THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE NGOs ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY MAKING

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Our GECOU research group is made up of six scholars whose work is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council as part of a Global Environmental Change Initiative stimulated by preparations for the 1992 UNCED conference in Brazil. Our focus is on policies to avert environmental degradation caused by (a) the international trade in nuclear materials between France, Germany, Japan and the UK; (b) the over rapid depletion of tropical forests in India, Indonesia and Malaysia; (c) desertification in sub-Saharan Africa especially Botswana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe

In assessing the making of environmental policy, we are particularly focusing on the relative influence of NGOs who we define as organisations that do not aim to make profits and are truly independent of governments. In doing so we have also to assess the relative influence of other policy actors like elected officials, unelected bureaucrats, national and transnational business, multilateral development banks, inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) like the UN, the International Timber Trade Organisation (ITTO) or the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the media as well as more dispersed social movements of concerned citizens.

Japan figures largely in our work for several reasons. Japanese citizens through their taxes have allowed the government to increase ODA funding to make Japan probably the largest global donor and recently this has been given a very explicit environmental focus (D.Potter 1994). This funding level has at the same time given Japan much higher status as a force in global environmental politics.

Alongside this governmental visibility has gone a rapid increase in the number of Japanese NGOs and an equivalent increase in their public visibility: one content analysis of the frequency of references to NGOs in the Japanese press showed an increase from 291 in 1992 to

over 1,500 in 1994 (Menju 1995). Some of these local NGOs are also well known and re-spected in the West. The Citizens Nuclear Information Centre (CNIC) run by Dr Takagi is one of the world's most respected groups working on the plutonium trade (see e.g.Takagi 1995). And Yoichi Kuroda the founder of Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN) co-authored the classic work *Timber and the South Seas* (WWF International, Switzerland 1989).

Of particular relevance to our policy making focus is the fact that Japan is a major player in two of our three issues. The long distance international trade in nuclear materials is entirely dominated by shipments between Japan and the COGEMA plant in France as well as to THORP in the UK and will long remain so until the plant at Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, is completed in the first decade of the next century. Similarly Japan dominates the trade in tropical timber as the world's number one importer, she hosts and largely finances ITTO in Yokohama and has been a major influence on the forest policies of Indonesia and Malaysia which are two of our chosen countries.

In the rest of this paper I will assess the significance of my research on Japan for the project overall. But first I need to indicate the four lines of enquiry into which we divided our overall focus. After reviewing the current social science literature, we hypothesise:

A. that NGOs are more likely to be influential the more democratised the political re-gime (Clark 1991; Hardoy 1992; Fowler 1993).

B. that NGOs are more likely to be influential where the environmental issue is well defined (Haas 1992; Haas, Keohane & Levy 1993; Young 1989).

C. that NGOs are more likely to be influential where they have good access to and lev-erage upon policy making networks (Haufler 1993; Hurrell & Kingsbury 1992; Princen & Finger 1994).

D. that NGOs are more likely to be influential where they collaborate globally in their campaigns (Caldwell 1988; Lipschutz 1992; Wapner 1995).

NGOs and the national democratic context of their campaigning

Superficially a more democratic context does indeed give NGOs more guaranteed rights to at least exist, so the example of more democratic regimes in Japan, India and Botswana at least allows NGOs the necessary basis from which to try to exert influence. This stands in contrast to less democratic regimes in Indonesia, Nigeria and at times in Malaysia or Zimbabwe where their very existence is often threatened by political or military elites. However we do need to go beyond this superficial analysis to detect whether more democratic regimes provide sufficient conditions for NGOs to influence policy making and at this point we ought to examine both the substantive (*honne*) as well as the formal (*tatemae*) elements of democratic processes.

Formal elements of more democratic regimes frequently stressed by conventional politi-cal scientists concern the accountability of policy makers through regular and competitive elections to a powerful legislature. While this open electoral context certainly exists in Japan (although there are many reservations about the equity of the system), these key moments for conventional political scientists are certainly not times when environmental NGOs feel they can gain more influence. In many ways Japan's experience is replicated elsewhere in the West even in those European countries where so-called Green parties are more evident (Frechet & Worndl 1993).

