a new body for Azerbaijan, introduced in 1999). In terms of social rights, the most significant change has resulted from the economic need to shift from universal systems of welfare towards a more targeted system of support.

Whilst civil and political rights are relatively new phenomenon, social rights were actually stronger in communist society – in that the provision of universal education, health and welfare systems as well as job security, price subsidies and accommodation were rights of all citizens, with the exception of those that did not fuel the Soviet machine, such as people with disabilities who were deemed 'defective'. If you were a contributing citizen, you would benefit from a comprehensive social security system. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, this system collapsed, leading to mass unemployment and poverty, a decline in health and life expectancy, the salaries of public service providers were too little to maintain effective services. Price subsidies were withdrawn, particularly affecting the poorest members of society. Privatization of

means of production and accommodation benefited many but led to further exclusion of others, particularly those families affected by disability and overall, the 'survival of the fittest' mentality prevailed. This strengthens the argument for a social rights approach to democracy because, whilst people have been given civil and political rights as a result of the transition to market economy, their social rights have been neglected, or sidelined in the debate about democratic development. Dean (2002) corroborates this, arguing that political rights have been promoted by external actors at the expense of social rights. Civil and political rights lose their value if you do not have the education to speak freely, or employment to be able to own, or the fear of approaching the State because of lack of awareness about rights, or the communist hangover that expression of interest is something to be feared. Citizenship embodies these separate rights as one, and is regarded as a social contract between the citizen and the State, embedded in the sense duty to the community and equality of opportunity. I argue that a balance of attention in terms of democratic development may do more to create social stability than a narrow focus on civil or political rights which can be divisive and easily manipulated by negative interests.

Civil society – whose interests count?

'The original sources of social rights was membership of local communities and functional associations' (p.21, Marshall)

In the previous section, I have discussed the significance of social rights within the framework of democratic development; the next step is to explore the role that civil society must play in negotiating these rights. In order to understand this role, we must first consider how the definition of civil society shapes the role it plays in democratic development.

Seckinelgin (2002) makes the argument that civil society is a 'metaphor for western liberalism', based on the concept that this terminology conjures up western contextual perceptions, which will have little bearing on the contextual perception of someone from elsewhere. The following definitions reflect the contexts of various international agencies:

- DFID[5] defines the parameters of civil society as volunteers and charities, community-based organizations, and issues
- USAID[6] focuses on civil society as a tool for democracy
- World Bank[7] defines it as the deliverers of social services and development

These definitions reflect the different political, economic and ideological contexts of the organization upon which they build their donor policies which, of course, are contrary to the understanding of civil society in post-soviet countries, in which civil society was limited to an extension of the State. These different viewpoints must be reconciled, in my opinion, if civil society organizations are to be truly representative of civil society, rather than reactive to donor interests. The issue of representation is fiercely argued by Anderson & Reiff (2004/5), who claim that NGOs are not representative of society because they seek support for their own causes and interests rather than represent existing causes and interests. Whilst this is a sweeping generalization, there is some truth in this. Many NGOs (international and national) have little contact with the average population, particularly in the field of democratic development, because activities are focused on political rights, meaning that they encounter a narrow sector of the population, typically the political elite. The needs and reality of ordinary people are rarely understood from their point of view but from a top-down, 'we know what is best' perspective (Seckinelgin, 2008). Additionally, the poorest may still be excluded from NGO-generated civil society development activities because they do not have a voice, are not empowered and so the problems that specifically affect them are not targeted.

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[5] Making Governments Work for Poor People, 2000
[6] Office of Democracy and Governance: Civil Society
[7] www.web.worldbank.org: Home>Topics>Civil Society>Overview>Defining Civil Society

Political civil society is defined in this thesis as the strata of NGOs that are funded by donor agencies, implementing projects that satisfy donor objectives, and often perceived as opposition to the State or as 'grant eaters' in FSU countries. This has bred mistrust and, in some countries, an almost outright ban on NGOs. The role of the State in creating space for civil society development is a key issue to consider. In Azerbaijan, the public domain is fairly tolerant – the National NGO Forum is respected and, based upon their advocacy efforts, the government set up the NGO Fund in 2008, to disburse grants. The State Program of De-Institutionalization of Children under State Care and Alternative Care' (2006-2015) states that one of its main objectives is to 'afford effective cooperation in the solution to deinstitutionalization among government, NGOs and international organizations.' This tolerance should be nourished effectively, through bottom-up approaches.

