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**“The Role of Multinational NGOs within Shifting Development Paradigms  
– Case from Japan”**

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## Introduction

As witnessed in the current debate on the role of “northern” NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), international NGOs that engage in humanitarian assistance, relief and development have been asked to re-visit their organizational mission and identity. This is happening largely because recent development policy is shifting toward strengthening the ownership of development of the countries of the “south” – i.e., developing countries – and their governments, NGOs, other civil society organizations, people and communities. Because of this trend, northern NGOs that have played crucial roles in delivering services and planning and implementing projects in development work are now expected to play more *facilitative* roles for the people in the south.

This change in the development paradigm is happening, in the authors’ view, more in the United Kingdom and so-called its ‘like-minded’ countries than the rest of the world. This of course has a lot to do with the governments’ attitudes and policies for international development. For example, international NGOs in the U.K. with the leadership by BOND (a network of international NGOs in the U.K.) have this spring launched an “NGO Futures initiative” in response to the shifting paradigms and the U.K. government’s policy changes in particular.

With these in mind, the authors in this paper examine the role of “multinational” NGOs, with a particular focus of its affiliates in Japan. Lindenberg & Bryant, in their *Going Global* (Kumarian Press, 2001), analyzed the work of six well-known “multinational” NGOs that have affiliates in many countries – CARE, Medecins Sans Frontieres, Oxfam, PLAN, Save The Children, and World Vision. This work is notable because it succinctly placed these multinational NGOs in the very context of shifting development paradigms and the effects of globalization, as well as it aptly summarized the relationship of the affiliates within their families.

In extending Lindenberg & Bryant’s work, the authors in this paper examine the Japanese affiliates of these multinational NGOs. Our focus is to 1) point out general characteristics of Japanese NGOs; 2) discuss how the Japanese development community is responding to the shifting development paradigms; and 3) bring out the efforts in advocacy and policy work at the affiliates of multinational NGOs in Japan. By writing this paper, our hope is to generate more discussion in Japan on the roles of northern NGOs and to possibly place these multinationals in the leading role of showing by practice what it means to be an NGO in an industrialized country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We would also like to communicate to the international development community what is happening to the Japanese NGOs. We believe that the multinational NGOs in Japan have an advantage because of their network of affiliates and the inroad to the international development community which other Japanese NGOs do not have. Also, they have the international *brand*, which makes them easier to appeal to the general public for support.

## **General Characteristics of Japanese NGOs**

The authors have written two papers on Japanese NGOs, focusing on their constituency building and the question of legitimacy. In these papers, we depicted Japanese NGOs as relatively young and still small as a sector, composed of a diversity of groups in size and scope of activities, and suddenly brought to a heightened visibility in the last several years. As different global issues – most notably the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq – capture the attention of government officials, mass media and the public, Japan sees its own NGOs as useful vehicles for carrying out Japan's *kokusai koken* (international contribution). In this process, there have emerged several star players who appear on TV screen and make commentary in newspapers on the situations in conflict and their efforts in humanitarian assistance. While this is happening and people wanting NGOs to play more active role, there certainly is a gap between the expectation and the capacity of Japanese NGOs.

The presence of this gap is not unique to international NGOs. In Japan, legal (including taxation) environment is still not supportive enough for private not-for-profit activities to flourish. As a not-for-profit entity, it is very hard to raise funds through government (with a very detailed set of instructions regarding for which expense items the funds can be used, usually excluding a large portion of indirect and administrative cost), corporations (with lingering recession), and individuals (traditionally, the Japanese public almost entirely relied on the government and its subsidiaries for the provision of public services and thus “giving” has not become prevalent). Also, there is a huge issue of trust. In Japan, some nonprofit organizations are not accountable to the public and thus often looked at suspiciously. Building trust is one of the biggest challenges faced with nonprofits.

Japanese international NGOs have to work within these unfriendly social environments. With this background, there have appeared efforts of capacity building of the Japanese NGO sector working in international relief and cooperation. This is largely led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Japanese government would like to see stronger NGOs in Japan playing more active roles in humanitarian assistance and community development.

## **Change in the Role of Northern NGOs**

The authors have been paying attention to the discussion of changing roles of NGOs and we have covered some key points of the discussion in the papers mentioned above.

Since the cold war ended, the wave of globalization has surged into every part of the world. Globalization makes traditional north-south, donor–recipient relations increasingly redundant. The foreign aid declined in most countries and humanitarian emergency relief delivered by NGOs became a priority item of governments. Since some

civil society organizations in developing countries have become prominent in development, the direct funding of southern civil society has grown significantly. Against the backdrop of these changes, northern NGOs which have traditionally been delivering aid in the form of development projects are required to re-assess their identity. A future direction shown in the discussion is for northern NGOs to play more active role in the country of their origin, especially in raising public awareness in global issues and mobilizing public in campaigns, in development education and in government lobbying and advocacy efforts.