As well as regular elections, another key feature of more democratic regimes is the requirement of a diversity of power centres where for instance the legislature, executive and judiciary are separate but equal in significance and there should exist transparent boundaries between political and economic spheres. Now as we all know these criteria are highly questionable in Japan so much so that one recent author argues forcefully that Japan's system should really be called a Pseudo-Democracy (Herzog 1993).
For NGOs in Japan, the reality of domestic politics means that they do not work with the assumption that the legislature or judiciary is an equal to a bureaucrat-dominated executive, neither can they possibly operate with any success if they think there is any separation between the economic sphere of business and the political sphere of policy makers. Campaigning then has to be aimed at bureaucrats who 'exercise unchallengeable power in centralised administrative initiatives' (Williams 1994:22). But relative to other interests, especially business, NGOs face enormous difficulties in even establishing their rights to participate in policy making.
A severe obstacle in this connection stems from the interpenetration of economic and political interests that characterises government-business relations in Japan and, for NGOs working on global issues affecting the South, this means confronting an ODA programme that 'structurally incorporates private commercial interests' (Arase 1994:172). Campaigning, for example, to reduce the consumption of tropical timber in Japan means therefore opposing the interests of *sogo shosha* who supply the capital goods to cut the forests, supply the transport to ship timber back to Japan and who organise its distribution to the market - some of which is underwritten by official approval within ODA project finance.

While overall there may be some connection between democratic rights for social associations and the existence of a thriving NGO sector, assessing the subsequent ability of NGOs to influence policy making requires us to probe further into the reality of participation rights for all interest groups not just 'insiders' nominated by those in power. NGO experience in Japan does highlight the dominance of unaccountable bureaucrats and the significance of business interests but our comparative research indicates that this picture is not at all unique to Japan. In my other work I have argued that Japanese social processes may not be as unique as many scholars imply (Eccleston 1995) and NGO campaigning in India, which also claims high democratic credentials, faces similar obstacles. While programmes such as Joint Forest Management may well seem to promise much for the sustainable use of tropical forests, the evidence of our research is that the schemes are imposed from above by national bureaucrats who along the way succeed in minimising the effects of such schemes on the profits of timber interests (David Potter 1994). Neither is the preferential access given to business confined to Asia or the South as this is a global phenomenon which confronts the campaigns of NGOs even in supposedly the most democratically open system of the US.
    Equally common in all political systems is the lower status accorded to bureaucrats in Environment Agencies (EAs) which should be the main point of access for environmental NGOs. For sure, the power of the EA in Japan is miniscule compared to MITI or the Ministry of Finance, but we have not come across examples anywhere in the world that are any different.
    From this analysis it follows that it is vital to assess the depth of substantive democratisation when examining the political context within which NGOs operate. Equally

significant is the recognition that where democratic procedures are shallow NGOs can potentially play an important role in opening up closed policy making networks to public scrutiny.

NGOs and environmental issue definition

The justification for this particular line of enquiry is that once an issue is placed on a policy agenda for change it should theoretically be easier for NGOs to exert influence in the formulation of policy options and subsequent choices between policies. For example, it could be argued that as the degradation of tropical forests is now incorporated into UNCED's Agenda 21, NGOs should have more opportunities to influence the selection of appropriate policies. But our research has highlighted the way in which incorporating environmental problems into policy agendas also sees these problems defined in ways that make them amenable to policy options preferred by those who control the setting of agendas in the first place (Breyman 1993). At this very crucial first stage of defining an environmental problem that needs a policy solution, NGOs are almost always excluded (Eccleston 1996b).

In the case of the depletion of tropical forests it is absolutely crucial to recognise that the environmental problems involved are socially constructed or framed in many different and competing ways (Liberatore 1995). For some, the problem concerns the need to conserve global biodiversity, for some it is the need to prevent adverse climate change like global warming, for others it is a matter of sustainably developing an economically valuable natural resource crucial to exports, while for others still it is matter of protecting the livelihoods of people who live in the forests. The significance of these differing frames is that they each have competing policy solutions and, while NGOs may have a role to play in the selection of policies, it may well be on an agenda which is defined in a way that they would disagree with. Tropical forest campaigns by NGOs in Japan illustrate this dilemma because the Forests Agenda is predicated on the sovereign rights of tropical timber producers to develop their own resources. Therefore any effort to frame the problem in terms of the rights of forests peoples immediately faces the blockage imposed by Foreign Affairs (FA) bureaucrats that Japan cannot interfere in the sovereign affairs of another country. This means that because tropical timber producing countries never define environmental problems in terms of the rights of indigenous peoples, NGOs can only participate in policy formulation if they accept the dominant frame of the problem which most Japanese NGOs do not.