My view is that a definition of civil society should refer to the capacity of the average person to understand and use their new freedom to come together with others who have a similar problem or issue, to support each other mutually and find a solution together. For conditions to enable this empowerment, networks based on trust must evolve and expand, so that 'civil society' develops beyond the western-defined concept and becomes embedded in the daily life of citizens. Once embedded, democracy has the opportunity to move beyond the narrow concept of political rights.

Policy implications

All arguments I have made so far point to a need for an alternative approach to democratic development, which focuses on the ordinary citizen who wants access to employment and needs-based health, education and social services. A social rights approach also meets the interests of government which needs a healthy, integrated and productive workforce if it is to reap the benefits of the market economy. A bottom-up approach to social rights which is based upon promoting equal opportunity can help to reduce the burden of care upon the welfare system, a legacy of Soviet policy of segregating problems from society. At the same time, the likelihood for civil society to become a political football in ideological arguments is removed because citizens become actively engaged in grass-roots political participation, they learn to speak freely, they start to use media as a tool to raise awareness of their issues and together fight the localized bureaucracy that can have such a negative impact upon their economic situation.

Frey (1997) described the 'crowding out' of the sense of civic virtue by the Soviet Union, meaning that the motivation to be part of an active civil society was destroyed:

> 'As a consequence, a negative attitude towards the state becomes current currency, which destroys the basis for a functioning democracy' (p.113).

Negative attitudes are not only one-way but are also apparent in the attitudes of some government representatives towards NGOs as a function of civil society.

These negative attitudes cannot be overcome through promotion of political or civil rights which are narrowly defined and have little meaning to the poor and vulnerable (Uhlin, 2006; Smith, 2008). Only through community-based work which strengthens the relationships between civil society and government authorities can the positivity be created which leads on to a regard for civic virtue, a reduction in cynicism and better conditions for what, to me, represents the most meaningful outcome of democracy – the freedom to live a lifestyle of choice.

