

2. Analysis of the Current Status of Japanese NGOs

2-1. REQUISITES FOR NGO POLICY ADVOCACY

As indicated above, in the debate on global health governance that arose in the 1990s, attention was paid to agenda setting, putting pressure on government policy, and creating the discourse in specific areas of civil society advocacy. Within that context, there has been increasing recognition that NGOs have been developing in the area of being able to set goals regarding what should be done on policy. Reflecting that shift, as this study evaluated Japanese NGOs' capacity to conduct policy advocacy, it considered the specific roles that today's Japanese NGOs must play and the capabilities they need to possess.

This report first considers this question from the perspective of NGO practitioners who are actually conducting advocacy. Masaki Inaba of the Africa-Japan Forum (AJF) indicates a need for “the ability to use specific types of data to produce definite policy directions—for example, being able to say that funding must be invested in this or that area.” Of course, recognizing the importance of NGOs as “watchdog” institutions—having a critical perspective on decisions made by government policymakers and keeping a watch on proposed policies from their perspective as part of civil society—Inaba also points to the need for NGOs to be able to gather diverse data, create independent policy directions, lobby the government, and be convincing. Compared with the advanced efforts by civil society in other nations, Inaba feels that this is an area where the current capacity of Japanese NGOs is low.

Takumo Yamada of Oxfam Japan discusses this as “the ability to understand Japan's uniqueness and propose macro-level policies.” He describes the current situation, stating, “Japanese NGOs are very good at proposing

policies that impact their own project region. In other words, they are capable of advocacy at the micro level based on detailed information. However, when it comes to discussions at the project level, or when it comes to the macro level—e.g., ODA policy as a whole or its overall allocation in the context of world trends—these NGOs tend to produce slogan-like ideas that rely on set political ideology.” Yamada describes what is required of NGOs as being the capacity to influence those decision-making institutions that have a global impact by applying the information they gain from their own project sites and from NGOs in their networks to their advocacy efforts.

In addition, from the perspective of someone who has been conveying policy recommendations to Diet members, government bureaucrats, businesspeople, and others, Satoko Itoh of JCIE notes the importance of “the ability to interact with the people you want to reach with your advocacy.” In particular, she states, “the ability to effectively convince others of your position by communicating not only based on your own interests but also based on an understanding of the other person’s logic and awareness” is an essential skill that relates to the specific methodology of advocacy.

In light of these comments from individuals who are actually conducting advocacy work, this section analyzes the current status of Japanese NGOs based on the perspective that the policy advocacy capabilities expected of them at present include

- (a) the ability to analyze information and expertise gained from their project sites and their global networks, interpret that information in the context of Japanese society, and formulate their own strategy for policy advocacy; and
- (b) the ability to then take a macro perspective, figure out the policy trends, and hold productive dialogues with the intended recipients of their policy advice in order to convey their recommendations.

2-2. THE ADVOCACY CAPACITY OF JAPANESE NGOS

Looking back at the historical beginnings of the NGOs active in Japan today in the health field, there are a number of organizations such as JOICFP (Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning) that began in the midst of the 1960s economic boom and operated health projects onsite in developing countries based on the concept of “conveying the experiences of Japanese health-related private organizations.” That

was when Japan's global health NGOs began implementing substantial activities. Subsequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, organizations including the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, and Services for the Health in Asian & African Regions (SHARE) were launched in similar fashion to conduct assistance projects on the ground. The broadening of activities that occurred in the 1990s was built on the experiences gained in projects conducted by these types of organizations. The majority of the organizations included in the directory at the end of this report, among others, really began developing their activities in the 1990s.

If we look at the work of these NGOs to date from the perspective of "advocacy," it was also in the 1990s that those efforts began in earnest. From that time on, new efforts emerged based on the concept that they could have an impact on global policy through the Japanese government, and this coincided with the period when the role of civil society in the health field was gaining recognition internationally as well. It should also be noted that in addition to domestic NGOs in Japan, the Japan branches of large-scale international NGOs that began developing their work in Japan in the 1980s—such as World Vision Japan, Oxfam Japan, and Plan Japan—have a very large presence in terms of their budget scale and commitment. Currently, the Japanese NGOs that have developed domestically in the postwar period and the newly participating international NGOs are developing efforts jointly to carry out advocacy in Japan.

(1) Fieldwork rather than policy work

There are roughly 30 NGOs that are engaged primarily in the field of global health in Japan, and the scope of their activities is extremely broad. The work of almost all of these organizations is centered on directly implementing aid projects on the ground in developing countries or within Japan. Also, there are many NGOs in Japan that work in the broader field of international development cooperation rather than specializing in health, and among them there are some NGOs that also address issues related to health and medicine. The work of most of these NGOs as well is focused mainly on operating projects in the field and on raising funds for those activities.