What is generally of more significance in Asia is that the exploitation of natural resources is seen in highly econocentric terms as a key route to faster economic growth with environmental or human costs relegated to a lower priority. This ideology of prioritising economy over environment is sadly one that frequently follows Asian determination to model their societies on the Japanese experience. Although it was an *ex post* rationalisation after the environmental improvements of the 1970s, the example of the policy strategy to 'get dirty then clean up later' has become embedded in the lessons other Asian states have taken from Japan (Imura 1994; Teranishi 1992). Indeed I would go as far as to suggest that traditional Asian views of nature (Bruun & Kalland 1995) have been replaced with the modern Western perception of nature as something to be exploited in the full expectation that technology will always be improved to replace the natural capital diminished in over rapid exploitation. Japanese policies of course are not by themselves responsible for this technocentric shift rather, Japan itself was merely following the Western model!

Such an unacceptable way of framing overall policies to safeguard the environment for

this and future generations means that all Asian NGOs face a clear dilemma in the way they campaign. To purchase some chance of influencing policy makers they have to sacrifice some of their basic ideals otherwise they are forced outside the policy process as what a Canadian Forests Minister called 'flat earthers'. Some NGOs do choose to work within agendas set by competing frames of environmental problems and may then be able to exert some influence via, for example, WWF's 'debt for nature swaps' which are designed to protect forest reserves (Klinger 1994). Other NGOs however refuse to participate in such schemes because in the process of preserving plants and animals in tropical forests they exclude the people who traditionally lived in those same forests. Instead such NGOs battle to alter the basic econocentric ideology by trying to raise awareness among citizens that natural capital is actually non-substitutable and irreplaceable. As a result of these differing approaches to the way environmental issues are defined by dominant groups, the NGO movement becomes divided and its impact dissipated making it much more open to traditional elite techniques of 'divide and rule'.

Similar problems of issue definition face NGOs who campaign against plutonium based energy policies where the environmental dangers are assumed to be solvable by expected technological safety developments and are in any case a risk worth taking to preserve an independent supply of energy. Whether in France, the UK or Japan, optimistic expectations embedded in the apparently limitless potential of technological "progress" allows plutonium policy makers to convince many citizens that the nuclear energy option is both sustainable and preferable to thermal energy sources. Where such views are also represented to have commercial benefits the vested interests of public utilities can be used to mobilise support for the nuclear option which again is a feature common to France, the UK or Japan. In theory the movement of an environmental problem on to a policy agenda for change does open up more opportunities for NGOs to exert influence, but only if they are prepared to accept dominant definitions that set the parameters for policy options.

The case of desertification in Africa does offer an alternative scenario in the matter of NGO influence and issue definition which I will refer to briefly here. From a very vague position on UNCED Agenda 21, desertification suddenly and rapidly moved into a practical and global initiative with the signing of a desertification convention last year. In this process NGOs were accorded full participative status in the formulation and implementation of appropriate policies on an agenda which they themselves helped to construct (Carr & Mpande 1996). While I do not wish to imply that desertification will be easily solved nor that all NGOs are agreed on appropriate policies, it is an interesting contrast with the relative exclusion of NGOs from the construction of agendas on nuclear power and tropical forestry. Among a number of reasons for the difference there is one in particular I would stress: there are no significant groups who will lose out from policies to resolve desertification, on the contrary everyone gains. Compare this now to the hugely powerful interests that would lose out if there was a moratorium on the production of nuclear power plants or on the felling of tropical rainforests. Exerting influence on these latter two environmental issues is made infinitely more difficult for NGOs because they have in the process to confront vested economic and political interests who can use their power to define problems in ways to suit their own agendas.