The needs of the most poor and vulnerable are often overlooked by international agencies working on democratic development (p.218, Twigg & Schecter), maybe due to a belief that if conditions for political and civil rights are introduced effectively according to western definition, resulting social rights and processes will follow naturally. However, referring back to Marshall's argument that civil, political and social rights were originally 'fused', is it possible to re-introduce this fusion through community-based approaches to social issues?
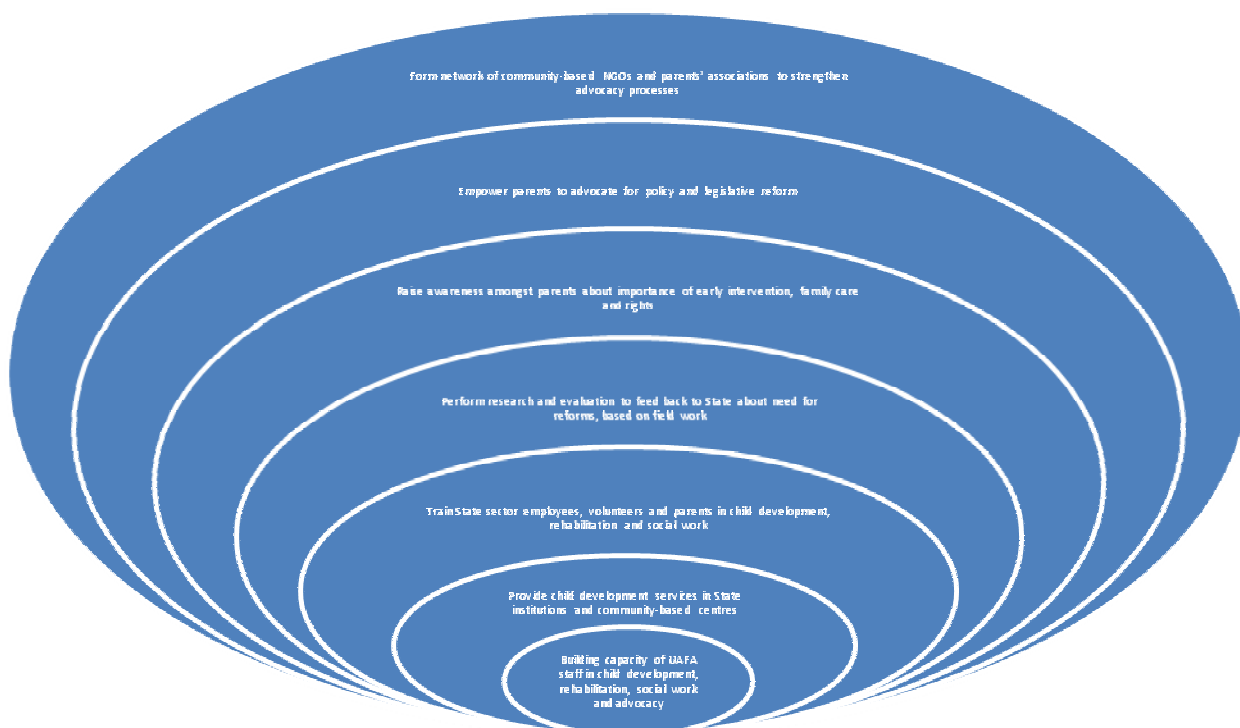
United Aid for Azerbaijan (UAFA)

UAFA was founded in 1998 with a mission to 'aid long-term development of life in Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on children, health and education.' Whilst UAFA is registered in the UK and so is categorized as an international NGO (INGO), UAFA has kept its operations strictly local, with no costs expended in the UK and all local staff employed, with only specialist input from foreign experts in areas of research, child development, rehabilitation, social work and advocacy.

Following the completion of a major piece of research, 'Situation Analysis of Children's Institutions, 2000', UAFA has followed the same objectives:

- To reduce the number of children in state care (de-institutionalization)
- To raise the level of institutional care (capacity-building)
- Development of social services for children in need of special protection

To achieve these objectives, UAFA has followed a 'service provision approach'. This can best be described in the following diagram:

Form network of community-based NGOs and parents' associations to strengthen advocacy processes

Empower parents to advocate for policy and legislative reform

Raise awareness amongst parents about importance of early intervention, family care and rights

Perform research and evaluation to feed back to State about need for reforms, based on field work

Train State sector employees, volunteers and parents in child development, rehabilitation and social work

Provide child development services in State institutions and community-based centres

Building capacity of UAFA staff in child development, rehabilitation, social work and advocacy

Throughout this process, spanning 10 years, UAFA has continually provided child development services at three State institutions for children with mental and physical disabilities, at community-based rehabilitation centres set up by UAFA in Yasamal (district of Baku), Khachmaz (rural town and villages) and Ganja (city/rural villages) and at the Children's Neurological Hospital in Baku. This has enabled the team to keep in constant contact with children and the families, supporting them through not only the children's problems but also the

myriad of social problems that arise for vulnerable families who are affected by poverty and disability.

Additionally, UAFA has maintained a strong emphasis on building relationships with relevant government bodies at local and national level, linking civil society organizations with government counterparts to educate, understand and find common solutions to daily problems. It is through this deep understanding of both political processes and social problems, enabled by daily service provision, that UAFA has been so successful in building up the foundations within civil society arenas for alternative democratic processes to develop,.

