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The Japanese Government–NGO Relationship in the Foreign Aid Field: “Partnership” Reconsidered

Abstract

This article re-examines the notion of “partnership” and its applicability to the relationship between the Japanese government and domestic NGOs in the context of foreign aid. As such, it provides empirical insights on government-non-profit relationship in understudied policy field of foreign aid in East Asian context. Illuminating how governmental financial support for Japanese NGOs has evolved in recent years, the article concludes that whereas “partnership” may be a preferred term of the Japanese government to describe the relationship with Japanese NGOs, the manner in which it is operationalized through selected financial support schemes raises legitimate questions about the validity and applicability of this particular term to the case under investigation. Hence, the chosen financial assistance schemes serve as the lenses through which the article explores and assesses the official “partnership” assertions. In sum, the relationship suffers from shortcomings in terms of mutuality and organizational identity, qualifying both the extent and quality of government-sponsored opportunities for Japanese international cooperation NGOs.

Keywords: government-NGO relationship, partnership, NGO funding, foreign aid, Japan



Introduction

During the last decade the government of Japan revised a pivotal document on the country's development assistance, introducing the new Development Cooperation Charter (henceforth DCC). The 2015 Charter contained commitments to "strategically strengthen *partnerships* with NGOs/CSOs" (emphasis added) and to "support excellent development cooperation projects of Japanese NGOs/CSOs and their capacity development"¹. In June 2023 the DCC was updated yet again, with civil society's – including NGOs' – contribution to humanitarian and development work being recognised.² The "strategic partner" label is used to describe its standing in the country's official development assistance (ODA), although the DCC claims that civil society is "newly positioned" in that particular role. As in 2015, the document mentions the support for capacity building of Japanese civil society, but it further contains a remark on a "continuous improvement of support schemes",³ and the making use of civil society's expertise in delivering aid – which are new additions in comparison with the 2015 charter – and seem to reflect the underlying tensions and ongoing challenges in government-NGO relationship. In the light of the abovementioned pronouncements of Japanese government, this article re-examines the governmental declarations of "partnership" with Japanese development and humanitarian NGOs in the context of foreign aid.

The article explores a crucial aspect of the relationship – that is, the nature and extent of NGOs' incorporation into the country's ODA through financial assistance schemes for projects and capacity development, investigating what the setup of these financial instruments can tell us about the purported partnership between the government and NGOs in the field of foreign aid. The main aim is to assess how the relationship between the Japanese government and NGOs – as seen through the lenses of the financial assistance schemes available for the Japanese development and humanitarian NGO community – has evolved over the last decade and to establish how far this relationship can be construed in terms of partnership today.

In summary, while reviewing the scale and trends in governmental initiatives intended to integrate NGOs into Japan's development assistance system and to financially support the NGO sector, the article problematises the governmental pronouncements of partnership. Although exchanges and collaboration between the government and NGOs have indeed been increasing, the article argues that the adoption of the internationally approved label of "partnership" masks a more complex reality in which Japanese NGOs – contrary to governmental assurances of strategic cooperation and backing for their development projects – maintain a limited presence in Japanese foreign aid and are being consigned to play a secondary role.

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *Cabinet Decision on the Development Cooperation Charter*, 2015, p. 14, Viewed 3 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000067701.pdf>>.

² MOFA, *Kaihatsu kyōryoku taikō: Jiyū de akareta sekai no jizoku kanōna hatten ni muketa Nihon no kōken*, 2023e, Viewed 3 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100514343.pdf>>.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

The article's findings will be of interest to scholars exploring and revisiting topics of relationship(s) between government and non-profit organisations, and regulatory frameworks governing and structuring non-profit spheres in specific national settings.⁴ The article provides empirical insights on government-NGO relationship in Japan through the lens of how relevant governmental agency structures institutional incentives for NGOs in a policy domain constituting a crucial component of Japan's foreign policy, that is development cooperation. As such, the article adds to the previous research that, first, explores relationship between government and non-profit actors in the context of particular policy fields,⁵ and, second, postulates for a more nuanced approach to researching government-non-profit relationships through paying a greater attention to differing forms of relationships between the two that may exist depending on which sections of the broader non-profit sector become of analytical focus.⁶

In the case of Japan, the extant literature traces continuities and change in government-non-profit relationships,⁷ often taking a comparative perspective.⁸ The scholarly contributions that investigate relationships in specific fields of policy frequently focus on the provisions of social-welfare services,⁹ such as, for instance, social care for the elderly.¹⁰ Among the scholarly contributions investigating the relationship between

⁴ Compare: Elisabeth A. Bloodgood, Joannie Tremblay-Boire and Aseem Prakash, 'National Styles of NGO Regulation', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 43,4 (2014), pp. 716–736; Nicole P. Marwell and Maoz Brown, 'Towards Governance Framework for Government-Nonprofit Relations', in: *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, eds. Walter W. Powell and Patricia Bromley, Stanford California 2020, pp. 231–250; Stefan Toepler, Annette Zimmer, Katja Levy and Christian Frohlich, 'Beyond the partnership paradigm: Toward an extended typology of government/nonprofit relationship patterns', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 52,2 (2022), pp. 1–27.

⁵ See Kirsten A. Grønbjerg and Steven R. Smith, *The Changing Dynamic of Government-Nonprofit Relationships*, Cambridge 2021.

⁶ Toepler et al., 'Beyond the Partnership Paradigm'.

⁷ Takayoshi Amenomori, 'Japan', in: *Defining the Nonprofit Sector: A Cross-national Analysis*, eds. Lester M. Salamon & Helmut K. Anheier, Manchester 1997, pp. 188–214; Tadashi Yamamoto, *Deciding the Public Good: Governance and Civil society*, Tokyo 1999; Robert Pekkanen and Karla Simon, 'The Legal Framework for Voluntary and Non-profit Activity', in: *The Voluntary and Non-profit Sector in Japan: The Challenge of Change*, ed. Stephen Osborne, London 2003, pp. 76–101.

⁸ Dennis R. Young, 'Alternative models of government-nonprofit sector relations: Theoretical and international perspectives', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29,1 (2000), pp. 149–172; Louella Moore, 'Legitimation issues in the state-nonprofit relationship', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30,4 (2001), pp. 707–719.

⁹ Sook-Jong Lee, 'Government-nonprofit organization cooperation in Japanese welfare administration', *Asian Perspective* 26,2 (2002), pp. 209–236; Margarita Estevez-Abe, 'State-Society Partnerships in the Japanese Welfare State', in: *The State of Civil Society in Japan*, eds. Frank J. Schwartz and Susan J. Pharr, Cambridge 2003, pp. 154–174; Laratta Rosario, 'Hand in hand or under the thumb? A new perspective on social welfare in Japan', *Social Policy and Society: A Journal of the Social Policy Association* 8,3 (2009), pp. 307–317.

¹⁰ E.g., on long-term care for the country's elderly population see Yuko Suda, 'Devolution and privatization proceed and centralized system maintained: A twisted reality faced by Japanese nonprofit organizations', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 35,3 (2006), pp. 430–452 and 'Changing relationships between nonprofit and for-profit human service organizations under the long-term care system in Japan', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations* 25 (2014), pp. 1235–1261; on elderly care and support for the disabled see Mary A. Haddad, 'A state-in-society approach to the nonprofit sector: Welfare services in Japan', *Voluntas:*

Japanese non-profits and the government in the field of foreign aid, the studies by Hirata¹¹ and Reimann¹² made a seminal contribution to tracing the transformation of interaction dynamics between the two parties. By underlining the growing opportunities for NGOs to participate in foreign aid policymaking processes and to profit from a range of new financial assistance schemes, they offered meticulous accounts of how Japanese non-governmental actors had become increasingly involved in advocacy and service provision in the field of Japanese development aid. Both studies acknowledged that this incipient cooperation was still limited, yet their findings provided grounds for hope about a further broadening and future directions of collaboration between NGOs and the state in the years to come. Beyond the studies of Hirata and Reimann, contributions exploring the inclusion and role of Japanese NGOs in the broader ODA framework are rare.¹³ While these studies acknowledge the importance of governmental funding schemes for facilitating collaboration between NGOs and the state on foreign aid, these contributions leave space for further inquiries in terms of both depth and scope, as they leave important aspects of the topic unaddressed – such as the financing of NGO capacity-building initiatives.

Thus, in the first instance, while building on findings of previous studies investigating the relationship between Japanese NGOs and the government in the field of foreign aid, this article provides an updated and expanded analysis of how government-sponsored opportunities – in terms of the funding available for NGOs – have evolved over the last decade. As such, it contributes to debates on the government support provided to the Japanese NGO community, with the article's findings offering the basis for a less optimistic assessment of the extent and nature of collaboration between the state and NGOs in recent years and the future prospects for the relationship.