We have not yet fully witnessed this shift in Japan. Needless to say, NGOs in Japan as elsewhere are always examining their roles in the field and as a result feel that changes are bound to happen. Nevertheless, it appears that members of the Japanese NGO community on the whole have not been gearing up their efforts to step into the direction of change, which requires a painful process of re-assessing and then transforming the status quo at the organizational and operational levels. One of the main reasons is that they have not been urged to do so by their main stakeholders – the donor community and the general public. Generally speaking, the Japanese donors still expect the Japanese NGOs to deliver services (in education, health, environment, etc.) in communities in developing countries. They do not want their money to be used to lobby Japanese government for policy change, or for public awareness raising campaign in global issues. The general sentiment of the Japanese public is largely the same – people in Japan might expect to see the Japanese nationals working on the ground in developing countries in order to link themselves with local people and issues in the south. The only exception here may be development education, as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is gearing up its effort to place development education in public school curricula, and is asking for NGOs to provide its contents.

### **Multinational NGOs in Japan**

As mentioned, the authors believe that multinational NGOs in Japan have a unique role to play within the Japanese international development NGO sector, with their access to the broad network of affiliates. The multinational NGOs in Japan are in the position to gain first-hand knowledge about what is being debated. With this assessment, the authors conducted interviews with a director-level staff person at the World Vision Japan, Oxfam Japan, CARE Japan, Save the Children Japan, PLAN Japan and a phone interview with a staff person at the marketing section at Medicins Sans Frontieres.

Combined with the information available from their publications, the most recent annual reports, their websites and information in Directory of International NGOs concerned with International Cooperation, we have observed the following:

#### Advocacy and campaigning

All of the six NGOs have agreed on the importance of advocacy and policy work in order to influence the foreign assistance policy and development policy. They participate in NGO consultation meetings with Official Development Assistance (ODA) agencies on a regular basis. Above all, newly established Oxfam Japan has started off mainly as an advocacy and campaigning organization by using their global network and abundant resources developed by other Oxfam international member organizations. World Vision International has recently set itself the goal of allocating 4% of the total expenditure for advocacy activities. World Vision Japan (WVJ) is putting comparable resources into advocacy and campaigning. It established an advocacy division and hired a staff person a few years ago to work exclusively on advocacy in the area of children's rights and now allocates nearly 5 % of its human resources for such activities. WVJ and Oxfam Japan globally work on policy issues and advocacy as part of WV International and Oxfam International, respectively. They also actively participate in local networks of Japanese NGOs and other civil society organizations in efforts to mainly lobby the Japanese government and carry out national campaigns. Medecins Sans Frontieres, Japon (MSF-Japon) is very active in advocacy and campaigning as well. Oxfam Japan and MSF-Japon with a local NGO have lobbied together the Japanese government on HIV/AIDS and the issue relating to the Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. MSF-Japon is recently strengthening its campaign on access to essential medicines. Save The Children Japan (SCJ) and CARE Japan are very aware of the significance of policy work and advocacy. However, they presently seem to put priority in expanding their budget scales through marketing and fundraising. Advocacy and policy work may become a focus area once they will have enlarged the scale of their organizations at a desirable level. PLAN Japan also has a clear intention to work more on advocacy and policy work in times to come.

#### Researching and writing policy papers

The six organizations interviewed do not spend so much resource on researching and writing policy papers. One of the common reasons is a limitation of budget and human resources. With limited resources, the organizations have to prioritize their activities since research work takes away substantial labor and thus financial resources. Another reason for this, in the case of Oxfam Japan in particular, is that they have access to policy papers and research outcomes provided by other Oxfam International member organizations. They use these resources by tailoring them for particular Japanese context. PLAN Japan does research for its constituency building purpose by conducting a survey of the Japanese public to find out the level of their interest in and recognition of international NGOs biannually. Because the finding has shown that the general public's interest in developing countries is low except for the time when the world concentrates on some particular countries, i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq, PLAN Japan has decided to lay stress on development education in recent years.

### Constituency and public awareness building

The budget level varies drastically among the 6 organizations. Oxfam Japan is considerably small compared to the other five organizations since it is new and was only established in December 2003. Apart from the differences in budget size, the largest source of income for these organizations is membership fees and contributions. With a child sponsorship program, both WVJ and PLAN Japan have become the largest NGOs in Japan, with nearly US\$ 30 million of total revenue per annum. MSF-Japan is one of the organizations which have drastically increased its revenue in recent years, from about US\$5.5 million in FY2000 to 13.4 million in FY2003. This is alluded to the sudden rise in the name recognition after the winning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999. The proportion of the funding from individual supporters and membership fees ranges from 30% (at CARE Japan) to nearly 100% (at PLAN Japan). SCJ has partnered up with a popular convenience franchise which has more than 6,000 stores all over Japan. It provides a donation box at the cash register in each store so that customers may put small change. WVJ carries out a donation campaign with a popular bakery chain with several hundred shops nationally. Oxfam Japan seeks to increase the number of its supporters by using Oxfam brand. Besides the child sponsorship, PLAN Japan has developed a unique monthly support system and enjoyed a rapid increase of supporters of it. Because of its success, some other PLANs have introduced this system to their own fundraising mechanisms.