It is important to define how this success can be measured objectively. Objectivity is difficult to achieve when monitoring and evaluating the effects of development activities because they are dealing with human nature, politics and systemic change; as well, the context of evaluation can be too easily skewed by the perspective of those evaluating, the demands of the donor organization or the inexperience of the NGO. Commonly, quantitative indicators are used to show the scale of achievement but figures can rarely demonstrate the quality of actions. In this case, milestones are often employed, and can be an indicator of a NGOs' deep understanding of the field in which they work if they are well defined and subsequently achieved, subject to events occurring outside of their control. Yet these measurements can be subjective and so UAFA attempts to demonstrate objectivity in measuring success with a wider range of indicators.

'Programme success depends upon the active enrolment of supporters, including the beneficiaries.' (p.8, Mosse)

1. *A consistent message* – UAFA's long-term objectives were defined in 2000, meaning that UAFA has consistently been associated with child welfare reform, building the capacity of the team over years, establishing a strong body of local support and developing a network of relationships with government and civil society, all based on a well-defined cause of promoting the rights of vulnerable children and their families. UAFA has been able to work long-term on the same objectives because of a variety of donor sources, including one major donor that has continued to support the organization's core costs for approximately 7 years.

2. *Individual case studies* – every child that UAFA works with directly is assessed using a standard child development assessment form which is then updated approximately every 6 months to evaluate change in a child's cognitive, motor and functional skills. These forms provide one of the best objective assessments of the team's work, because the results speak for themselves; you cannot be subjective about whether a child that previously could

not walk unaided is now mobile and performing daily functions independently[8]. When working on family cases, a care plan is completed. This objectively demonstrates the change made to a family's life as a result of intervention. These care plans are developed with the participation of the family concerned.

3. *Government suppor*t

UAFA was invited to speak in Milli Mejlis (Parliament) in April 2001, at the second reading of draft legislation regarding education of children with disabilities. We subsequently worked with the parliamentary commission responsible for education to make changes to the law, arguing vociferously for integration to mainstream as opposed to the segregation which was still a feature of this draft. We were able to achieve this change which paved the way for future Inclusive Education programs, and the law was signed into practice by the President. This was the beginning of UAFA's parliamentary lobbying and the organization has since developed a functioning partnership with the Social Policy Commission in Parliament, leading to UAFA being requested in 2007 to gather NGO recommendations to Parliament for reform of the Family Code. This was subsequently followed by a televised Social Policy Commission meeting which was hosted jointly by the Commission and UAFA, with representation from national and international NGOs and Parents' Unions.

This respect for UAFA's expertise is compounded by support from local authorities in the three regions – Yasamal, Khachmaz and Ganja – in which UAFA provides community-based rehabilitation. Each authority has provided UAFA with a Centre from which services operate and they have engaged in activities with the Parents' Unions, as described below. All the support described has been without financial incentive.

4. *Independent actions of Parents Unions (PU)*

The purpose of children and parent participation is to help create better services, and promote citizenship, social inclusion, personal and social education. Parents must be actively involved in their children's care and rehabilitation because they should be the most responsible people in the lives of their children. Parents of children with special needs must be advocates for their children. Since 2004, UAFA has set up PUs in five regions (Yasamal, Khachmaz, Ganja, Mingechevir, Goranboy) as part of the process of developing accountability from the bottom-up. Additionally, membership of a PU helps to move the families from beneficiary mentality towards organized 'self-help' to meet their needs themselves. Each PU is made up of parents of disabled or disadvantaged children who benefit from the child development services at the Centres and therefore membership grows continually. Members meet once a month to discuss

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[8] Of course, it is possible for assessments to be falsified; UAFA aims to video children's progress whenever possible and child assessments can be verified by the parents who are included into the therapy process. In the case of institutionalised children, institutional care staff are active participants in all therapy activities.

on-going advocacy issues; provide mutual support and to be updated by the Committee which is elected to work on prioritized advocacy issues in-between meetings. Membership is voluntary and UAFA only covers expenses such as transport and stationery materials.