Second, the review of the scale of ODA financial support schemes and their direction to domestic NGOs allows us to draw conclusions about governmental commitment to implementing and maintaining more participatory forms of foreign aid governance and to assess how far NGOs have managed to assert themselves as stakeholders in this process. As such, the article's findings provide additional empirical input, complementing extant studies on the broader problem of dynamics between civil society and the developmental

International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations 22 (2011), pp. 26–47; and on life-long learning see Akihiro Ogawa, *The Failure of Civil Society: The Third Sector and the State in Contemporary Japan*, Albany 2009.

¹¹ Keiko Hirata, *Civil Society: The Growing Role of NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, New York 2002.

¹² Kim Reimann, *The Rise of NGOs: Activism from Above*, London 2010.

¹³ See Jooyoun Lee, 'Understanding Japan's international development NGO policy: Domestic interpretations, identities, and interests', *Asian Politics and Policy* 34 (2011), pp. 527–550; Hyo-sook Kim and David M. Potter, 'Complementarity of ODA and NGO roles: A case study of Japanese support of the Millennium Development Goals', *Journal of Inquiry and Research* 99 (2014), pp. 87–104; Maasaki Ohashi, 'NGOs and Japan's ODA: Critical Views and Advocacy', in: *Japan's Development Assistance: Foreign Aid and the Post-2015 Agenda*, ed. Hiroshi Kato, John Page and Yasutami Shimomura, London 2016, pp. 327–343; Akio Takayanagi, 'Civil Society Organisations as Partners and Critics of Japan's Aid Policy', in: *International development cooperation of Japan and South Korea: New strategies for an uncertain world*, eds. Huck-ju Kwon, Tatsufumi Yamagata, Eunju Kim and Hisahiro Kondoh, Singapore 2022, pp. 211–236.

state¹⁴ in Japan. Both Hirata¹⁵ and Pekkanen¹⁶ propose in their respective works that autonomy and the political insulation of strong Japanese bureaucracy have been eroded by the increasingly vocal civil society actors, who have contributed to the decline of the country's developmental state. In principle, the presented article shares these assessments of the evolving relationship between governmental bureaucracy and NGOs. Its findings, however, reveal the resilience of the governmental side in exerting control and influencing further development of the NGO sector via targeted funding opportunities.

Hence, through providing new empirical input on relationship between Japanese non-profits and the government in the field of foreign aid, the article can serve comparative purposes to explore resemblance with, and distinction from, interactions between state agencies and non-profits in other policy spheres in Japan.

Furthermore, in addition to conducting within-state comparisons, the article findings can be utilised to compare Japanese case with how other donor countries structure incentives for non-profits in foreign aid sphere. For instance, recent scholarship has indicated that there is a need to explore further the approaches of various donors to funding for civil society – and the differences among them – to counter a tendency to “see donors like-for-like”.¹⁷ Hence, this article contributes updated knowledge on how the Japanese government have been structuring financial incentives and support for NGOs. Insights from the Japanese case can be utilised to draw comparisons with other East Asian states – such as South Korea and Taiwan – that share developmental state traditions and to accentuate the variety of approaches present among members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

¹⁴ In 1982, Chalmers Johnson proposed the notion of the “developmental state” to explain a specific approach to economic development that had been observed in Japan and which was distinct from both free-market and planned economy approaches. Over the years, this notion has been applied to explain the rapid economic rises and governance patterns seen in East Asian countries. The developmental state model emphasises the involvement of state authorities in leading economic development, the latter being motivated by an ideological conviction that authorities must secure a strong economy to protect their societies from existing threats. Industrial policy, export-orientation, and the protection of domestic industries are the key measures employed to achieve this aim. Moreover, there are notable interconnections and interdependence between policymakers, bureaucrats, and business community, and these play a significant role in the planning and implementation of economic policies. Finally, the notion of the developmental state captures the prominent role of certain institutional actors, such as economic ministries, central banks and business associations. Richard Stubbs, ‘The Origins of East Asia's Developmental State and the Pressures for Change’, in: *Asia after the Developmental State: Disembedding Autonomy*, eds. Toby Carroll and Daryll S.L. Jarvis, Cambridge 2017, pp. 52–54.

¹⁵ Keiko Hirata, ‘Whither the developmental state? The growing role of NGOs in Japanese aid policymaking’, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 4,2 (2002), pp. 165–188.

¹⁶ Robert Pekkanen, ‘After the developmental state: Civil society in Japan’, *Journal of East Asian Studies* 4 (2004), pp. 363–388.

¹⁷ Nicola Banks, ‘The Role and Contributions of Development NGOs to Development Cooperation: What Do We Know?’, in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda*, eds. Sachin Chaturvedi, Heiner Janus, Stephen Klingebiel, Xiaoyun Li, Andre de Mello e Souza, Elisabeth Sidiropoulos and Dorothea Wehrmann, Cham 2021, p. 673.

Finally, the article's findings feed into a broader discussion regarding the influence of existing governmental regulations on NGOs' prospects for transcending service delivery and pursuing the goal of social and political transformation.¹⁸ With a recent shift within DAC towards greater support for civil society groups as actors in their own right in the fields of development and humanitarian assistance (2021), the examination of how a major non-Western donor operationalises its "partnership" rhetoric makes an empirical contribution that helps to assess the governmental approach to supporting Japanese NGOs function as a transformative force for social and political change.

The manuscript proceeds as follows. The next section delineates the conceptual framework and methods of the investigation, focusing on the notion of partnership and its characteristics. The article then briefly describes how the Japanese government construes the relationship in terms of "partnership" and then juxtaposes these assertions with data from OECD on the overall volume of Japanese aid flowing through non-governmental actors to put the former into a context. Subsequently the article explains the instruments and avenues through which this "partnership" is implemented and operationalised, with a focus on the funding opportunities extended to NGOs and their evolution over the last decade. Finally, the article explores the legacies of the developmental state mode of governance in the field of Japanese foreign aid, ODA budgetary constraints and a renewed focus on safeguarding the country's economic – as well as security – interests in Japan's foreign aid to revisit the "partnership" assertion, venturing an assessment of how far it is justified to construe the relationship between the Japanese government and NGOs in these terms, and which other analytical notions would be more suitable in this particular case. This article also offers some preliminary thoughts on, first, the significance of the 2021 DAC recommendation on further supporting civil society actors in their development and humanitarian work, and second the ongoing Ukraine crisis, for the expansion of government-NGO collaboration in Japan.

The Global Rise of NGOs: Partnership and Power Inequalities

Regarding the expanded presence of NGOs in the international arena, the existing scholarship focuses on a number of endogenous and exogenous factors. Whereas some scholars have underlined the importance of NGO agency and the NGO's active struggle to have their voices heard,¹⁹ others have enumerated a variety of institutional and

¹⁸ See Nicola Banks, 'The Role of and Contributions of Development NGOs'; compare: Jennifer N. Brass, 'Do service provision NGOs perform civil society functions? Evidence of NGOs' relationship with democratic participation', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 51,1 (2021), pp. 148–169.

¹⁹ Peter Willets, *Non-governmental Organisations in World Politics: The Construction of Global Governance*, London and New York 2011.

structural conditions that facilitated their rise.²⁰ Anheier and Salamon,²¹ for instance, credit globalisation – with the accompanying increase in the significance of international organisations, “the thickening of the international rule of law”, the spread of democracy and the telecommunication revolution – for opening new avenues for involvement of non-governmental actors in policy discourse.²² Another prominent theoretical account focuses on a change of approach towards NGOs by major donor states and international organisations. Reimann, arguing for an “activism from above”, draws attention to the decisive importance of state policies and the structure of political opportunities in terms of political access and resources at both the domestic and international levels.²³ Reimann proposes that the dissemination among Western democratic countries, major donors and international organisations of a “pro-NGO norm” stressing the need for greater inclusion and engagement with NGOs in global politics for the purpose of tackling transnational challenges has exponentially improved the operational environment for NGOs. The discourse of NGOs as “partners in development” and “enforcer[s] of good governance”²⁴ has legitimised NGOs as rightful participants in global affairs, performing the role of advocates, service providers and regulators.²⁵ The abovementioned approach falls into the partnership paradigm literature, which underlines governments’ role in “creating space for collaboration” with non-profits.²⁶

Nevertheless, while the term “partnership” is routinely used to describe the relationship between the government and the broader non-profit sector, its exact meaning remains elusive and “it often means ‘different things to different people’”.²⁷ The definition “has evolved from a matter of simple coordination and coalition to more participatory terms such as mutual collaboration, common goal, and shared responsibility”.²⁸

To address the challenges of strongly normative and often subjective ideal-type notions of partnership Brinkerhoff proposes an alternative conceptualisation of the relationship between the government and NGOs, one reflecting the degree of mutuality and organisational identity. Mutuality encompasses qualities such as mutual dependence and commitment to joint goals, equality in decision-making and traits such as mutual trust

²⁰ Compare: Brian H. Smith, ‘Non-governmental organisations in international development: trends and future research priorities’, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations* 4 (1993), pp. 326–344.

