

3. Strengthening the Capacity of Japan's Global Health NGOs—Focusing on Areas Where Short-Term Results Are Feasible

The previous section outlined the current status of health-related NGOs and analyzed the issues they face, focusing on advocacy. Based on that analysis of the current situation, this section analyzes areas that can be strengthened from the perspective of what can feasibly be done in the short term to improve NGO advocacy. In particular, this section will consider two points that are important in terms of carrying out effective advocacy in the future: how to formulate effective advocacy strategies and how to obtain funding to support advocacy.

3-1. TOWARD STRATEGY FORMATION FOR ADVOCACY

The current situation in terms of strategy formation for advocacy is that individual NGOs are conducting advocacy and each organization is groping around to find its own methodology. At World Vision Japan and Oxfam Japan—organizations that are positioned as Japan offices of international NGOs—they have established a systematic methodology at the global level for approaching policymakers, the media, the general public, or others, and so they are searching for how to apply that and put it to work in the Japanese culture. In terms of the information that forms the basis for their strategy, these organizations share information and databases compiled by a global institutional network, primarily through the Internet. Even if they are not directly gathering the information themselves, organizations such as JOICFP, AJE, and Japan's Network for Women and Health, as the Japan focal point for international networks in their fields, are able to follow the

global trends related to their area of expertise and get a constant flow of the information they need for advocacy, and as a result they are able to carry out their own advocacy. On the other hand, even though Japan's NGOs have access to international networks, they place their central focus on carrying out projects in the field. Accordingly, they analyze project-related issues primarily based on expertise gained from on-the-ground experience related to individual projects, and most of their advocacy is done on a relatively small scale.

In order for NGOs to formulate advocacy strategies, it is always necessary to improve each organization's capacity within the context of their daily institutional operations. For that purpose, NGO representatives indicate that they need high-quality advocacy staff, and that the ideal would be to have resident staff that could not only formulate policy recommendations but also deal with the media and conduct campaigns. However, that type of improvement is connected to the strengthening of the organizations as a whole, and is a process that will take a very long time.

(1) Creating an "NGO consortium"

When analyzing areas that can be improved in terms of Japanese NGOs' ability to conduct advocacy as a whole, and particularly their ability to formulate strategy, one point that we must take note of is the advocacy work done to date by loose networks and alliances of NGOs. For example, one notable achievement by an NGO alliance working with policymakers is the MOFA-NGO Open Regular Dialogues on GII/IDI. Launched in 1994, this is a regular meeting that involves MOFA and a network of what are now 41 NGOs in the health field. The result so far has been more than 80 meetings, conducted once every two months. Among the concrete results of this process have been the submission of policy recommendations by the NGO alliance and the participation of NGO representatives in government delegations to such UN conferences as the Cairo Conference, the Beijing World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference), and the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS. These were advocacy efforts not by single NGOs but by alliances of health-related NGOs, and based on their achievements to date, they can be deemed as having functioned very effectively.

One option for the future that was commonly pointed out by NGO representatives is the strengthening of advocacy efforts by this type of NGO

alliance. In particular, many of the NGO personnel interviewed spoke of the concrete effects that could be produced by advocacy conducted cooperatively by international NGOs and domestic, project-oriented NGOs. Yamada of Oxfam Japan describes his image of what that might entail as follows: “It would be an NGO alliance that could move with flexibility and speed on a broad range of issues and an alliance that exists not only to respond to some specific opportunity but at normal times as well.” You could call this a strengthening of the organic network functions that would allow it to adapt to changing conditions or objectives. Currently, the MOFA-NGO Open Regular Dialogues on GII/IDI are conducted on an ad hoc basis, but a permanent network is strongly needed.

With regard to the effect such a network would have, Sumie Ishii of JOICFP notes first that since the Japanese government tends to respect recommendations presented as the consensus of Japan's international health NGOs rather than recommendations from individual NGOs, alliances have greater influence. Also, Ishii feels that the most important point is the sharing of the global data and information that international NGOs can bring and the large amounts of information and experience that the project-focused NGOs possess, stressing the significance of then using that information to form strategies as a group. On this point, the AJF's Inaba points to the potential for Japanese NGOs to play a role in creating trends in Japan's internal health policy:

It is important to improve so that the Japan branches of international NGOs and Japanese NGOs can work well together and, while sustaining the momentum of actors in Japan, can formulate practical policies. We should also conduct our own data analysis and strengthen the interaction between on-the-ground NGOs and advocacy NGOs.