Through the process of advocacy training and empowerment, UAFA's experience illustrates the following process of development for Parents' Unions:

Growth	Type	Activities
Stage 1	Self-help group	- Helping each other to gain benefits, telephone etc. - Mutual support - Organizing outings for children and families - Writing to local businesses for donations etc. - Raising local awareness
Stage 2	Advocacy group	- Letter-writing campaigns to local authorities - Petitions - Announcements - Meetings with government representatives - Public debates - Utilizing mass media

Examples of PU achievements will be described in the next section but first we must address two of the key factors that enable UAFA to successfully realize these objective indicators.

1.   The strength and capacity of the UAFA team which has been able to develop gradually over 10 years with a low turnover of project staff. UAFA has a recruitment policy which states that any individual who applies to UAFA to work on the projects with children must first volunteer for a period of time to allow for assessment of approach towards children, the cause and fellow team members. As Atlani-Duault also notes (p.64, 2007), in post-Soviet countries, many people face discomfort about working with vulnerable people, maybe because these vulnerabilities were seen as family or State responsibilities rather than a community issue. It is much easier to recruit staff to provide training or work on advocacy than it is to find people who are willing to 'get their hands dirty'; yet without firsthand experience of working with children in a family or institutional environment, training and advocacy work does not have same resonance. Volunteering also enables UAFA to recruit people who can cope with emotionally and physically challenging work. An added advantage is attracting people to working for 'the cause', rather than those who wish to pursue an NGO career. Some staff members are mothers of disabled

children and have an intrinsic motivation to pursue reform that career professionals can never have.

2. <u>Holistic approach</u>: practical experience combined with theoretical knowledge of national and international child welfare systems, legislation and rights frameworks ensures that the UAFA team deeply understands the context within which they work. As a result, advocacy efforts are more powerful because they are based on the results of service provision – 'the gap between policy and practice is constantly negotiated away' (p.17, Mosse)

There are a range of other factors that indicate UAFA's unique position: all training program are embedded into practice, with training participants mentored by UAFA staff to make the new skills sustainable; understanding the interests of all stakeholders through relationship-building, to ensure win-win negotiations because 'ideas have to be understood in terms of the institutions and social relationships through which they are articulated.' (p.11, Mosse). As outlined above, it is the strength, capacity and longevity of UAFA's team that have created the conditions for a working model of accountability to develop.

Working Model of Accountability

In 2006, UAFA was funded by an international donor to strengthen its working model of accountability. The following section introduces key elements of this model and uses material from field research to highlight how this model addresses key issues in democracy building.

1. Growing, non-threatening civil society participation in policy-making

   'I've seen women standing up in meetings and challenging local government, not frightened about saying what they want. You see that kind of dynamic going on at that level but you don't see it going on in the political rights sphere.' Donor agency

Following a period of training and development with 5 PUs, UAFA started organizing meetings between the PUs and their elected Members of Parliament. These meetings gave parents a voice to freely express their opinion about policies and gave MPs a first-hand understanding of the problems affecting their constituents, as well as proposals that the PUs had generated based on their prioritized needs. It was the first time any of these MPs (and subsequently, we organized similar meetings in 11 more regions) had had this kind of direct contact with an issues-based constituency group; moreover, it deepened their understanding of the issues because they were able to ask questions, learn about the problems in the context of the daily lives of their constituents and, in every case, led to a direct intervention to solve bureaucratic issues.

One of the goals of this project has been to develop an informed lobby group within Parliament which has the baseline knowledge to be able to lobby effectively when legislation is discussed. UAFA has been present in a number of official Social Policy Commission meetings in the past two years in which MPs who have participated in the community-based meetings have brought the parents' concerns and proposals to the discussions, leading to a more informed and effective debate.