²¹ Helmut K. Anheier and Lester M. Salamon, ‘The Nonprofit Sector in Comparative Perspective’, in: *The Nonprofit Sector: Research Handbook*, eds. Walter W. Powells and Richard Steinberg, New Haven 2006, pp. 89–114.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 94.

²³ Kim Reimann, ‘A view from the top: International politics, norms and the worldwide growth of NGOs’, *International Studies Quarterly* 50,1 (2006), pp. 45–67, and *The Rise of NGOs*, 2010.

²⁴ Kim Reimann, ‘A view from the top’, p. 59.

²⁵ Christopher T. Beer, Tim Bartley and Wade T. Roberts, ‘NGOs: Between Advocacy, Service Provision, and Regulation’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, ed. David Levi-Faur, Oxford 2012, pp. 325–337.

²⁶ Toepler et al., ‘Beyond the partnership paradigm’, p. 3.

²⁷ Shamsul M. Haque, ‘Governance based on partnership with NGOs: Implications for development and empowerment in rural Bangladesh’, *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 70,2 (2004), p. 272.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

and respect. Organisational identity requires the partners to, first, retain their mission, values and constituencies, and second, to preserve the sectoral characteristics of the given actors – understood primarily in terms of specific comparative advantages. High levels of both mutuality and organisational identity in the relationship distinguish a partnership from other forms of interactions between the government and NGOs (such as contracting, extension and co-optation/gradual absorption).²⁹

As Haque observes, however, the real-life application of a partnership is highly dependent on “the social, economic and political powers of partners involved”, with the interests and identity of the more influential partner prevailing.³⁰ Hence, Haque’s contribution draws attention to the problem of power dynamics in partnership relations. For Owen, although partners may embark on the relationship without enjoying equal status in power and influence, “some semblance of equity” needs to be present in the liaison, and power disparities should be addressed through corrective measures (e.g. mutual accountability).³¹ In her research, Lister offers a rather sombre assessment of the possibility of achieving partnership in asymmetrical power relationships.³² Thus, whereas the emergence and spread of pro-NGO norms has been crucial for increasing the prominence, relevance and status of NGOs, the issue of power inequality has remained central to the broader picture.

In practical terms, the advancement of consultative and financial connections between the states and NGOs is a significant aspect of the broader process by which NGOs have achieved increased inclusion in decision-making and human services provision at the international level.³³ Here, Lister draws attention to the significance of the ownership of financial means, with this constituting the key resource by which one actor can affect the actions of others (the base of power).³⁴ Financial (support) instruments and funding incentives are a crucial element of a regulatory framework governing non-profit sphere, and they feed into broader “institutional conditions” that structure operational context for non-profit actors. Such financial mechanisms enable governmental agencies to influence activities of non-governmental actors.³⁵ The directionality of monetary support measures and the latter’s forms allow for assessing the quality of financial aspect of government-non-profit “partnerships”.

²⁹ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, ‘Government-nonprofit partnership: A defining framework’, *Public Administration and Development* 22 (2002), pp. 21–24.

³⁰ Shamsul M. Haque, ‘Governance based on partnership with NGOs’, p. 272.

³¹ Tim Owen, ‘NGO-government partnership’, *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 1 (2000), p. 134.

³² Sarah Lister, ‘Power in partnership? An analysis of NGO’s relationships with its partners’, *Journal of International Development* 12 (2000), pp. 227–239.

³³ Volker M. Heins, ‘Global cooperation and economies of recognition: The case of NGOs’, in: *Global Cooperation Research Papers* 5, Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2014, p. 17, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.gcr21.org/publications/gcr/research-papers/global-cooperation-and-economies-of-recognition-the-case-of-ngos>>.

³⁴ Sarah Lister, ‘Power in partnership?’, pp. 230, 235.

³⁵ Compare: Nicole P. Marwell and Maoz Brown, ‘Towards Governance Framework’.

Methods

This article investigates one dimension of NGO-government partnerships, focusing on the financial support schemes made available by government to domestic NGOs, through which the latter have been integrated into the Japanese foreign aid architecture. The article analyses the evolution of the financial assistance offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to NGOs through Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects (GA), emergency humanitarian assistance funds through Japan Platform (JPF), NGO Project Subsidies and smaller schemes intended to facilitate an enabling environment for NGOs. Hence, the article utilises the case study approach, with the chosen financial assistance schemes serving as the lenses through which to explore and assess the official “partnership” assertions.

The empirical material on which the study is based primarily originates from documentation published by the Japanese government, NGOs and the OECD. Document analysis of materials published by MOFA and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is conducted to elucidate the presence and usage of the term “partnership” in regard to NGOs in the governmental narrative on development cooperation. Subsequently, data from OECD reports (2013–2022) on aid distribution via civil society organisations (CSOs) by members of the DAC are presented to briefly address how Japan compares in this respect to the DAC average and to provide an outside view of the governmental approach to non-governmental actors in the field of aid. Finally, numerical data produced by MOFA over the last decade – focusing on number of projects and overall budgets – are marshalled and analysed to demonstrate trends in the development of the abovementioned financial support schemes in terms of their scope and magnitude.

Ideally, the analysis would also address the instruments of dialogue with Japanese NGOs in foreign aid policymaking process³⁶, but considering the intricacy of this subject area, the latter deserves a separate inquiry to do it justice. Delimiting analytical focus to the scope and character of financial support schemes for Japanese NGOs, however, will provide pertinent evidence on how the government anticipate an appropriate role for them in development cooperation, as well as the areas in which – and extent to which –

³⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a Non-governmental Organizations Cooperation Division within its International Cooperation Bureau to facilitate links between the state and NGOs. The NGO-MOFA Regular Consultation Meetings began in 1996, and they encompass both a general meeting and separate sessions of the ODA Policy Council and the Partnership Promotion Committee. Likewise, JICA has its own department responsible for maintaining relationship with NGOs; namely, the Citizens Participation Promotion Division, which is a part of the Domestic Strategy and Partnership Department. Furthermore, NGO-JICA Consultation Meetings are held four times a year. The increasing interaction between the government agencies and NGOs resulted in the inclusion of Japanese NGO community representatives in deliberations over development issues and foreign aid, pursued in connection with revisions of the ODA charter (2003 and 2015), the TICAD process, and G-Summitry, among others. While this clearly demonstrates that NGOs were recognized as legitimate participants in these proceedings, access does not necessarily translate into influence, as the experiences of Japanese NGOs testify. See: Kazuo Sunaga, *The Reshaping of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) Charter*, FASID, 2004, pp. 5–8, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/reform/paper0411.pdf>; Maasaki Ohashi, ‘NGOs and Japan's ODA’>.

the government is willing to support them. The juxtaposition of official pronouncements of “partnership” with the data on financial flows will demonstrate the level of NGOs’ involvement in ODA delivery, potential discrepancies between the declared and actual state of affairs, and governmental responsiveness towards NGO calls for institutional change in the financial support schemes available to them. Therefore, the article explores and demonstrates how inclusion is implemented through the abovementioned financial channels and the extent to which the relationship formulated in this process is distinguished by the partnership qualities of mutuality and organisational identity.

NGOs in Delivery of Japanese Foreign Aid

Over the years, the term “partnership” has become the default for describing relations between NGOs and the government in Japan,³⁷ and it is frequently used in the official documents. For instance, the MOFA report on international cooperation and NGOs claims that Japanese NGOs are “essential partners” in the task of securing visibility for Japanese foreign aid. Furthermore, the collaboration contributes to popularising “participatory approaches” in international development work and is considered to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Japanese ODA.³⁸ The depiction of NGOs as embodying “visible Japanese development cooperation” and being “indispensable players/partners” in the eyes of MOFA returns in the White Papers on development cooperation.³⁹ In a similar vein, JICA publications consistently use the term “partnership” to describe the relationship with NGOs and stakeholders such as universities or local governments, confirming the embeddedness and prominence of this term in the official discourse.⁴⁰

Before proceeding to an analysis of specific financial cooperation channels that the governmental side employs with NGOs to ground their assertions in existing practices, the article reviews the overall volume of Japanese aid flowing through nongovernmental actors to establish the magnitude of this phenomenon.