Another commonly held opinion was that it is very important in particular to have the participation of Japanese implementing NGOs in this type of alliance. Minori Tanimura of World Vision Japan calls it an effective strategy in the sense that it “maintains a Japanese face while at the same time forming connections with overseas NGOs through Japanese NGOs.”

Also, from the perspective of advocacy strategy, Miyata of the Japan AIDS & Society Association discussed the linkages not only between international NGOs and Japanese NGOs operating overseas, but also with organizations that are conducting assistance activities within Japan.

If you are talking about AIDS, the issue is that there is no link between domestic policy and advocacy on international aid policy. The question is how to link those two activities in terms of advocacy strategy. For that purpose, we need cooperation between organizations that carry out international aid work and advocacy in the AIDS field and those organizations working in the field within Japan.

In other words, Miyata's standpoint is that you can bring strength to advocacy activities themselves if you start from the shared agenda of working in the health field and engage more NGOs in the process of formulating advocacy strategy. Consistency with domestic policy is considered by Miyata to be an important point in terms of developing a Japanese health policy that has an international perspective, and an NGO alliance could play an important role in terms of invigorating advocacy efforts on Japanese health policies as well.

On the other hand, however, in order to make sure that this kind of alliance functions effectively, there are a number of challenges that need to be overcome. Many NGO representatives pointed out the difficulty of making adjustments when their own institutional priorities do not correspond to the priorities of the alliance. In particular, when it comes to working out the specific content of policy recommendations, there are various competing interests and power relations between the organizations, and it requires a fair amount of energy to accommodate those differences. However, based on the experience to date with advocacy work for the G8 summits, most agreed that it was certainly possible to do so if enough time is given.

(2) Cooperation with research institutions

Greater cooperation with research institutions is another potential area in which one could expect to see results. Ishii of JOICFP describes the positive implications of this:

It is important that advocacy work by NGOs be based on research findings. Depending on the target of the advocacy, having an academic or scientific basis to your recommendations can produce more effective advocacy. Also, expanding the scope of advocacy work requires a process of linking projects to advocacy through theory, and academic skills are beneficial in providing methods to do so.

This type of cooperation between NGOs and academia would enable a sharing of scientific data and systematization of knowledge gained through experience in the field. However, NGOs usually see research institutes as leaning toward medical and epidemiological research and rarely focusing on policy formation.

In that sense, the research project on “Challenges in Global Health and Japan’s Contributions” that JCIE conducted in preparation for the Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit, which is described in detail in the case studies in section 5, is a very interesting example of cooperation among academia, NGOs, and other stakeholders. That project was led by Keizo Takemi, former senior vice minister of health, labor, and welfare, and included members from NGOs, universities, government agencies, and elsewhere. The group’s clear objective was advocacy toward the G8 Summit, for which Japan was the host country, and in the sense that it created a policy direction for the Japanese government based on research and theory, it is an instructive approach for the future.

Also, cooperation with academia offers other potential opportunities in addition to the research aspect—cooperation with international health and medical associations, for example, strengthening human resources through exchanges, or approaching the media through universities. If one takes a positive view of the position of universities in society, then one possible advantage of working with them would be the opportunity to add greater conceptual depth to the policy recommendations offered by NGOs by using universities more strategically.

(3) Methods that take Japan’s political culture into consideration

Another point that many NGO representatives mentioned as something that was necessary in order to formulate more effective strategies was understanding that Japanese policymakers have their own peculiar “political culture.”

First, in Japanese bureaucratic institutions such as MOFA and the Ministry of Health, which serve as decisionmakers for the Japanese government, personnel systematically change positions roughly every three years. This fact is highly significant for advocacy efforts by NGOs. The bureaucracy, since it assumes that the people in charge will change every three years, is set up in such a way that no matter who takes over next, they can

adapt to some degree. For that reason, Japanese government bureaucrats tend to emphasize reaching decisions through consensus building to a great degree, which takes a very long time to move things forward. One could say that this is a way to ensure that, once decided, things move forward even if the person in charge changes midway through.

On the other hand, the response to NGO advocacy efforts relies to some extent on the individual abilities of the bureaucrat to whom the recommendations are made. Depending on who the person in charge is at a given time, there will be a different level of understanding of the recommendation proposed by an NGO and a different awareness of the role of NGOs, and the ability of a recommendation to have some kind of impact will greatly change based on how an individual recognizes the meaning and importance of advocacy. Also, it is important for NGO advocacy that there be daily, careful cooperation with government through individual communication and mutual trust. The NGO representatives share the common perception that it is “not just what is proposed, but to whom and how it is proposed” that has an impact. Another general trend that was often pointed out was that government bureaucrats prefer dialogue rather than a confrontational type of approach when it comes to NGO advocacy. Many NGO representatives spoke frequently of their impression that advocacy is extremely effective when policymakers do not feel that policies they have already produced are being criticized but rather that “they can have a beneficial dialogue in the process of formulating policies.” On the other hand, there is a fear among NGO representatives that this waters down the NGO’s critical perspective—that their views are being adapted and used as the government sees fit—and people are becoming considerably more aware of this.