The directory provided in the appendix of this report covers global health NGOs that are relatively active in advocacy, but their number is small in absolute terms. There is also a very large gap in the degree of their commitment, ranging from organizations that consider advocacy to be an

important task of their organization, to those that say the person in charge of the project does it as a side job, or that it is mostly done by volunteer staff. There are organizations such as JOICFP, the AJF, Oxfam Japan, World Vision Japan, and Japan's Network for Women and Health that have sections or staff that primarily handle advocacy, the media, and campaigns for the general public, and these organizations have a shared institutional awareness of the fact that advocacy, as well as fieldwork, is an important area for them as an organization.

In particular, the AJF does not conduct fieldwork in developing countries and views its primary work as "advocacy" in Japan. Also, Japan's Network for Women and Health, which was created to provide civil society input into the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (Cairo Conference), focuses on issues of "women's health" and "reproductive health rights" and defines its basic objective as conveying information to the general public and conducting advocacy. While there are a number of organizations such as these that were created in the 1990s, there are very few NGOs overall that actively engage in advocacy as part of their work.

The final section of this report offers a summary of those few organizations in Japan that carry out advocacy work, and it can be noted that overall, many of them are organizations with relatively large operating budgets. In particular, some of the Japan branches of international NGOs have budgets in the range of billions of yen. On the other hand, when one looks at the budget breakdown, the portion that can be considered to be related to advocacy, such as advertising expenses, domestic program expenses, and so on, tends to be small. In particular, in terms of domestic NGOs, a large portion of their budgets come from commissioned project income, and that gives greater weight to projects conducted in the field, which implies that it is difficult to set aside money for advocacy.

So why is it that advocacy receives such low priority within the work of Japanese NGOs? Miki Nishiyama of SHARE, a Japanese NGO that carries out field projects focusing on AIDS in Thailand and elsewhere and that is well regarded in the health field, speaks of the structural issue:

We are aware that advocacy is important, but in reality, our hands are full trying to run our field projects, and there is no room time-wise or mentally for our staff to do anything more. If the people in charge use part of their time for network conferences and advocacy work despite that situation, they begin to question what the essence of their own organization's work really is.

Behind that issue lies the fact that many organizations receive funding for their activities in the form of government grants (see appendix), so fulfilling those contractual obligations becomes a priority in their work. It is an issue of institutional priorities.

According to Nishiyama, however, the problem extends beyond just structural issues:

We don't have a good understanding of how to tie advocacy to our field projects, and there is no shared perception of the importance of doing so as an organization. We are not very good at framing the debate within the larger context. Even at the project base, if we hear that there is a problem facing local residents, for example, how do we tie that to the national level, to the world, to the UN, or to other international institutions? Creating those links is very difficult. In particular, our work is really at the regional and village level, so there are a lot of areas where we do not know how to connect that to the debates at the international level.

In this way, we can conclude that many NGOs operating projects—particularly domestic NGOs—do not systematically attach significance to advocacy or connect their projects to policy at the organizational, conceptual, or operational level. On this point, Yamada of Oxfam Japan notes that the issue for Japanese NGOs is that “institutionally they don't understand the cycle of how benefits can be secured for their projects through the achievements gained through advocacy.” That also means that the knowledge accrued through the experiences of the project-oriented NGOs is not adequately conceptualized and is not effectively applied to the formation of policy recommendations. One additional factor is that the number of people in NGOs who are capable of doing that is extremely limited.

This trend was greatly influenced by the historical context of Japanese global health NGOs, which were founded to carry out projects that shared Japan's postwar experience, following which domestic NGOs developed by carrying out micro-level projects and have since been recognized by the public for doing exactly that. While this is the general trend among NGOs, one notable characteristic of the Japan branches of international NGOs that have appeared in Japan since the 1980s has been their commitment from the start to advocacy. By nature, the fact that these organizations have an advocacy strategy as global NGOs and intend to apply that in Japan represents a different stance than that of domestic NGOs.