   'Talking about issues-related approach to freedom of speech, assembly etc. it should be based on the daily demand of real people and in this case the government will not create barriers against this kind of action. If you have 100 people gathering together somewhere to discuss their own real problems and put something on paper and provide to the government or local authorities, it will not have such negative reaction from the government as the opposition parties face when trying to organize a rally.' Donor agency

Part of the training given to PUs was in how to approach local and national government in the spirit of partnership; not to cry, blame or shout but to present issues and potential solutions:

   'Without dinstinction to the sources we accept the recommendations and suggestion by them (civil society) with great pleasure if they are useful and rational for further executions. Alas, sometimes there is animosity and imprecision in the materials presented by some organisations.' Senior Member of Parliament

Therefore, by approaching some of the typical institutions of democracy by way of social rights, it is possible to strengthen political participation:

'The power of the people should not be restricted to their engagement in political power and government body creation but should be a process of delegating some governance responsibilities to the structures, with heavy participation of civil society; through the strengthening of civil society engagement mechanisms, and through the government accountability and transparency institutions. We would make more success from the angle that you mentioned (social rights). However, that's the issue of political power philosophy, understanding the political power being rooted in people's decision.' Donor agency

It is also worth considering the potential of issues-based politics in improving democratic processes, particularly with regard to giving political parties and individual politicians a platform from which to promote their policies:

'There was no statistical difference between the parallel vote tabulation and the official count. What it doesn't address is anything about why people voted the way they did, or anything about pre-election – free media, free assembly etc.' Donor agency

2. Improved governance based on greater equality of rights and citizenship

'During the Soviet Union all member countries couldn't lead their independent policy; just all of them ruled over by headquarter. We didn't have any opportunities to set our own activities.' Senior Representative, Ministry of Labour & Social Protection

As a result of this top-down approach, governance, particularly at the community level, is bureaucratically challenging and has led to a breakdown in trust between civil society and the State. An individual is easy to exploit but a group of parents, armed with greater awareness of their rights and the responsibility of the State, can overcome these daily challenges:

'Before we did not trust local authorities but being a member of the PU and joining our efforts, now we can obtain something.' PU member

'*Before we were not aware about our rights, but after we visited the UAFA Center and became the member of this Parent Union we became very enlightened persons. When we apply to a state agency, we can demand our rights with facts and evidence; if they see that we are aware about our rights they don't have any chance to reject us. If we apply on behalf of the Center we can achieve something rather than applying as a civilian.'* PU member

One example of PU success is in the field of Targeted Social Aid. PUs have helped new members who have faced bureaucratic problems when trying to receive the TSA to overcome these challenges, leading to more families being able to realize their rights. The PUs have also been lobbying hard to remove the disability filter that records disability benefits as income, so reducing the amount of TSA for families affected by disability, despite the fact that disability incurs many extra costs and keeps families poor. Independently, members of the PU have researched the normative living costs for a typical and disabled person to make comparisons and use as evidence in their lobbying.

Each PU has been successful in building a relationship with their local authorities, initially by demanding their rights and subsequently by inviting them to the Centres to meet and discuss further collaboration:

'*If we approach to the concerned agencies now, they also inform us about other services, rights and possible things they can do for us. Before they didn't do that, they just used to ignore.*' PU member

From a policy-maker's perspective, this approach helps to reduce the Soviet legacy and build civic responsibility:

'*In my opinion, the psychological remainder is the most problematic issue that our country confronts with. Thus, most of the people are still sure that individuals don't have any responsibilities and duties in front of the State; Government should solve all their problems and carry out unlimited obligations. But in the Western countries people mostly rely on their own initiatives and....try to achieve something. In order to release from the remainders of Soviet policy first of all we should inspire people with the importance of modern education, individual initiatives, new worldvision, and agitating the development in this directions is necessary.*' Senior Member of Parliament

Thus, to improve governance is a two-way process and promoting civic responsibility is a key issue. When asked if more freedom brought more responsibility, one PU member answered

'*today we have more responsibilities, more facilities and we have choice. It means that the future of our children depends upon us.*'

3. Growth in social movements for change

The actions described meet the definition of 'social movement', according to Tilly (2004);

➢ Campaign (organised public effort)

➢ Repertoire (of political action, associations, petitions, use of public media)

➢ Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, Commitment

Through campaigning and building a repertoire, PUs learn not to attack government but to ask questions, create partnerships and find a way through problems together. They do their research, and present realistic ideas. Most importantly, they become empowered citizens.

