

Fund Raising

Viewpoint

Going from ODA to the world of grant-making

Creating a better society through intersectoral cooperation

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Fulfillment of a long-held wish

Since I joined the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) in 1968, I have worked in the field of official development assistance (ODA) for 35 and a half years. In January of this year, I began working at SPF. Thus began my life in the private nonprofit sector, fulfilling a long-held dream.

In my former occupation, I dealt mainly with government officials in developing countries and in various Japanese government agencies. When it came to the private nonprofit sector, I did have some contact with NGOs involved with international cooperation and local NGOs in developing countries, but I was not particularly close to people from grant-making foundations. I did, however, have some old friends in this field, and I noticed the relish with which they tackled what appeared to be most interesting subjects. It was around 1992, when I returned to Japan from my second assignment in France, that I began to think that someday I too would like to live that way.

At the time Japan stood tall as the world's top ODA donor. Not only was it the top donor, it was working hard to enhance both policy and implementation with the aim of becoming the leading donor. The first job I was given on my return was second in command to the person in charge of the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere—in short, everything except Asia. My main work involved wrestling with and trying to beat back a particular ministry that was attempting to meddle in the implementation of ODA projects and vying with the Export-Import Bank of Japan to get in on the ground floor of ODA to the commu-

nist bloc, which had just begun.

In 1993 the Research Institute of Development Assistance, a kind of in-house think tank of the OECF was set up, and I was charged with being its managing director. This experience made me keenly aware of the difficulty of promoting, setting directions for, and managing quality control of research projects, which are much slipperier in nature than development project financing. I put everything I had into this job, though, since it would not do for the main aid organization of the leading donor to be outshone by the World Bank's intellectual contribution.

Then in the spring of 1995, I was sent to Bangkok. For the next two and a half years, until the Asian financial crisis struck, I oversaw the management of yen loans to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand and the identification and formulation of new projects in those countries.

I was ordered back home in the midst of the financial crisis, which led some of my colleagues in Bangkok to accuse me of fleeing in the face of the enemy. The job awaiting me in Japan was managing director of the department dealing with all the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Far from fleeing in the face of the enemy, I was put in the position of tackling head-on aid activities targeting the countries in the eye of the financial-crisis storm. I was kept frantically busy grappling with unprecedentedly tough problems.

In the autumn of 1999 OECF and the Export-Import Bank of Japan merged to form the Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC). Buffeted by the winds of debate over reforming "special corporations" and reviewing ODA, the ODA-related government sector, including JBIC, was under strong pressure to reform itself.

In these circumstances, interest in

the private nonprofit sector resurfaced in my mind. Unlike my previous simple attraction, now I had an idea that I might be able to strengthen cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, with a view to improving the quality of ODA and strengthening its support base within Japan. For those involved with ODA, this would have the merit of increasing taxpayers' understanding and support and effectively utilizing the knowledge, technology, and other resources of the Japanese people. And for NGOs and NPOs seeking opportunities for international cooperation and exchange, this would have the merit of expanding their sphere of activity. It seemed like a win-win situation to me.

Toward drafting the next SPF guidelines

Soon after joining SPF, I was asked to review the Operational Guidelines for the Third Midterm Program (2000–2005) and give my views on the next guidelines. When I had been viewing the private nonprofit sector from my vantage point in the government sector, I had been attracted to the seemingly free and open-hearted atmosphere of the nonprofit sector. But when I became part of that sector and was handed an unexpectedly big role (or problem), I became keenly aware of having entered a wholly new world. To add to my anxiety, I was told to figure out how to do the job for myself.

I have spent the last few months gaining an understanding of the basics: how SPF works, the content of its projects, and its manner of involvement.

Although it is too early to comment on substantive issues, I intend to do my best to assimilate the research staff's concerns and thinking and see that these are reflected in the drafting of the new guidelines. No matter how

impressive the message may be, unless it is underpinned by concrete activities within the period of the guidelines, it will simply be all show and no substance. This is why good communication with the program officers who actually put together and administer projects is so important.