(2) Financial vulnerability

One external factor that we can point to as a reason why domestic NGOs are structured primarily to carry out fieldwork and cannot seem to commit to the field of advocacy is the financial vulnerability of NGOs in Japan. As shown in the appendix materials, there is a wide degree of variation in the scale of NGO operating budgets, but fundamentally, most NGOs are constantly facing difficulty in sustaining their organizations' operating funds. NGO operating funds generally come from private donations, commissioned projects, grants, and so on, but most of those funds are earmarked for costs directly related to actual projects in the field. It is extremely rare for grants or budgets to include advocacy work itself. There are almost no cases of government grants being given for advocacy, nor of external funding from Japanese private corporations or private foundations being given for that purpose. Organizations such as JOICFP and AJF have received funds from American foundations for advocacy, but they are the exception to the rule in Japan, and in the majority of cases the budget for advocacy is taken from the domestic program budget or general operating expenses, or advocacy efforts are incorporated as part of a project and paid for in that way. Yamada of Oxfam Japan describes the impact that this absolute deficiency of funds has on advocacy:

Advocacy is just a small percentage of the amount NGOs need to operate. However, that only applies if the overall funding for their work is a big pie; if the overall funding is a small pie, then the funds needed for advocacy take up a bigger percentage of that total. At that point, it is difficult to rationalize spending money on advocacy, particularly in terms of donor accountability.

This indicates that NGOs are caught in a vicious cycle wherein the relative priority placed on policy advocacy becomes lower due to the overall lack of funds. For that reason, when NGOs have to choose how to use limited resources, they inevitably place priority on promoting activities in areas where they know they can raise funds.

Under these circumstances, one would expect funding to come from private corporations and foundations, but according to Inaba of AJF, who has received funds for advocacy from US foundations,

Among Japanese private corporations and foundations, there is absolutely no recognition of NGOs as being able to serve as a kind of policy trendsetter. Particularly among corporations, there is a strong emphasis on fieldwork in the sense of working on the ground to directly help people in need.

Most NGO leaders stated that it is currently difficult to get funding from Japanese foundations and corporations, and most have never succeeded in getting their support. There are a few cases in which international NGOs, such as World Vision Japan, receive funds from their parent organization, but those are extremely exceptional cases.

(3) Lack of personnel capable of advocacy

Another issue raised by NGO representatives is that advocacy is heavily dependent upon the few organizations that are capable of forming policy recommendations. There is a common awareness of the need for personnel who are effective in carrying out advocacy and, in particular, personnel who have expertise in advocacy methods for dealing with policymakers, the media, and the public. Meanwhile, looking at NGOs as a whole, the fact that there are so few people who possess those talents means that the limited funds available tend to be concentrated where those people are. The fact that advocacy relies excessively on individual capabilities and has not been developed as an institutional capacity is another source of vulnerability for Japanese NGOs.

Moreover, advocacy is “information-intensive work” and therefore requires an extremely high level of expertise. But within these organizations there is currently no system in place for improving the expertise of young people in this area. Advocacy requires that different methods be used depending on the situation and context, for example when lobbying and directly interacting with policymakers or others, or when NGO representatives are trying to convey their experiences. Currently, within each NGO there is no clarification of the roles or substance of who handles what. While that ambiguity may allow NGOs to respond flexibly to various situations, it also makes it difficult to create a system for nurturing people with skills in this field. At present, those with experience train younger personnel on a case-by-case basis when they are actually conducting advocacy. As a result, among that already small number of people, there has been no systematic development of the capacity to train a lot of new people. It was also noted that senior staff of NGOs need to speak at international conferences and have opportunities for active exchanges with people not only from other NGOs but also from other private organizations. Currently, however, those opportunities are extremely limited.

2-3. PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN JAPANESE NGOS AND GOVERNMENT, RESEARCH INSTITUTES, AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

(1) Government relations

The sections above describe the current conditions shared by a relatively large number of NGO representatives regarding the advocacy capacity of Japanese NGOs in the health field. At the same time, despite facing those issues, each NGO has developed its own advocacy work and has carried out various advocacy efforts related to their mandates at certain points in time.

One example of advocacy that directly targets policymakers is a supra-partisan gathering of female Diet members, the “Reproductive Health/Rights Study Session,” which has been conducted by JOICFP since 2002. The primary goal of these meetings is to raise the priority placed on developing policies in those areas. To do that, JOICFP brings experts from Japan and abroad talk with the Diet members about global trends in specific areas, thereby raising the priority of policies in those areas. Fifteen sessions have been held to date, and they continue to be conducted on a regular basis. World Vision Japan works to protect the interests of children, and when the head of the international organization visits Japan, it tries to set up direct dialogues with government bureaucrats and members of the Diet. SHARE, as a domestic NGO with expertise in health issues affecting foreigners in Japan, has offered recommendations on ways to handle those issues to the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (hereafter, Ministry of Health) and to the Embassy of Thailand and has also made efforts to approach the media. NGO websites are one notable example of efforts to educate the general public through the dissemination of information and recommendations, as is the publication by AJF of an e-mail magazine on the global AIDS issue.