³⁷ Akihito Hayashi, ‘Japan: Partnership at a Turning Point’, in: *The Reality of Aid 2014. Rethinking Partnerships in a Post-2015 world: Towards Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, The Reality of Aid Network, 2014, p. 53, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<http://www.realityofaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/4.Japan-Partnership-at-a-turning-point.pdf>>.

³⁸ MOFA, *International Cooperation and NGOs: Partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Japanese NGOs*, 2013, p. 1, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000024755.pdf>>.

³⁹ MOFA, *White Paper on Development Cooperation 2016: Japan’s International Cooperation*, 2017, p. 174, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000282089.pdf>>; *White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017: Japan’s International Cooperation*, 2018, p. 148, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000406627.pdf>>; *2018-nenban kaihatsu kyōryoku hakusho: Nihon no kokusai kyōryoku*, 2019, p. 110, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000453646.pdf>>.

⁴⁰ Japan International Cooperaton Agency (JICA), *JICA 2017 Annual Report*, 2017, p. 88, Viewed 6 October 2023, <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/publications/reports/annual/2017/c8h0vm0000bws721-att/2017_all.pdf>; *JICA 2018 Annual Report*, 2018, p. 54, Viewed 6 October 2023, <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/publications/reports/annual/2018/c8h0vm0000dxws0g-att/2018_all.pdf>.

The data compiled by the OECD (2013–2022) concerning Japan reveal that, in general terms, the amount of aid (both “to” and “through” CSOs⁴¹) made available to donor country-based, developing country-based and international CSOs – while fluctuating substantially over the years – declined from US\$ 387 million in 2010 to US\$ 218 million in 2020. Out of this, the portion allocated to donor country-based actors was US\$ 223 million in 2010 and US\$ 127 million in 2020 respectively.⁴²

The percentage of bilateral aid channelled via non-governmental actors – donor country-based, international and developing country-based organisations altogether, both “to” and “through” them – did not change significantly between 2011 and 2019, oscillating around the 2 per cent level, with the largest beneficiaries being Japanese NGOs.⁴³ To compare, the overall ratio of aid channelled to and through CSOs for all DAC countries was 15 per cent in 2019.⁴⁴ The broader Japanese NGO community itself has been very much aware of this gap, calling on the government to bring its aid disbursement in line with the DAC average.⁴⁵ Considering these data, the insistence of MOFA that it “actively provides Official Development Assistance (ODA) through NGOs”⁴⁶ appears to be an overstatement.

In the past, concerns about the level of cooperation between Japanese government and NGOs regularly surfaced in the DAC peer review documentation. Although the most recent 2020 report acknowledges that Japanese NGOs expressed recognition for “their freedom to operate in countries and sectors of their choice”, it still recommends

⁴¹ For information on aid to/through CSOs and issues with this distinction see: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2019, p. 24, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2019.pdf>>; and *Development Assistance Committee Members and Civil society: The Development Dimension*, Paris 2020c, p. 34, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/51eb6df1-en>>.

⁴² See OECD reports on aid to civil society organisations published between 2013 and 2022; for quick overview see OECD, *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2022, pp. 4–5, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2022.pdf>>.

⁴³ See OECD, *Aid for CSOs*, 2013, p. 12, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Aid%20for%20CSOs%20Final%20for%20WEB.pdf>>; *Aid for CSOs*, 2015, p. 12, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Aid%20for%20CSOs%20in%202013%20_%20Dec%202015.pdf>; *Aid for CSOs*, 2018, p. 24, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-Civil-Society-Organisations-2015-2016.pdf>>; *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2019, p. 24, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2019.pdf>>; *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2020, p. 24, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2020.pdf>>; *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2021, p. 22, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2021.pdf>>.

⁴⁴ OECD, *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2021, p. 6, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2021.pdf>>. Having said that, in 2020 it declined slightly to 14.1 per cent. See OECD, *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2022, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), *Japanese NGOs’ 10 Recommendations for Revision of Japan’s ODA Charter*, 2014, p. 4, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.janic.org/MT/pdf/Japan-oda.pdf>>.

⁴⁶ MOFA, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017: Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2016, 2017b*, p. 355, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000290287.pdf>>.

“providing greater institutional support to civil society organisations in Japan and partner countries as strategic partners and development actors in their own right”. Furthermore, it calls on Japan to support “the enabling environment and space for civil society”.⁴⁷ We return to this matter later in the text.

Support Schemes for NGO Development and Humanitarian Projects

As demonstrated by previous research, governmental support for Japanese NGOs has grown progressively over the years.⁴⁸ MOFA currently operate several schemes that provide financial resources to NGOs. Amongst these, the most important tools are Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects (GA, 2002 onwards) and the funds disbursed via Japan Platform (JPF, 2000 onwards). The first of these provides support for Japanese NGOs implementing projects in developing countries and regions,⁴⁹ while the second is a source of funds for rapid emergency responses to humanitarian needs that arise in the wake of disasters and conflict.

The total funds distributed to Japanese NGOs via GA and JPF grew steadily between 2002 and 2019, despite occasional dips.⁵⁰ In 2002, a little over 1.2 billion JPY (app. US\$ 9.6 million) was allocated to NGOs (60 development-oriented initiatives received sponsorship through the GA scheme). The ascension to power of the Democratic Party of Japan in 2009 led to an increase in ODA funds flowing to NGOs through GA and JPF (2009: 4.4 billion JPY and 2012: 6.3 billion JPY). Even after the return to power of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) in 2012, this funding was not cut back and reached 11.1 billion JPY in 2019. The total number of projects eligible for governmental funding under the GA scheme has also continued to increase, peaking in 2017 and 2019 with 113 projects receiving governmental backing. In 2020 and 2021 the overall number of allocated funds and projects declined (9.8 and 9.2 billion JPY, 109 and 96 respectively).⁵¹

⁴⁷ OECD, *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Japan 2020*, 2020, pp. 20–21, Viewed October 2023, <https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-japan-2020_b2229106-en#page1>.

⁴⁸ Keiko Hirata, *Civil Society: The Growing Role of NGOs*, pp. 131–133; Kaori Kuroda, ‘New roles of nonprofit organizations and partnership with government and/or business’, *Global Economic Review* 29,4 (2000), pp. 73–88; Kaori Kuroda, ‘Japan-based non-governmental organizations in pursuit of human security’, *Japan Forum* 15,2 (2003), pp. 235, 237–238; and Reimann, *The Rise of NGOs*, pp. 88–93.

⁴⁹ Introduced in 2002 through the streamlining of the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects and the Grant for Supporting NGO Emergency Activities schemes. It was intended to alleviate the paucity of monetary resources available in the sector and to boost NGOs’ “weak financial foundation” and strengthen their organisational capacity. MOFA, *NGO-MOFA Joint Evaluation in FY 2004: Evaluation of ‘the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGOs Modality*, 2005, pp. 4, 8, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/FY2004/text-pdf/ngo.pdf>>.

⁵⁰ The years presented in the text here denote Japanese fiscal/financial years.

⁵¹ MOFA, *Kokusai kyōryoku to NGO: Reiwa 3-nendo Nihon NGO renkei mushō shikin kyōryoku oyobi Japan Purattofōmu jigyō jisseki*, 2022, p. 1, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100349052.pdf>>.

Over the years, one of the main problem areas for the schemes has been the overheads for project implementation. This issue was raised during a joint evaluation of the newly introduced support scheme conducted by MOFA and NGO representatives in the mid-2000s, but it was largely dismissed.⁵² It has been suggested that an important institutional constraint on allocation of funds to NGOs by the government was Article 89 of the Constitution that prohibits provision of public money to private entities unless they are under public control. In light of these constitutional limitations, governmental funding was channelled to cover direct project costs, rather than being allocated to direct labour costs and indirect costs.⁵³ In 2019, the financing for overheads was considerably heightened, although with some caveats.

Before 2019, the limit for general administrative expenses was set at the level of 5 per cent of the grants' value. However, this limit was considered insufficient for enhancing organisational strength through measures such as contribution towards stable employment in the sector, expansion of funding sources and promotion of awareness amongst the public.⁵⁴

Following lengthy negotiations between MOFA and NGOs, it was agreed that this ceiling should be raised. In April 2019, Foreign Minister Kono Taro announced that the threshold would be raised to "a maximum of 15 per cent". Nevertheless, the minister was quick to clarify that "it would not be [...] increased to a maximum of 15 per cent for everything"⁵⁵ and that he would expect NGOs to fulfil certain conditions to attain this expanded ceiling. Addressing the same subject back in December 2018, Minister Kono talked about increasing the threshold only in instances in which the fulfilling of reporting obligations and transparency would be assured.⁵⁶ Enumerating the reasons for the decision to offer the increase, Kono stated that a low threshold for overheads could lead to building up "deficits [...] through conducting projects".⁵⁷ Interestingly, this concern has a long history and was voiced by some NGOs in the previously mentioned joint evaluation of the GA scheme.⁵⁸ Second, Kono underlined that this move would lead to the bolstering of the "organisational foundation of NGOs". He also expressed hope that, through this, NGOs would be able to expand their financial resources and increase their domestic and international activities.⁵⁹

⁵² MOFA, *NGO-MOFA Joint Evaluation*, pp. 8, 15.

