

Reports from the Field

Promoting civil society resource organizations in Southeast Asia

By David Winder

Director of Global Philanthropy Programs,
Synergos Institute

The Synergos Institute is a New York-based nonprofit organization. The name Synergos indicates the synergistic effect of cooperation among government, business, and the NGO sector. SPF has funded two projects administered by the Synergos Institute: Promotion of Civil Society Resource Organizations in Asia (fiscal 1997-99) and Promotion of Civil Society Resource Organizations: Linkage Between NGOs and Donors (fiscal 2000-2002).

The Synergos Institute was founded over 15 years ago. It was created to find ways of overcoming poverty by strengthening cooperation between the nonprofit/NGO sector, government, and the business sector. We realized that one type of organization had the potential to play a critical role in building bridges between the sectors and mobilizing much-needed resources from domestic and international sources for organizations building social and human capital.

This was the local development foundation, or civil society resource organization (CSRO), a term increasingly used in Southeast Asia. For the past decade, we have concentrated our energies on developing programs to build and strengthen such organizations.¹

Until 1996, we focused our energies on Latin America and southern Africa. In 1996, we received invitations to extend our program to Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thai-

land. We were able to respond thanks to the support of SPF. Below I will describe some of the major results of the work undertaken since 1997.

Understanding the CSRO sector in Southeast Asia and responding to its needs

The first task in launching a program to promote CSROs in Southeast Asia was to undertake a survey of the sector. This mapping exercise, the first of its kind, was carried out by local researchers in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It revealed the existence of a diverse universe of almost 80 local grantmaking CSROs mobilizing tens of millions of dollars for grassroots programs and providing a wide range of additional services.²

All the organizations surveyed were invited to a regional meeting in the Philippines in May, 1998, to discuss the needs of the sector and plans for follow-up. As a result of that meeting Synergos decided to work closely with key organizations in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand to strengthen the sector. National meetings were held in those countries in late 1998 and early 1999 to further define CSRO needs.

Common themes were the need for more opportunities for exchange of information and experience on a national, regional, and global level and the need to devise more effective ways to build a stronger and more sustainable financial base for CSROs.

Building sustainable financing strategies

In response to these needs Synergos has worked jointly with Philippine Business for Social Progress to organize a series of workshops.

The first was a regional workshop held in Manila and attended by over 60 participants. At this workshop CSRO managers from Colombia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and South Africa shared their experience in endowment building and investment.

The second was hosted in Indonesia by Bina Swadaya for representatives of 26 Indonesian CSROs. This was the first time they had had the opportunity to meet and discuss the various ways they were meeting the challenge of raising funds for their programs and institutional development. Further regional and national workshops are planned.

In addition to the workshops we have drawn on our global network of 30 senior fellows to provide technical assistance to CSROs on such themes as marketing and communications and endowment building and investment.

CSROs and ODA agencies: opportunities for partnership

A number of official development assistance (ODA) agencies have realized the benefits to their aid programs of developing partnerships with CSROs. Doing so enables ODA agencies to channel aid to NGOs and people's organizations (POs) at lower

1. In addition, Synergos has recently launched two new programs, the Global Philanthropists Circle and the Bridging Leadership Program. Information on all Synergos programs and publications is available on our website, www.synergos.org. For specific information on pro-

grams in Southeast Asia, please contact Gina Velasco, regional director for Southeast Asia (gvelasco@synergos.org).

2. Following this initial survey, updated national CSRO directories have been prepared for Indonesia, the Philippines and

Thailand. These profile almost 100 organizations and provide a valuable reference.

3. This project, Promotion of Civil Society Resource Organizations: Linkage Between NGOs and Donors, is supported by SPF.

transaction costs and with greater efficiency in reaching the poor. In view of the potential to encourage greater ODA-agency support for the CSRO sector we have initiated a research and dissemination project as part of our broader CSRO-strengthening program.³

To date we have documented a number of ways in which ODA agencies have collaborated with CSROs and assessed the advantages gained by both. Drawing on these case studies, we will prepare an "options" paper for ODA agencies. The cases illustrate three different approaches used by ODA agencies to draw on or strengthen a range of civil society organizations.

Case One: Channel financial resources generated by debt-forgiveness plans to new CSROs. These CSROs are created with a large initial endowment, and the interest on the endowment is channeled as grants and loans to NGOs and community organizations and used for core institutional costs, including staff development.

Case studies have been prepared of the Foundation for the Philippine Environment and the Foundation for Sustainable Societies, both in the Philippines and supported by the U.S. and Swiss governments, respectively. This approach has the advantage of adding

to the country's social capital by creating permanent bridging organizations with the capacity to strengthen a range of civil society organizations.

Case Two: Work with local NGO networks to develop a mechanism to channel ODA grant funds to programs that address the needs of the poor. This is an approach favored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The case of the Philippines Development Assistance Program illustrates the special challenges of working with NGO networks in two countries (the Philippines and Canada). It describes how the program has evolved since it was created in 1986 and assesses how it meets the interests of key stakeholders.

The second case involves the Local Development Institute and its grant-making arm, the Local Development Foundation. CIDA's support for these Thai organizations has proved an effective strategy for channeling resources to grassroots programs and also contributing to national-level policy formulation.

Both cases show the advantages of building long-term institutional capacity and developing a relationship of trust between the CSRO and the donor. Nevertheless, in the absence of

endowment support these organizations have to use creative strategies to ensure sustainable funding.

Case Three: Contract CSROs to deliver technical assistance and resources directly to low-income communities or local NGOs. This is an approach favored by both Japanese embassies and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The case of JICA's Community Empowerment Program in Indonesia shows the potential for partnering with CSROs to increase the capacity of civil society organizations to implement effective community development programs.

The case of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects shows the significant role it plays in making Japanese ODA more relevant and responsive to small NGOs and POs. It also illustrates the advantages to be gained from developing partnerships with CSROs for the purpose of identifying viable grass-roots projects and ensuring that micro-projects contribute to long-term developmental goals.

Both of the Japanese cases provide valuable insights into new and creative approaches to the delivery of aid and indicate the critical role played by energetic, committed staff with strong local knowledge of the NGO sector. *SPF*

Water supplies of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers

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efforts to conserve water, improve water quality, use water more efficiently, and for concrete steps to implement work on the eastern and central routes.

Progress on the western route has

been hampered by the fact that the target region is thinly populated, mountainous terrain 3,000 to 5,000 meters above sea level, and survey teams have found it difficult to replenish supplies. For this reason, surveying has been inadequate. It is necessary to push ahead with surveys so that construction can begin. A new plan for the western route providing for easier lowland construction has now been put forward.

Official and unofficial Japan-China exchange between survey teams in regard to the western route began in

1994, with discussions on technical aspects of tunnel construction and geological concerns. In recent years, China too has begun to appreciate the desirability of plans that take the environmental impact into account from the survey phase onward, in regard to large-scale development. With the support of the Sasakawa Japan-China Friendship Fund we have completed a two-year feasibility study for the western route. Based on the findings, we now hope to move on to more-active cooperation with relevant agencies and specialists. *SPF*