In addition, one issue that is generally mentioned as being peculiar to Japanese society is the strategic effectiveness of using external pressure. The general understanding among NGO representatives is that, while presenting what is happening globally as a way of influencing domestic policy is one method of persuasion, its effectiveness depends on the situation. Depending on the policymaker—the individual bureaucrat or Diet member—this method might work or they might take the position that “in Japan we have our own way of doing it” and not like the recommendation, so the representatives interviewed for this project felt that it is hard to generalize.

Also, policymakers include not only bureaucrats but also Diet members, and in terms of the dynamics between them, JOICFP’s Ishii stresses that advocacy toward Diet members should not be done independently; it is

more effective to approach Diet members based on communication with the relevant government bureaucrats. Ishii emphasizes that “each side is a target of advocacy, but information sharing and mutual trust are at the base of NGO advocacy efforts,” and this is a Japanese way of conducting these efforts.

Considering this political culture surrounding the relationship between policymakers and NGOs Tanimura of World Vision, for example, proposes an interesting strategy: “If there is resistance to a one-on-one relationship between the government and NGOs, one method is perhaps to hold dialogues with the government that involve a combination of stakeholders.”

3-2. CREATING AND MAINTAINING A ROUTE FOR PRIVATE-SECTOR FUNDING

Another priority area is the improvement of NGO fundraising abilities. The current breakdown of NGO operating funds includes individual contributions, income from independent programs, commissioned programs, grants, and so on, but in order for Japanese NGOs to carry out advocacy on a consistent basis, they need a system for getting an ongoing, long-term flow of funding rather than short-term project funding. Also, when NGOs conduct government-oriented advocacy, their reliance on funding from the government makes it difficult to guarantee the NGO's objectivity and ability to critique government policies. For that reason, because of the peculiar nature of the activity as well, the appropriate path in the future is for private organizations within Japan, such as foundations and private companies, to actively provide support.

However, according to the NGO representatives interviewed in this study, there currently are hardly any Japanese private foundations or private corporations that actively provide support for advocacy.

There are two reasons why private corporations in particular find it difficult to support NGO advocacy. One is related to the “fields and themes” of advocacy. For example, based on her experiences working in Thailand, Nishiyama notes,

Japanese companies in Thailand will give funds for such activities as offering scholarships to AIDS orphans or providing stationery supplies or used cars. But when it comes to issues related to migrant laborers or sex workers, they

won't provide support. Companies won't actively support NGOs if it doesn't fit into the image of 'helping those in distress.'

This trend means that Japanese private companies will not actively support an NGO working on AIDS issues if that NGO's interests lie in such areas as minorities, which involve legal and other political issues.

Another reason is that Japanese private companies tend to prefer to directly support projects rather than advocacy. This demonstrates that private companies have a pre-existing image of corporate social contributions that entails direct aid to those in distress, and they lack an image or understanding of advocacy or any other ways to contribute to society.

On the other hand, it is worth taking note of the fundraising done by the Japan Committee Vaccines for the World's Children (JCV) as one approach to working with private companies. This NGO works with the objective of providing vaccines to children around the world, and its president is Kayako Hosokawa, the wife of Japan's former prime minister, Morihiro Hosokawa. The main focus of the organization's work is fundraising in order to provide vaccines to children in developing countries; it does not actually conduct projects on the ground in those countries. Since this NGO's founding in 1994, the amount of funds it has raised from private corporations has been rising, and the organization interacts with private companies on a daily basis. Based on this experience, Reiko Ezaki of the JCV points to the fact that its activities are "easy to understand" as a factor in its successful efforts to get corporate support. Ezaki notes that "the image of saving children's lives by providing vaccines" is very easy to understand in the context of a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and is therefore appealing. It is also easy to account for the way in which the funds were used because one can count how many vaccines were delivered. Of course, the JCV does not conduct direct advocacy targeting policymakers, but through the act of fundraising it conveys an educational message that raises public awareness of the importance of global health, and that can be interpreted as advocacy. This case also suggests that some potential does exist for Japanese companies to provide funding in the global health field.