Access to and leverage upon policy makers for NGOs

Given the problems of NGOs being labelled as "outsiders" in Japan's polity that I described earlier, it is not surprising that gaining access into policy making networks is extremely difficult for NGOs and consequently many authors have commented on the particular problems they face. Potter (1994) has written about the very limited role played by NGOs in overseas environmental aid policies; van Wolferen (1993) contrasts the bureaucratic doors open to NGOs in the US with the closed ones in the Kasumigaseki district; and Maull (1992) also emphasises the absence of political space for NGOs in Japan. I would not want to disagree with general perceptions that access to policy making networks is difficult to achieve, but neither would I want to exaggerate that better access elsewhere in the world actually means NGOs there are more influential. As far as Japan is concerned, what is interesting is how NGOs cope with generally more difficult access routes into policy making; in other words what they do to improve things.

One clear strategy that has produced better access if not necessarily more immediate influence, is to display technical credentials which seems to impress bureaucrats - on some occasions it also intimidates them because NGO experts are more aware of global trends than are some introverted bureaucrats. As I said earlier, Kuroda at JATAN clearly gained respect from his research into Japan's overseas timber operations such that, when he also exposed some illegitimate uses by Itoh of ODA project finance, JATAN's input to bureaucrats was deemed more legitimate and resulted in repayment of ODA loans. Similar credibility is attached to the contributions of Dr Takagi's CNIC campaigns which may not produce instantaneous results, but have in the past few years had at least begun to be addressed openly. (There are other factors involved here that relate to CNIC's pattern of global collaboration that I deal with in the next section.)

These two cases, and there are more examples I could quote, show that NGOs in Japan do not sit back and accept their outsider status but develop coping strategies including the fairly common one of using 'safe' Diet representatives to flush out answers from the bureaucracy that NGOs would not otherwise be able to get.

Another strategy of coping with the intransigence of national bureaucrats is to attempt to pass them by and target Prefectural or Municipal officials in the style of the Pollution movements of the 1960s and 1970s. A good example here would be the campaigns coordinated by the Sarawak Campaign Committee to encourage the construction industry to consume less tropical timber in their concrete panel (*kon pane*) techniques.

There are a few examples too of ODA projects using non-governmental staff from Japan's own NGOs to implement projects in Asian states where Japan's official capacity is weak. However caution is needed before these examples can be used to signal any major change in bureaucratic attitudes. As Potter points out, before NGOs become involved in this way they have to show a positive commitment to the ODA projects concerned otherwise they remain confined to the periphery as happens where NGOs are critical of large hydroelectric dam projects (1994:204). Equally important is the question of whether groups participating in ODA projects are really "non-governmental" as in the case of OISCA which is sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Despite the general problems of access into policy making networks Japan's NGOs can and do use leverage based on their expert credentials and contacts with friends in the Diet to

exercise more influence than general views of their position might suggest. I would certainly not want to exaggerate how much influence NGOs have and I would also suggest that what influence they do have is often negative in the sense of curbing some of the worst cases of degradation rather than positively influencing the choice of quite different policies. What is really needed in the latter case is much more public legitimacy for their campaigns which is widely perceived as the *sine qua non* for the access of interest groups in general.

It is in this area of public support for their campaigns that scholars and NGOs alike are most likely to argue that Japan lags behind the West and even parts of the South. Authors such as Holliman (1990), D. Potter (1994) and Maull (1992) all stress the problems of mobilising public support for campaigns which concern global issues in particular which they argue are perceived as too distant from the immediate concerns of home-centred Japanese people. Other problems are related to antiquated financial and legal regulations that inhibit the financial capacity of NGOs and reduce the effectiveness of their campaigning relative to other countries. In addition there seems also to be less social status accorded to those who work in Japanese NGOs and who are misrepresented as 'drop-outs' from what is often called a 'corporate-centred society'. Equally demeaning comments have been heard in the dominant men's culture of the bureaucracy that, as women are so prominent in NGOs, this occupation must be accorded low status because it is "women's work" (Noguchi 1992).