⁵³ Kaori Kuroda, 'New roles of nonprofit organizations', p. 80; and 'Japan-based non-governmental organizations', p. 235.

⁵⁴ Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), 'Nihon NGO renkei mushō shikin kyōryoku no ippan kanrihi ga zōgaku', 2019, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://sva.or.jp/wp/?p=34331>>.

⁵⁵ MOFA, 'Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono', 2019b, Viewed 6 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000626.html>.

⁵⁶ MOFA, 'Extraordinary Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono', 2018b, Viewed 6 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000590.html>.

⁵⁷ MOFA, 'Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono'.

⁵⁸ MOFA, *NGO-MOFA Joint Evaluation*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ MOFA, 'Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono'.

Support Schemes for NGO Capacity-Building

In addition to providing financial support for the realisation of development and humanitarian projects analysed in the previous section, MOFA operates schemes to bolster capacity-building in the NGO sector. The enhancement of NGOs' organisational capabilities became a significant area of interest for MOFA towards the end of the 1990s, when a transition from "a period of supporting NGO's projects" (1989–1999) to a "period of supporting NGOs' organizational development" took place.⁶⁰ The concern with NGO capacity was closely linked to the need for judicious utilisation of public money.⁶¹

The support programmes in this category include the NGO Project Subsidy scheme, the NGO Consultants scheme, the NGO Intern Program, the NGO (Overseas) Study Program and the NGO Study Group.⁶² A closer inspection of these schemes intended to support capacity-building in the NGO community allows us to identify the nature and directions of governmental support for capacity development in Japanese NGOs.

In general, between 2012 and 2018, both the number of projects sponsored via these schemes and the total allocated funds channelled through them markedly declined. In 2012, 72 initiatives received governmental support of more than 168 million JPY (app. US\$ 2.1 million); while in 2018, these numbers had fallen to 43 and 111 million JPY (app. US\$ 1 million), respectively.⁶³ More specifically, among the discussed schemes, the only one that does not seem to have experienced a significant decline in support during the majority of the period under discussion is the NGO Consultants programme. The number of NGOs selected to act as "consultants" – tasked with the provision of information and advice to the public and to other NGOs on the subjects related to international cooperation and non-governmental actors – declined only slightly between 2010 and 2022, from 17 organisations to 15, but in 2023 it stood at only ten.⁶⁴ For the NGO Study Group scheme – focusing on the organisation of research, symposia, workshops, and so on, exploring the issues and challenges facing the NGO sector and how these can be addressed – the highest number of initiatives to receive support was 5 (in FY 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015), after which this figure declined to 3 per year in

⁶⁰ JICA, *Understanding Japanese NGOs from Facts and Practices*, 2008, p. 6, Viewed 6 October 2023, <<https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11881265.pdf>>.

⁶¹ MOFA, *NGO-MOFA Joint Evaluation*, p. 14.

⁶² The government classifies the NGO Project Subsidies scheme as a "funding assistance for Japanese NGOs", whereas the remaining schemes are grouped under the "creation of an enabling environment for NGOs". However, since all of these programmes aim at enhancing various capacities in NGO sector, they are mentioned as such in the article. See: MOFA, *International Cooperation and NGOs: Partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Japanese NGOs*, 2013, pp. 5, 9, 12, 15–17, Viewed 6 October, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000024755.pdf>>; *Kokusai kyōryoku to NGO: Gaimushō to Nihon no NGO no pātonāshippu*, 2016, pp. 5, 9, 12, 14–16, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000071852.pdf>>.

⁶³ MOFA, *Kyōgi jikō (1) Gidai teiansho: NGO Katsudō Kankyō Seibi Shien Jigyō – NGO Jigyō Hojokin, genjō to kondo no kadai*, 2019d, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000508615.pdf>>.

⁶⁴ The numerical data were obtained from MOFA, 'NGO sōdan-in', 2023b, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/oda_ngo/shien/soudanin.html>.

FY 2016–2019 and to 2 per year in FY 2020–2023.⁶⁵ Over the years, the NGO Intern Program, launched in 2010, has aided efforts to foster human resources for the NGO sector by providing opportunities for young people to undertake paid internships with NGOs. Under this scheme, around 100 interns have been supported, but there have been notable declines in the numbers of existing and new interns over the years. Whereas in 2012, 20 interns benefitted from the scheme, in 2019 there were only nine, and then seven per year between 2021–2023.⁶⁶ Finally, the NGO (Overseas) Study Program was designed to support human resource development via postings of a few months in length of NGO staff to domestic and foreign institutions (other NGOs, international organisations, etc.). However, this went through an expansion–contraction cycle between 2007 and 2023, peaking with support for 15 and 16 initiatives in FY 2010 and 2015, respectively, after which numbers have declined to less than 10 per year since 2017, reaching its lowest point in 2021, with four postings, and rebounding to eight in 2022.⁶⁷

The abovementioned declining trends negatively affected the NGOs, with the shrinking of the NGO Project Subsidy⁶⁸ scheme considered especially concerning.⁶⁹ In the initial phase of the NGO Project Subsidy scheme's operation, 69 projects implemented by 36 organisations were supported with a total of more than 256 million JPY (app. US\$ 2.2 million; FY2003). These numbers fell sharply the following year to 17 organizations, 24 projects and total of nearly 42 million JPY (app. US\$ 388,000). By 2009, the number of recipients and initiatives and overall expenditure levels had all declined substantially to 8 recipients, 11 projects and approximately 25.5 million JPY (app. US\$ 273,000). While the numbers of supported projects and organizations did rebound afterwards, overall expenditure continued to fall. Since 2018, the number of funded initiatives fell again to single digits; and in 2021 and 2022, just six organisations per year received funding, with a total budget of slightly above 6.5 and 6.7 million JPY, respectively.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ The overall number of initiatives supported under this scheme was 78 between 2001–2023. The numerical data were obtained from MOFA, 'NGO kenkyūkai hōkokusho', 2023g, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/oda_ngo/houkokusho/kenyukai.html>.

⁶⁶ The numerical data were obtained from Japan Overseas Cooperation Association (JOCA), 'NGO intān jigyo', 2023, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.joca.or.jp/news/project/ngointern/>>. See also Association for Aid and Relief Japan, 'NGO intān puroguramu seika hōkokukai no goannai', 2013, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://aarjapan.gr.jp/about/news/2013/0306_1114.html>.

⁶⁷ The numerical data were obtained from MOFA, 'NGO sutadi puroguramu: hōkokusho', 2023i, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/oda_ngo/shien/study_p.html>. For all the abovementioned schemes, however, it needs to be added that the COVID-19 pandemic might have also been a contributing factor impacting the low numbers of the supported initiatives for specific schemes in the few last years.

⁶⁸ Funding has covered preparatory project activities, evaluation initiatives, and domestic/international activities enhancing NGOs' work. Available funding is up to two million JPY. See <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/oda_ngo/shien/hojyokin_g.html>.

⁶⁹ MOFA, *Gidai (1-2) NGO – Gaimushō teiki kyōgikai 2018-nendoban Renkei Suishin Inkaigo-gawa furikaeri*, 2019c, p. 4, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000488127.pdf>>.

⁷⁰ The data were obtained from MOFA compilations on recipients, projects, and budgets in the NGO Project Subsidies scheme between 2003 and 2022. See MOFA, 'NGO Jigyō Hojokin: jisseki chiran', 2023d, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/oda_ngo/shien/jh_j.html>.

In addition to the decline in overall number of projects sponsored under the NGO Project Subsidy scheme, we observe that, of the various types of activities eligible for support under this programme, those for surveying and evaluation purposes saw the most substantial decline in terms of the number of projects funded and the funds allocated. On the other hand, although the number of activities concerning the organisation of domestic events has also declined – albeit along a significantly flatter curve – those activities have begun to account for an increasing proportion of all funds allocated via NGO Project Subsidy.⁷¹ Hence, a decline in the funds available for NGO capacity-building has been clearly discernible in recent years.