Constituency building is one of the top priority items for the six organizations, not only from fundraising perspective, but also for the purpose of building a broad support base, awareness building of the issue of poverty and social injustice, and cultivating active civil society. Oxfam Japan has an urge to increase its supporters in order to ensure legitimacy for their claims and advocacy. MSF-Japan is launching a unique series of events in five cities in Japan which replicates a refugee camp in outdoor exhibits, building on its success in the 13 other MSF affiliates. CARE Japan has a supporter's group called 'CARE Friends' Group' which currently consists of approximately 150 members, including several spouses of influential parliamentarians and successful entrepreneurs who helped to bring more people to support CARE through their own fundraising and public relation activities. PLAN Japan also has strong support groups. There are forty groups made up of foster parents voluntarily throughout Japan. These groups are engaged in development education in the community where they live by using the materials developed by PLAN Japan.

### Development education

Development education is an emerging area on which many development NGOs have placed focus in recent years. Since *sogo gakushu* (integrated studies) that is more or less equivalent to Citizenship Education in UK was introduced to regular schooling in 2002,

NGO staff and materials for development education have been in great demand at primary and secondary schools. Some multinational NGOs have already developed many materials for international development for many years and their Japanese affiliates may be encouraged to introduce them to regular schools. Many NGOs, both local and multinational, strategically utilize development education for building their support base as well.

#### Western versus Japanese identity

SCJ and CARE Japan admitted that they had not fully utilized their global brand names in the past. Rather, they acted as an indigenous born NGO in Japan. This has something to do with their possible desire, at least in the beginning (SCJ started in Japan in 1986, and CARE in 1987), to be seen not as a well-established Western NGO coming to Japan to seek “Japan money.” Although the tension between the Japan-born and “foreign-born” NGOs in Japan has been eased to a certain extent, there still remains a prevailing sense in the NGO community of distinguishing between the two and treating them with different attitudes. That is why these Japanese affiliates had to demonstrate their local base to the people in Japan.

WVJ is fairly successful in blending their effectiveness and strength at global level and localized experiences in its early stage following the WV principle of ‘twin citizenship’ that means global citizenship and local citizenship. The Executive Director of WVJ is one of influential persons within the NGO community in Japan, serving as the vice chairperson for a largest network of international development NGOs and chairperson of Japan Network of NGOs for Education. The other multinational NGOs seem to try to maximize their dual citizenship these days as well.

#### **Conclusion**

The authors have stated that the shift in the consciousness of NGOs in Japan has not taken place to a noticeable level. Yet, the Japanese NGO community has begun to review its mission, vision and role to play in international development. Indeed, some NGOs have started to openly express the need to become “change agents” in their own country, rather than service delivery organizations. Once they choose to go in that direction, they will need to accelerate their efforts in broadening their support base at home and building capacity for advocacy and campaigning. As mentioned earlier, some multinational NGOs have already exerted a significant influence over the NGO community in Japan by connecting Japan-born NGOs with their global networks and sharing with them their well-developed resources, know-how and methodologies.

Strengthening research capability is what is still lacking in Japanese NGOs, and it will become crucial for reconfiguring their new identity. Even multinational NGOs interviewed for this paper have not yet developed this capacity fully. Accumulating

reliable research outcome is important in order to make a strong basis for policy work. With the global debate on aid modality and harmonization evolving among the donors, it is hoped that Japanese NGOs will soon take part in this macro development policy debate, especially with the Japanese ODA agencies, so that they can be an effective conduit for the voices of civil society, domestic and abroad.

Public-awareness raising is another area where Japanese NGOs need to strengthen efforts, and this is where the multinationals in Japan could possibly cooperate. There needs to be a more concerted effort to increase the number of people who are interested in and showing concern for the issue of global poverty and conflict. NGOs should also be able to chart a path for the public from showing concern to participating in taking action. There is a sense among NGOs, Japan and elsewhere, that there is a competition for supporters and thus sensitive information such as marketing strategy cannot be shared easily. Still, if NGOs are to play more powerful role in Japan, they need to think more about broadening the support base for the cause than competing for the would-be supporters from the same pool of small constituents.

There are many challenges ahead for NGOs in Japan. And yet, they seem to have no choice but to change their role within shifting development paradigms. That will eventually lead to visible outcomes such as making change in the policy making process of Japanese ODA. It is strongly hoped that a further expansion of multinational NGOs in Japan will stimulate locally-born NGOs to make the shift and strengthen the sector in partnership.

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