Activities grounded in experience

Incidentally, besides my work at SPF I have a number of other positions or social activities: visiting senior advisor for development planning at the Institute for International Cooperation of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), executive director of Yamaguchi University, auditor of Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, director of the Okinawa Health and Longevity Research and Development Center, and lecturer in the distance-education graduate program of Nihon Fukushi University.

My JICA post is based on the agency's system of international-cooperation specialists, established more than 20 years ago. At present some 90 of these international-cooperation professionals are active in developing countries or Japan. They fulfill diverse functions. Specialists dispatched to developing countries are on the front line of technology transfer or act as policy advisors to high-level government officials. At home they support Japan's ODA in various ways, such as helping with surveys in response to requests from JICA or serving as lecturers to JICA staff members and specialists, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) personnel, and others before they are sent abroad. I myself intend to focus mainly on activities to invigorate exchange and cooperation between local communities in Japan and in developing countries, working in collaboration with the JOCV secretariat and JICA's newly established Office of Citizen Participation and its offices around Japan.

At Yamaguchi University and Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, I see my mission as promoting university reform by assisting with the management of the two institutions, which have just become independent administrative corporations. In particular, I hope to be of use

in helping the universities' efforts bear fruit in regard to social contribution and dealings with developing countries and regions.

The Okinawa Health and Longevity Research and Development Center is carrying out regional promotion measures unique to Okinawa. It is an initiative designed to conduct diverse and creative activities in such areas as medical care, health improvement, healing, and recreation in a number of cities and towns centered on the city of Gushikawa, with the aim of publicizing Okinawa's reputation as "the island of longevity." Other activities include regional exchange and cooperation with China's Heilongjiang Province. Medical care and health are outside my field of expertise, but I feel that I can contribute something in regard to regional promotion and international exchange.

I am scheduled to begin lecturing in Nihon Fukushi University's distance-education graduate program this autumn. I will be teaching adults who are keen to keep studying while working in the field with JOCV and other organizations, discussing and learning about such subjects as the challenges and constraints of ODA and development cooperation.

Laying the groundwork for a stronger private nonprofit sector

I wear six hats, but I have one aim: cultivating and consolidating civil power and improving society through international exchange and cooperation. The phrase "cultivating civil power" may seem antiquated, reminiscent of the debate over state powers versus civil rights that raged in Japan in the 1880s and 1890s. My stance, however, is not one of improving society in opposition to the state or the government but one of strengthening the private nonprofit sector, the third pillar of society along with the government and business sectors, so as to create a more livable world through three-way cooperation and division of labor.

If we take this viewpoint, we cannot remain detached from efforts to improve socioeconomic development and governance in developing countries and economies in transition.

The way in which central governments, NGOs, universities, businesses, and other actors cooperate, compete, and clash as they search for solutions to difficult problems fundamentally has much in common with the process of social reform we Japanese are tackling within our own country. It is not merely a matter of happenings in countries that are the recipients of ODA and other assistance but is also the process of struggle by colleagues addressing the same challenges as our own.

Of course countries have their own cultures and traditions, and their political and economic circumstances differ. Still, we are seeing sustained economic growth and the emergence of a middle class in a significant number of countries in Asia and elsewhere. On the other hand, many issues remain, including poverty and environmental problems. In these countries there is also a growing awareness that effective initiatives cannot be taken if people have the attitude of leaving everything to the government. On the basis of this awareness, a variety of practical activities are underway. (Japan, incidentally, is not necessarily an advanced country when it comes to collaboration among the three sectors and the vigorous involvement of the private nonprofit sector in that endeavor.)

My dream is to see more systematic exchange and experience sharing by people within Japan and overseas, together advancing the creation of a better society while generating a synergistic effect. Different people will have different notions of "a better society." But to my way of thinking, the biggest issue is governance.

To me, issues having to do with the public interest are not the exclusive province of the government sector. I would like to see the kind of society in which a variety of sectors and actors, involving themselves and interacting with one another in an appropriate manner, creatively devise mechanisms for dealing with such issues fairly, effectively, and efficiently. To make this possible all countries, Japan included of course, need to strengthen the private nonprofit sector. I would like to see SPF play an active part in bringing this about, and I intend to do my bit. *SPF*