In response to the current state of the abovementioned schemes, NGOs have proposed to simplify them, increasing the rate of governmental support for these programmes and introducing new initiatives. On a positive note, the former NGO (Overseas) Study Program has been modified to incorporate domestically conducted training activities into its scope.⁷²

In summary, writing in 2010 on the subject of financial support schemes available to NGOs, JANIC stated that the government extends its backing to projects that are largely in line with its “mandate and preferences”. In turn, governmental assistance for NGOs’ capacity-building, budgets and advocacy activities remained underdeveloped.⁷³ Addressing governmental funding for NGOs, Hayashi asserts that, “[B]asically, in the past, the government had been responsive to CSO proposed projects that were based on the latter’s interests and mission”.⁷⁴ Hence, it seems that, while governmental funding programs indeed prioritised support for the service-provision angle of NGOs’ endeavours, financial subsidies for specific developmental and humanitarian projects were disbursed with a degree of sensitivity to NGOs’ responsibilities and commitments. Yet, with some notable differences, such as the raising of the general administrative expenses ceiling, the challenges enumerated by JANIC remain within the framework of NGO-government “partnership” collaboration to this day.

A Tenuous Government–Nonprofit “Partnership” in the Foreign Aid Field: Navigating Domestic and International Pressures

Lister proposes that partnership discourse is instrumentalised to mask continuing power inequalities and maintain the status quo.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Brinkerhoff contends that “application of partnership framework does not eliminate the potential for actors

⁷¹ Ibidem. See also MOFA, *Gidai (1-2) NGO – Gaimushō teiki kyōgikai*, 2019c, p. 14.

⁷² MOFA, *Gidai (1-2) NGO – Gaimushō teiki kyōgikai*, 2019c, p. 3.

⁷³ Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), *NGOs and Development Effectiveness in Japan: Strengthening Advocacy, Accountability and NGO Support*, 2010, pp. 22–23, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.janic.org/MT/pdf/janic_issuepaper_english.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Akihito Hayashi, ‘Japan: Partnership at a Turning Point’, p. 54.

⁷⁵ Sarah Lister, ‘Power in partnership?’, p. 235.

to engage in partnership rhetoric without partnership-like behaviour”,⁷⁶ which can be motivated by the salience of this discourse and its utility for public relations purposes. These observations can be applied to the Japanese case under consideration.

The readiness of the government to utilise the “partnership” label, as demonstrated in official MOFA and JICA documentation, has been motivated by the rise and expansion of the “pro-NGO norm” – described by Reimann in her research – to which Japan, as a leading donor and democratic country, is obliged to respond in an accommodating manner. The collaboration with NGOs enables the government to improve the visibility of Japanese foreign aid by providing a more human face; and NGOs may be indispensable to achieving this goal. Nevertheless, the low levels of ODA channelled to and through these actors do not square easily with the characteristic of mutual dependence in the partnership. Yet, the degree of responsiveness to the NGOs’ mission and interests when disbursing project funding has contributed to the protection of NGOs’ organisational identities, in terms of their autonomy and ownership. Having said that, the decreasing level of support offered by the capacity development schemes for NGOs reinforces the impression that the “partnership”, as executed by the governmental side through the financial channels discussed in this article, continues to have a rather narrow service provision-oriented character. Thus, the relationship struggles to meet the criteria for partnership delineated earlier in the text.

The disjuncture between the partnership rhetoric and the reality of NGO involvement in Japanese foreign aid can be attributed to several factors. First, it testifies to the resilience of the governance modes of the developmental state. Japanese NGOs have both contributed to and benefited from the decline of the developmental state and the advancements of civil society in multiple ways.⁷⁷ Coupled with the increased salience of the poverty alleviation paradigm, “pro-NGO norm” and international pressure, this has resulted in MOFA’s acceptance of (limited) institutional pluralism and experimentation with an increasingly participatory mode of governance in the foreign aid field. This has culminated in recognition of the need to facilitate the NGOs’ ability to implement development and humanitarian projects, as well as their access to policymaking. As noted by Hirata, MOFA considered NGOs to be its domestic constituency, and it was expected that the inclusion of NGOs into ODA would result in increased the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of projects.⁷⁸ Thus, the Ministry hoped to mobilise NGOs as allies and to organise them to deliver fiscally appealing service provision. On the other hand, as Hirata observes, MOFA did not wish to antagonise the remaining significant ODA stakeholders, such as the economic ministries (e.g., MITI and MOF) and the private sector.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Ministry was bound to safeguard the position of Japanese development aid as the preeminent foreign policy tool intended to further national interests. In summary, governmental agencies

⁷⁶ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, ‘Government-nonprofit partnership’, p. 28.

⁷⁷ Keiko Hirata, *Civil Society: The Growing Role of NGOs* and ‘Whither the developmental state?’; Robert Pekkanen, ‘After the developmental state’.

⁷⁸ Hirata, *Civil Society: The Growing Role of NGOs*, pp. 129–130

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

have cautiously implemented the new participatory arrangements through the discussed financial support schemes, often resisting calls and pressure for broader and more radical changes or taking a long time to respond. Thus, from the point of view of the extent and forms of financial support schemes – and their development over the last decade as analysed in this article – the approach of the Japanese state was in line with what Gilley refers to as “updated participatory version of Asian governance [that *add.*] might be described as Mobilise-Organise-Manage (MOM)”.⁸⁰

Second, in addition to the abovementioned resilience of the established modes of governance, a further significant factor affecting governmental funding for NGOs – and by extension, the latter’s prospects of playing a greater role in the country’s ODA and the expansion of “partnerships” – has been the general state of ODA financing over the last two decades. Between 1978 and the mid-1990s, the pool of ODA funds grew steadily. However, the budget then declined in the subsequent years,⁸¹ a change precipitated by Japan’s increasingly challenging fiscal situation in the post-bubble period⁸² and the outbreak of the Asian Financial Crisis. In early 2010, the downward trend was halted and ODA budget allocations have since largely plateaued, with slight fluctuations occurring over the last decade. In 2021, the ODA budget stood at 1.9 trillion JPY (17.6 billion USD).⁸³ In addition to the general downward trend in ODA funds, the proportion of the aid funding remaining in MOFA’s sole purview has been also markedly affected.⁸⁴ Thus, the expansion of the collaboration between Japanese NGOs and MOFA in the field of foreign aid has taken place against the backdrop of a decline and subsequent stagnation of available ODA funding (after 2010). Taking into account the decreasing funds at MOFA’s disposal, the Ministry seemed to have prioritised investment in service provision by NGOs, viewing those sorts of projects as having a greater intrinsic value. The substantial limiting of funds for NGO projects could affect the visibility of Japanese contributions to regional and global humanitarian and development efforts. On the other hand, the cutting of funds for capacity-building initiatives – despite being undeniably problematic from the point of view of the NGO community – has not posed the same risks. For this reason, sacrificing these projects to manage pressures emanating from the decline and stagnation might have been deemed acceptable and necessary.

Third, although a focus on assuring Japan’s own interests has been a consistent characteristic of the country’s foreign aid, the prominence of this characteristic has grown

⁸⁰ Gilley Bruce, *The Nature of Asian Politics*, Cambridge 2014, p. 185.

⁸¹ Hiroyuki Hoshiro, ‘Japan’s foreign aid policy: Has it changed? Thirty years of ODA charters’, *Social Science Japan Journal* 25,2 (2022), pp. 303–304. See also MOFA, ‘Official Development Assistance (ODA): The 1997 aid track record’, 1998, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1998/2.html>>.

⁸² Hiroshi Hiroshi, ‘Japan’s ODA 1954–2014: Changes and Continuities in a Central Instrument in Japan’s Foreign Policy’, in: *Japan’s Development Assistance: Foreign Aid and the Post-2015 Agenda*, ed. Hiroshi Kato, John Page and Yasutami Shimomura, London 2016, pp. 4–5.

⁸³ MOFA, *2022-nendo kaihatsu kyōryoku hakusho: Nihon no kokusai kyōryoku*, 2023, pp. 13, 15, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100507326.pdf>>.