'*It is one thing talking about the abstract human rights, freedom of assembly etc. On the other side is how to protect vulnerable groups of population, real children, elderly, disabled etc....I think that if we have success in this area of human rights it will somehow strengthen the civil society itself and show them that they can do something.*' Donor agency

This social movement is based on social rights with the idea that these rights are closer to people's every day life than political rights:

'*Political parties are not interested in this kind of issue, only distribution of power, how to be elected etc. If you monitor the papers, you will find articles about the difficulties of normal life, financial problems of families but it is critical against government without any analysis or proposals about how to tackle these problems ….that is why some vulnerable groups feel themselves outside of normal life, not protected.*' Donor agency

Social movements played a major role in 1989, leading to the collapse of communism. This movement was based on political rights and has subsequently led to some post-soviet countries being very cautious about allowing civil society to develop. However, these countries should also be aware of the problems that can occur if civil society does not develop:

'I think that the revolutions (in Ukraine and Georgia) were possible because of more freedom of expression and more civic engagement but it doesn't mean that those who raised the critical voices were aiming to change the governments. Definitely, a few years ago, the people thought that the social rights can only be secured with the change of the governments. And the political opposition used such sort of resentment, protest movement, for the benefit of their political agenda. But the governments should also use such release of public opinion for their own benefits, and adjust their policies. If they don't do that they lose the support of those people. So political figures are trying to decide who will be in power but the actual view of their work is public opinion. You may suppress but if there is some influence of the people on the political process, those (governments) that are responding to this better will benefit. It doesn't mean that the people were just fighting to remove the governments.' Donor agency

Finally, it is worth noting some individual comments from the interviews that I think help to shed more light on the opinions of stakeholders in Azerbaijan.

'We made steps for democratization…that is, as a basis stands a multi-party system, freedom of media and formalization of NGOs. One of the major foundations of democratic society is the Supremacy of Law. That is why we took measures for legal reforms. Democracy is possible in a country if there is free court system.'

However, the same senior Member of Parliament also made the following, important point:

'There cannot be democracy in any country with poverty. Democratic processes depend on social welfare of society and human relationships. That is why the development of democracy should go in parallel with socio-economic development as well.'

And when directly asked about opinions on democracy in Azerbaijan, one PU member said:

'In general we are satisfied with the democracy in our country and our President also. They have arranged suitable conditions for …(vulnerable people)…. and we would like to have the same attention to the families and children with disabilities by the Government, President himself and other state agencies.'

Whilst most of the Western donor agencies were able to recognize the potential of UAFA's social rights approach to democratic development, there was still some skepticism from one agency which focuses only on civil and political rights:

'You have these smaller successes (e.g. PU achievements) but you will never have this bigger change. We trained the electoral commission and you can see changes, they are more professional in the work but of course when it comes to the bigger picture....'

During the interview, I raised the example of one post-Soviet country where democratic institutions are in place but still the power struggles and corruption affects the social rights of ordinary people, the response was *'ok, but still they have free and fair elections'*.

However, as one donor agency counter-argued this:

'Let's say it doesn't achieve the big sea change of what we call in our mind a democratic society, at least we have those families, those communities that we assisted, their lives are improved. Period. And that's not a bad thing….We need to never lose sight of that.'

Conclusion

In this thesis, I am not putting forward the arguments for democracy based on typical civil or political institutions but am arguing from the perspective of the ordinary citizen, for whom these institutions mean less than their freedom to access good health, education and social services. Whilst some might call my arguments limited, that without viable opposition parties or unrestricted media, for example, real democracy can not develop, I counter argue that without a bottom-up approach to social rights development, conditions cannot establish themselves for democracy to develop without the political fears of instability, manipulation and uprising.