There are other examples of NGOs that are working individually to reach policymakers, but another characteristic of Japanese NGO advocacy is that the majority of the efforts are done through ad hoc alliances of NGOs. In particular, this is the method employed in almost all cases where NGOs are trying to influence the Japanese government’s global policies. These alliances have become particularly active since the mid-1990s, as represented by such efforts as the MOFA-NGO Open Regular Dialogues on GII/IDI

(GII: Global Issues Initiative on Population and HIV/AIDS), as well as the Health Working Group working in the lead-up to the Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit held in 2008.

The efforts of these NGO alliances have shown some results, such as the inclusion of NGO representatives in a Japanese government delegation to a UN conference, having a spillover effect on adopted documents, and gaining commitments from the Japanese government. However, Kazuo Miyata of the Japan AIDS & Society Association, who has been active primarily in government-oriented advocacy in the AIDS field since the early 1990s, believes that “until around the mid-1990s, even if the Japanese government held discussions with NGOs, they did not really acknowledge the need to respond to their policy recommendations.” He notes, “The 2000 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit’s Infectious Diseases Initiative became a turning point.” JOICFP, which serves as a secretariat for and plays a central role in the activities of these types of alliances, also points to the 1994 Cairo Conference as a period when global awareness of NGO involvement in policy grew and when the Japanese government’s awareness began to change as well. The UN conferences, G8 summits, and international AIDS conferences were thus effective opportunities for offering policy recommendations to the Japanese government.

As Miyata noted, one example of government recognition of this type of relationship between NGO alliances and government was the 2000 Kyushu-Okinawa G8 Summit’s IDI, which is taken up as a case study in section six of this report. Hiroyuki Nagasawa of MOFA, who was involved in drafting the initiative, noted, “We talked to many relevant people in deciding on the IDI. In that process, we had seen the results of the GII Dialogues, and based on the trust we had developed there, we asked for the NGOs’ opinions and worked together on the draft.” This was an example of the NGO alliance having an impact on the Japanese government at the policy drafting stage.

On the other hand, many NGO representatives noted that their own experience has been that the willingness to receive recommendations relies on the individual policymaker’s personality and abilities. In particular, in terms of creating policy trends at the macro level, there is a strong need to work cooperatively with policymakers, but there is a relatively limited sphere in which NGO alliances are able to exert any influence, and they are vulnerable in that when the target person changes, the whole situation changes as well.

(2) The ability of Japanese NGOs to formulate and convey strategies

From the perspective of formulating strategies and creating trends, the ability of Japanese NGOs to convey their ideas is important, but according to Miyata, NGOs on the whole “are weak in terms of introducing what is happening in the world to Japan and conveying what is happening in Japan to the rest of the world.” The lack of funding and capable personnel is also a factor, but there is a common recognition that communicating in English is a large burden. International NGOs are getting information from the Internet in English every day, but for many NGO staff, it takes major efforts to translate the information they get in order to convey it to others. In addition, to then reformulate that information within the Japanese context in order to create some strategy based on that the information requires still more effort. For that reason, the total amount of information transmitted is very small, and the fields and scope are limited. This places these organizations at a disadvantage when they carry out advocacy efforts as one member of an international network. Some NGOs, such as the AJF and World Vision, are dealing with this issue by effectively using student volunteers and interns, but this has remained a small and exceptional trend.

There have been many attempts among global health NGO alliances to hold meetings, collect and analyze information, and formulate effective strategies that can serve as the basis for practical action. These efforts have resulted in policy recommendations for the Japanese government. However, they do so with limited time and personnel. To address this challenge, one could imagine, for example, that effective ties to research institutes could not only assist in the provision and analysis of statistics and basic data but also contribute to debates by considering from an academic perspective how on-the-ground experiences in projects might be applied to global policy advocacy, or how the most up-to-date theoretical and analytical frameworks can be developed for the global health field. Such coordinated linkages, however, are currently being carried out only within a very narrow scope.

Another type of linkage is that between NGOs and international organizations. In 2007, the AJF published a report titled *NGO no hoken bunya ni okeru kokusai-kikan to no renkei* (NGO cooperation with international organizations in the health field) as the product of a MOFA grant for NGO capacity-building projects. Although this report describes some examples such as SHARE, which is cooperating with the United Nations Development

Programme under a grant from the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, as an indication of the potential for NGO cooperation with international organizations, it can be inferred that the number of actual cases of active cooperation that have led to effective advocacy geared toward governments and other targets is extremely small.