Against this backdrop, Tanimura of World Vision Japan, whose own NGO activities receive support from Japanese companies, discussed the different stages of corporate support:

There are a number of steps involved in corporate support for NGOs. The first step is for individuals from private corporations to go directly to the

site where an NGO project is being conducted and provide funding or other project-based support. The next step is not special support for a project that the NGO is already conducting, but rather getting people from the company involved in the NGO's operational activities and having them provide financial support. As the next step, they can think about corporate support for the NGO's advocacy work.

For example, World Vision Japan, which raises its annual ¥3.3 billion operating budget from donations, also places priority on “approaching corporations by showing the output of the campaigns” and is working to strengthen its efforts in this area. Its methodology is to convey to its supporters not only the type of information usually provided to foster parents but also policy information so that it can get ongoing support. This organization clearly states that its philosophy is to represent the interests of the children, and as part of its effort to show its supporters how policy advocacy is tied to the improvement of children's lives, it has created an advocacy page in its newsletter as one of its activities. Of course, this methodology is in part based on the creation of a global strategy by World Vision, but it also shows that the potential for raising funds from Japanese corporations does exist, depending on the method of approach used.

Based on these results, one can conjecture that private companies are open to providing support for the activities of NGOs in the global health field. Regarding the form that support will take, companies will not jump immediately into advocacy targeted at policymakers but rather must follow a process. Depending on the method, however, there seems to be ample room to develop a route for securing private company funding for NGO advocacy in Japan in the future.

In order to take advantage of private resources and request corporate support for health NGOs' advocacy work, NGOs need to improve their corporate-focused advocacy and develop collaboration with private companies. The current passivity of companies is, of course, a result of their rigid image of social contributions, but this is probably caused by their inadequate understanding of what support for advocacy means, as well as their lack of knowledge of international policy or ability to understand the trends in that policy. It would be useful to try to encourage understanding in Japanese society and among private companies of the fact that the methodologies used by private companies, such as public relations campaigns, would be extremely beneficial if applied to NGO advocacy work as well. There are already activities underway that extend beyond cooperation in

Japan. For example, when the Taisei Corporation carries out infrastructure-building projects in developing countries, it has been working together with an international NGO that has a local office in Japan to carry out an HIV/AIDS prevention program. This type of example shows the potential opportunities for building collaboration.

For these types of practical actions, it is important that NGOs take a proactive approach to developing strategic ties with private companies. As Nishiyama of SHARE states, “There is a need for methodologies that make the connection between the image that a company wants to project as a contributor to society and as a business on the one hand, and what the NGO itself wants to do.” One important point to consider is how to achieve that methodology at the NGO staff level. One way is by strengthening advertising and marketing skills through NGO-business cooperation for fundraising. It is important that past expertise raising funds and working cooperatively with Japanese private organizations be effectively shared. In the future as well, by creating opportunities to work together, the knowledge gained from each other and of different methodologies can lead to further improvements. In addition, what is needed is not just a one-way flow of resources from companies to NGOs but to build cooperative NGO-business experiences in advocacy as well, and indeed “connecting” interests and repeatedly holding dialogues will lead to the strengthening of health-related NGOs.

What is expected from private foundations is essentially direct funding for NGO advocacy in the global health field. In comparison to private companies, a large part of what private foundations do is aimed at serving the public good. When one considers that aspect, in future approaches to private foundations it would probably be beneficial to promote the understanding that the health field is recognized as a global topic and a topic that the international community must tackle. So, by supporting NGO advocacy, they can become major actors in influencing policy on global issues. In Europe and the United States, private foundations have been able to have an impact on NGO advocacy through the provision of funding, thereby getting involved in global policymaking. Another characteristic is that they possess ideas and expertise about global health and are directly involved in the policymaking process. Even when one considers that the scale of funding from Japanese foundations is different, there is still ample room to further develop the role that Japanese foundations should play.

The above section describes the areas that need to be improved in order to create and maintain a funding route from the private sector. In the context

of “global health governance” as well, there are growing global expectations regarding the role that private foundations and companies should play. Figure 3, which is based on the above analysis, presents an image of ways that are feasible in the short term to strengthen NGO-centered advocacy. Existing diverse NGOs can develop activities as an alliance and devise ways to actively cooperate with research institutions that possess an academic capacity. This structure enables improved direct advocacy geared toward policymakers such as government bureaucrats and Diet members, as well as advocacy that targets the media and the public, by creating a funding flow from private companies.

Figure 3. Models of cooperation in NGO advocacy