For democracy to work, the education and involvement of all citizens is crucial. However, given the context of civil society in post-soviet countries, this element of democratic development needs to be given more attention by donor agencies. It takes time and funding to stimulate the development of civil society to produce the outcomes so important for building civic responsibility, to encourage the self-help mentality that leads to a fully-functioning democratic society. One of the themes emerging from the interviews was the length of time it takes to measure success and change. With a focus on political rights reform, which is easier to evaluate in terms of immediate outcomes, donors get frustrated with the lack of progress. Yet, at the same time, most of the interviewees from donor agencies did agree with the social rights approach and its potential for democratic development. This leads to the question about why these agencies put so much of their funding into promoting typical institutions of democracy rather than support NGOs and networks to develop. One reason may be that to support an NGO like UAFA requires a much longer-term commitment in terms of funding than the usual 2-3 year program cycles allow.

In my introduction, I raise points made by Freedom House and Transparency International, both respected organizations but narrowly focused in terms of democracy. This thesis raises many counter-arguments that question the value of denouncing the lack of progress in political rights; would this time and the resources be better spent in promoting alternative routes to democracy? Those that meet the social needs of people which enable the roots of freedom to strengthen without threatening the political status quo which is regarded by those in power as essential in order to maintain national strength and autonomy. Certainly, the individual opinions of those that work in the donor agencies seem to correspond with my view, highlighting the disparity between donor policy based upon years of western-influenced democratic development and the reality of countries emerging from communist rule.

From the view of the ordinary citizen, social causes are easier to understand and have more resonance in daily life than the machinations of economic, political or foreign policy which tends to engage the political elite and the media. As one of the donor agency interviewees said,

'Political rights- based NGOs……they are saying that the reason they don't have water, education etc. is because of the political rights issues…yes, I come from a political background too and can make that argument but I'm telling you that that is a huge jump for most people to make…'

By approaching these issues from a political perspective, I think that this serves to alienate the ordinary citizen from the political process, particularly if that citizen is in any way excluded or faces barriers due to disability, poverty, gender or health problems. Thus, through civil society development, building the self-help mentality and fostering a spirit of civic responsibility at each level, it is then possible to fuse social, civil and political rights, meeting the needs of each stakeholder without leading to antagonism and potential disorder.

Finally, we need to consider the role of NGOs that provide services and their role in promoting a social rights approach to democracy. One of my strongest standpoints is in the role of representation. In order for an NGO to represent the reality of the most vulnerable and bring their needs, priorities and opinions into a political debate, that NGO must be immersed in the daily lives of those people they are working with and for, empowering them to represent themselves and supporting them to understand the challenges within political processes, helping them to overcome apathy, distrust and petty corruption. A training session or leaflet can not bring about these changes; words and theories must be embedded into practice. UAFA chooses to do it through service provision, so that whilst the long-term societal changes gradually emerge, a child's life improves, a family's life improves and communities become more connected. It is only within this context that I believe that democracy can flourish and be truly representative of the needs of all members of society.

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Interviews with policy-makers will be semi-structured

1. What is soviet legacy on current social policy?
2. Traditionally, policy-makers did/do not trust NGOs. What do you look for when you accept the advice and evidence produced by an NGO or IO?
3. What is the impact of International Financial Institutions on social policy?
4. Are the rights of a citizen in Azerbaijan closer to western or former soviet typologies? How do you see change happening?

Interviews with International Organizations will be semi-structured:

1. What criteria do you follow when evaluating NGOs for potential grants to promote democracy?
2. How important is it that they work closely with civil society and how do you assess this representative relationship?
3. How do you measure success? Please give examples of successful outcomes and their on-going legacy.
4. How do you balance your attention between civil, political and social rights when promoting democracy?
5. Are your country funding programs set within an umbrella framework and, if yes, how do you then tailor it to fit the country context?
6. How country-specific are these projects?
7. Do you think your projects have any significant effect on social policy in Azerbaijan?

Focus Group Discussions:

1. What does civil society and civil action mean to you? Has this understanding changed as a result of participating in the Parents' Union?
2. How has participation helped your understanding of political processes and democracy?
3. How could the example of Parents' Unions be used in your wider community? What are the challenges?