⁸⁴ MOFA, ‘ODA yosan: Gaimusho yosan’ (ODA budget: Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ budget), 2023c, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryō/yosan.html>>.

in the recent years.⁸⁵ The 2015 Development Cooperation Charter heralded the primacy of economic interests (including interests of the country's private companies) and a focus on fostering economic growth in Japanese ODA, as well as envisioning greater alignment of the latter with the country's national security interests, while admittedly retaining references to human security and poverty alleviation goals.⁸⁶ The (renewed) emphasis on pursuing large-scale economic infrastructure projects in recipient countries at the expense of contributions to social infrastructure and services is important feature of the ongoing transformation of Japan's foreign cooperation.⁸⁷ However, this re-emergence of national (economic) interests in Japanese ODA has been also precipitated by a worsening geopolitical situation. The 2023 revision of DCC was strongly driven by the need to respond to the changing international pressures (e.g. the increasing volatility of security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, the Russian aggression on Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic) and this most recent version of the charter solidifies the strategic utilisation of ODA for further securing Japan's diplomatic, security and economic interests.⁸⁸ China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), pursued since 2013, has substantially expanded China's geopolitical and geoeconomic clout across the globe, challenging not only Japan, but also other established donors such as the USA and EU countries in the field of development financing and initiatives.⁸⁹ Hence, a growing focus on economic infrastructure projects in Japan has become a geopolitical necessity. Furthermore, to enhance its ability to respond to China's growing military assertiveness, Japan launched Official Security Assistance (OSA) in 2023, a new cooperation framework to support armed forces of other countries and promote the development of security infrastructure.⁹⁰ In 2022, PM Kishida's government increased Japan's defence budget to improve the country's preparedness for military contingencies. Those initiatives, indicating new priorities in Japanese aid, inclusive of its growing securitisation, will require sustainable budgeting in the coming years.⁹¹

The renewed focus on economic infrastructure projects – either hard (e.g., transportation) or soft (e.g., digitalization) – begs the question of how far NGOs will be able to contribute to the implementation of such initiatives. The elevation of NGOs' status and visibility in Japan has been occurring in connection with and parallel to the increasing global relevance of the development aid paradigm centred on poverty alleviation and with a focus on social infrastructure and services. Having said that, the abovementioned shifts in Japan's foreign

⁸⁵ Hiroyuki Hoshiro, 'Japan's foreign aid policy'.

⁸⁶ MOFA, *Cabinet Decision on the Development Cooperation Charter*.

⁸⁷ Hironori Sasada, 'Resurgence of the "Japan Model"? Japan's aid policy reform and infrastructure development assistance', *Asian Survey* 59,6 (2019), pp. 1044–1069; Hiroyuki Hoshiro, 'Japan's foreign aid policy'.

⁸⁸ MOFA, *Kaihatsu kyōryoku taikō*.

⁸⁹ Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, 'Japan's strategic responses to China's geo-economic presence: quality infrastructure as a diplomatic tool', *The Pacific Review* 36 (2023).

⁹⁰ MOFA, 'Official Security Assistance (OSA)', 2023h, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/ipc/page4e_001366.html>.

⁹¹ Ryosuke Hanada, 'Fighting to fund Japan's historic defence budget increase', *East Asia Forum*, 2023, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/05/17/fighting-to-fund-japans-historic-defence-budget-increase/>>.

aid have not resulted in significant fall of funds allocated to domestic NGOs through the GA and JPF schemes. This suggests that Japanese development and humanitarian NGOs still have a designated space in the new development cooperation framework.⁹² At the same time, as there was no further expansion in the established flows of ODA via Japanese NGOs, the mutual dependence aspect of the proclaimed “partnership” remains an ongoing issue.

The abovementioned domestic institutional stressors and international pressures help to explain the challenges inhibiting the development of more fully-fledged “partnerships” between NGOs and the Japanese government in the field of foreign aid. On the other hand, the ongoing calls of Japanese NGOs for government to expand its engagement with non-profits in the foreign aid field are still buttressed by normative pressures emanating from Japan’s peers in the OECD’s DAC. In 2021 the latter issued guidance on strengthening support and collaboration with civil society actors (*DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*). The Recommendation “seeks to enable civil society actors both as independent development and humanitarian actors in their own right” who – while being partners in the implementation of development and humanitarian project – have their own specific priorities and approaches.⁹³ To achieve this, DAC suggests that its member countries – and other interested non-DAC states and parties – should strengthen the core support and program-based support for CSOs to facilitate greater predictability and elasticity in terms of their income streams. Furthermore, the document also includes a range of measures to foster the (organisational) capacities of CSOs (e.g. including the promotion of best practices and adherence to international standards in their operations, and collaborative initiatives with stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of their operations).⁹⁴ The *Recommendation* recognises that the implementation process will be shaped by the domestic frameworks and contexts of the DAC member countries,⁹⁵ yet its content and recommended action points are supportive of further development of collaborative “partnerships” with CSOs more deeply characterised by the qualities of mutuality and organisational identity discussed in this article. Although it remains to be seen whether the 2021 Recommendation will have any substantial impact on the governmental financial support schemes for Japanese NGOs discussed in this article, the increasing opportunities to support the latter through core

⁹² The BRI has also included the utilisation of Chinese (GO)NGOs to promote Chinese government’s strategic interests around the world. This internationalisation process is complex and has not been driven solely by state mobilisation of non-governmental actors. See Ying Wang, ‘Embeddedness beyond borders: Examining the autonomy of Chinese NGOs in their global endeavours’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 52 (2022). Nevertheless, the growing presence of Chinese (GO)NGOs in the broader BRI framework underlines the significance of maintaining – and further expanding – the engagement of Japanese non-governmental actors in Japan’s foreign aid.

⁹³ OECD, *DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, OECD/LEGAL/5021, 2023, pp. 3–4, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021>>.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 8–9.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

funding and boosting funding available through the existing capacity-building schemes would be in line with the DAC guidance.⁹⁶

Thus, in summary, the particular domestic and international factors influencing and shaping the policy field of foreign aid in Japan produced the institutional context, within which MOFA needed to manage NGO engagement through institutional incentives conducive to achieving the Ministry's broader goals and in a manner that would not unduly challenge the perceived national interests, and would be sensitive to MOFA's budgetary constraints. The outcome of this process was a complex and often contradictory relationship between the Japanese government and NGOs, described with the internationally accepted and coveted term of "partnership". The balancing act of Japanese authorities, caught between domestic budgetary concerns and foreign aid policy priorities, as well as international pressures, has afforded NGOs a constant, yet limited involvement in foreign aid delivery, mainly geared towards utilising them as service providers. Overall, a substantial expansion of Japanese ODA channelled via NGOs has not yet occurred, and the meaningful increase of overheads ratio for project funding materialised only in 2019.

From Tenuous "Partnership" to "Complementary Relationship"?

Considering the findings presented in the previous sections, if one were to move away from the concept of partnership in discussions of the government–non-profit relationship in the policy field of foreign aid in Japan and investigate potential alternatives to this, the relationship between the two sides may benefit from the notion of a *complementary relationship*, as developed by Toepler and his colleagues.⁹⁷

Although the authors note that "nonprofits are considered partners" in this relationship type,⁹⁸ this complementarity does not seem to require substantial levels of mutuality or recognition of the organisational identity that is expected to characterise a partnership relationship, beyond a (certain) commonality of interests that would both merit and enable collaboration. In the matter of financing, although over the years Japanese development assistance and humanitarian non-profits have increased their capacity to generate untied income from private philanthropy, the government schemes investigated in this article remain a significant – if not the most relevant – source of funding for many organisations engaged in international development and/or humanitarian pursuits. This resource dependency has allowed the government to shape non-profit involvement in the delivery of foreign aid projects by supporting initiatives that were in line with its own preferences and interests, prioritising funding for the implementation of projects to improve the visibility of Japanese aid – rather than for capacity building and core support.

⁹⁶ See Akio Takayanagi, 'Civil Society Organisations as Partners' for challenges in implementing the 2021 Recommendation in Japan.

⁹⁷ Toepler et al., 'Beyond the partnership paradigm', pp. 10–11.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 10.

Furthermore, the notion of a complementary relationship may be better suited to accommodating the existing power inequalities in relationships and the tensions or lack of alignment over strategies, goals, missions, and financial instruments that affect the quality of a relationship, often stretching thin the applicability of the term “partnership,” resulting in its instrumentalisation, as noted by Lister.⁹⁹

NGO-Government Cooperation and the Ukraine Crisis (2022 onwards)

The eruption of the Ukraine crisis has led to the intensification of cooperation between the Japanese government and NGOs for the purpose of delivering relief to the affected population. International challenges such as the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine (February 2022 onwards) may then constitute an important area in which negotiations to create “more partnership-like practices” in Japan’s foreign aid field could materialise. At least in terms of overall financial flows, the Japanese government has increased the funds available for NGOs active in the field of foreign aid due to the ongoing crisis. In spring 2022, the government set aside funds from the Emergency Humanitarian Assistance for Ukraine and the neighbouring countries to be disbursed via Japan Platform to NGOs carrying out initiatives focused on the provision of health and medical care, food items, shelter, education, and WASH, among other things¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, in December 2022, it announced the allocation of financial means through Grant Assistance for reconstruction projects in Ukraine and for initiatives supporting the social integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.¹⁰¹ Approximately 3.87 bln JPY – nearly a half of all funds channelled via JPF in 2022 – was earmarked for humanitarian projects in Ukraine, plus 1.06 bln JPY was allocated to through Grant Assistance.¹⁰²

Furthermore, Japan’s broader commitment to and interest in participating in the reconstruction and rebuilding of Ukraine once the conflict is concluded – a multilateral process that will be marked by heavy involvement of multiple actors – may require an even greater level of collaboration with both Japanese and Ukrainian non-profit actors. While the government will surely promote the engagement of Japanese corporate actors in the reconstruction of Ukraine’s economic infrastructure, alleviating the extensive damage to

⁹⁹ Sarah Lister, ‘Power in partnership?’.

¹⁰⁰ MOFA, ‘Emergency humanitarian assistance in Ukraine and neighboring countries’, 2022, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003097.html>; ‘Additional humanitarian assistance in Ukraine and neighboring countries’, 2022c, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003108.html>.

¹⁰¹ MOFA, ‘Reiwa 4-nendo hosei joson Nihon NGO renkei mushō shikin kyōryoku (N-ren) jigyō: “Reiwa 4-nendo hosei joson ni yoru Ukuraina – Porando shien N-ren jigyō” shinsei ankei boshū ni tsuite’, 2022, Viewed 9 October 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shimin/page22_001576.html>.

¹⁰² The overall sum of funds allocated through GA and JPF in FY 2022 was 15 bln JPY, that is 5.8 bln more than in the preceding year. See MOFA, *Kokusai kyōryoku to NGO: Reiwa 4-nendo Nihon NGO renkei mushō shikin kyōryoku oyobi Japan Purattofōmu jigyō jisseki*, 2023f, pp. 1–4, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100522700.pdf>>.

social infrastructure in the country will merit further expansion of the cooperation with non-profit actors to maximise the visibility of Japanese contributions in a complex landscape of donors and initiatives. This, in turn, could feed into future domestic discussions between the government and NGO community on, first, the augmenting of funding schemes towards more sustainable forms of funding (e.g., program funding & funds for capacity building), and second, the strengthening of support for local non-profit actors. Both measures are mentioned in the 2021 *DAC Recommendation*, and advancing these would contribute to the alleviation of the existing weaknesses in the government–NGO relationship in the field of foreign aid in Japan.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that while “partnership” is the preferred term of the Japanese government to describe their relationships with Japanese NGOs, the way in which it has been implemented through financial support schemes for NGOs to facilitate their inclusion in the country’s foreign aid raises legitimate questions about the validity and applicability of this term. The relatively low and fixed percentage of ODA channelled via NGOs over the years, the modest overheads ratio for NGO projects that was amended only in 2019 and the declining financial support for schemes that enable NGOs’ capacity-building all reveal blind spots in how cooperation has been executed in practice. In short, the “partnership” as seen through the lens of financial support schemes for NGOs suffers from shortcomings in terms of mutuality and organisational identity, qualifying both the extent and quality of government-sponsored opportunities for international cooperation NGOs in Japan. In the light of article’s findings, other notions – such as that of the “complementary relationship” developed by Toepler et al.¹⁰³ – seem to offer fruitful conceptual tools for the exploration of the Japanese case of government–non-profit relations in the field of foreign aid.

The embracing of domestic NGOs in the context of ODA – and the expansion of governmental support for them – was an important indicator of changing trends in Japan’s foreign aid, precipitated by the need to respond to the evolving global aid norms, and an approach to tackling development challenges among the other major donors in the 1990s and 2000s. The renewed post-2015 focus on supporting Japan’s economic interests and actors, with its greater emphasis on private-led growth, did not result in financial side-lining NGOs, whose activities proved beneficial for demonstrating a human face of Japanese foreign aid. Nevertheless, the expansion of financial-support instruments is limited, and some of those focusing on capacity building have experienced decline.

The conjunction of internal and external circumstances since the 1990s has led to increasing governmental openness to participatory approaches in policymaking and implementation processes in the field of development and humanitarian assistance. This

¹⁰³ Toepler et al., ‘Beyond the partnership paradigm’.

has benefited Japanese NGOs and ensured their access to new funding opportunities. Nevertheless, while the increasing relevance of NGOs has posed a challenge to bureaucratic dominance over fashioning and executing development aid policies, it has not led to the loss of either initiative or, indeed, control by the government. The broader structure of ODA policymaking and implementation, the prevalence of traditional aid philosophy, the declining ODA budget and ODA's vital importance as a foreign policy tool to respond to the increasing geopolitical and geoeconomics challenges have combined to produce a relationship characterised by a tension between treating NGOs on an equal footing and pressing them into more subordinate roles.

Regarding the resilience of the governance traditions of the developmental state and its role in structuring the continuation of a limited participatory engagement of Japanese NGOs in the country's ODA programs, this factor is of importance for comparative purposes. Similarly, in the case of South Korea, scholars have indicated that one can only talk about a "weak partnership with civil society", as exemplified by low level of ODA allocated to CSOs and the focus on mobilising domestic private companies. This characteristic is considered one of significant similarities between Japanese and South Korean development cooperation.¹⁰⁴ Thus, insights from research on the current trends in Japanese governmental funding schemes for NGOs provides empirical evidence for further (comparative) studies exploring the evolving position(s) of non-profit actors in the development aid of democratic East Asian states sharing developmental traditions.

A positive note in the discussion on the future of Japanese NGOs in the country's development cooperation could be that, even if a real-life application of partnership were absent (or inadequate), this discourse could still be utilised by actors "to create opportunities to promote more partnership-like practices"¹⁰⁵. From the perspective of Japanese NGOs, the utility of this rhetoric may well rest in its potential to validate their demands for the introduction of further support measures and policies that are more commensurate with a partnership relationship based on mutuality and recognition of their organisational identity. The 2021 *DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance* has certainly provided additional support for NGO calls for more "partnership-like practices" by the Japanese government, including in the field of financing. Japan is not the only DAC member that will need to adjust its financing instruments and priorities to diversify its funding mechanisms for supporting CSOs as development actors in their own right¹⁰⁶, and certain major donors such as the Netherlands seem to have already made progress in transforming their financing strategy for civil society actors.¹⁰⁷ The changing international norms contributed to the greater

¹⁰⁴ Huck-ju Kwon, Tatsufumi Yamagata, Eunju Kim and Hisahiro Kondoh, 'Conclusion', in: *International development cooperation of Japan and South Korea: New strategies for an uncertain world*, eds. Huck-ju Kwon, Tatsufumi Yamagata, Eunju Kim and Hisahiro Kondoh, Singapore 2022, pp. 313–322.

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, 'Government-nonprofit partnership', p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ OECD, *Aid for Civil Society Organisations*, 2019, p. 57, Viewed 9 October 2023, <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2019.pdf>>.

¹⁰⁷ Nicola Banks, 'The Role of and Contributions of Development NGOs', pp. 677–680.

accommodation of NGOs by the Japanese government in the 1990s, yet it remains to be seen what impact the current normative shift concerning the further empowering of civil society actors may have on Japanese development cooperation. The brief mention of “continuous improvement of support schemes”¹⁰⁸ in the 2023 DCC offers some opening for the modification of financial support measures for NGOs, or at least indicates that the need to address this topic is being taken into consideration. Yet, it is unclear at this point whether those potential adaptations in funding mechanisms would entail a greater support for Japanese NGOs as “development actors in their own right”.

Finally, a note on the limitations of the presented article is necessary. The latter has focused on the evolution of financial support schemes provided by the government for Japanese NGOs over the last decade, drawing its empirical data from documentary sources. However, as mentioned earlier in the text, to augment the findings of this study, there is a need for a separate analysis of the instruments of dialogue between the government and Japanese NGOs in the foreign-aid policymaking process. Furthermore, for a more comprehensive understanding of government-NGO relations in the field of foreign aid, it would be beneficial to incorporate insights obtained from interviews with representatives of MOFA and NGOs into future research inquiries. Whereas the presented study has illuminated how the inclusion of Japanese NGOs in foreign aid is enabled through financial channels – an approach that involved juxtaposing official pronouncements of “partnership” with quantifiable data – an interview-driven study would contribute to knowledge of how the relationship is subjectively perceived by both sides. This approach would have the benefit of uncovering mutual perceptions, expectations, and (further) understandings of the desirable and expected roles in foreign aid held by members of the NGO community and MOFA (and JICA) officials. Consequently, such studies would allow a better assessment of the extent to which the existing institutions and forms of cooperation between the government and NGOs have created (or not) a framework that fosters mutual exchange and understanding, and facilitates and constrains the presence of non-governmental actors in Japan’s foreign aid.

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¹⁰⁸ MOFA, *Kaihatsu kyōryoku taikō*, p. 9.

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