While once again urging that we do not assume there is a difference of kind in the status accorded to NGO workers between Japan and the West, it does have to be admitted that NGOs outside Japan can generate more funding and offer career structures for their employees comparable to those offered by profit-making companies. I should add though, that even in Europe this is a fairly recent development and it may well be that as 'Internationalisation' takes its course in Japan there could be more public interest in global environmental change. I do accept that there are grounds for pessimism in the ephemeral attitude of Japan's media and younger generation towards the environment, but once again comment that you would find similar views in the environmental movement in Europe and North America.

Access and leverage problems for NGOs are not necessarily unique to Japan not least because the allocation of insider status is controlled by bureaucrats the world over. One solution to this problem of 'gatekeeping' by national bureaucrats is to try to circumvent their control via global collaboration between NGOs.

NGOs, global collaboration and domestic legitimacy

Several trends have come together in recent social science literature that makes scholars optimistic about the prospects for transnational cooperation between NGOs. First there are doubts about the primacy of nation states as IGOs and social movements take on a global scope in a new era of 'sovereignty-free actors' within a global society (Shaw 1992). Secondly environmental problems are increasingly being treated as international problems because the scope of air and water pollution, for instance, cannot be confined within national boundaries (Litfin 1993). Thirdly the enormous expansion of International NGOs, Multinational NGOs and multifarious NGO networks, coalitions and alliances has apparently given environmental NGOs greater global consciousness in a 'green culture as earth nationalism' (Deudeney 1993). All of these trends surface most visibly at global fora such as UNCED where the status accorded to NGOs by an IGO like the UN contrasts most markedly with the attitudes of domestic bureaucrats.

Practically, what global collaboration delivers to national NGOs is additional resources in the form of information, past campaigning experience and the ability to tap into global political spaces to compensate for the constraints of their domestic political systems. Classic examples of these sorts of resources in the case of Japan, come when overseas NGOs transmit information about how ODA is being implemented which can then be used to supplement information available in Japan to help an NGOs critique. This has been vital in challenging the popularity of huge Asian Dam projects in ODA allocations (D. Potter 1994:203). In a similar way CNIC was only able to publicise the exact details of the shipment of nuclear materials because of information supplied by its allies in Europe and only able to publicise the dangers in states along the shipment route because of links with NGOs in Panama and South America. Equally, the guarantees given on the safety of such shipments were never publicised in Japan so the only way CNIC could build a critique of their accuracy into their campaigns was from information supplied in France. Better information resources than could be obtained at home raise the public credibility of NGOs and therefore force the bureaucracy into a dialogue that may never have happened without some degree of collaboration with NGOs abroad.

These examples from Japan are by no means unusual and, even in more repressive regimes in the South, local NGOs often see positive benefits in 'going international' with their campaigns (Potter 1996). In the case of NGOs from Brazil or Indonesia while they may be unable to exert much influence on domestic forest policies, they can, through allies in the US, exert indirect influence by campaigning at the World Bank which might then make any loans conditional on slowing down the rate of deforestation. In this type of case, leverage at the World Bank exercised through Northern allies is a substitute for the absence of domestic legitimacy and leverage. Working together means that local information from the South gives credibility to Northern NGOs who would otherwise not have enough knowledge to make an impact.. Equally the access advantages of US NGOs in World Bank discussions gives to Brazilian NGOs a point of entry that they would not have had without the alliance (Bramble & Porter 1992).

However as I argue in detail elsewhere (Eccleston 1996a), there are some caveats to be made to the mood of optimism about a vibrant global civil society and the demise of the nation state in global politics. While nation states by themselves are inadequate to deal with international environmental problems, their function in implementing agreements is indispensable. For this reason it remains clear that NGOs have to continue targeting national governments just as much, if not more, than IGOs. As far as civil society is concerned it is also wise to remember that it is national governments that set the parameters of their independence from the state. This is especially evident in many Southern countries where, for example, merely associating with foreign NGOs can be used as an excuse to repress and harass personnel from domestic NGOs. Evidence for this sort of backlash is widespread in the forest campaigns of countries like Indonesia and Malaysia (Eccleston 1996a). Given the obvious power of nation states to define the limits of civil societies, I prefer not to think in terms of a global civil society but, like Peterson, to see more closely interlinked national civil societies (1992:378).

Related to these limitations on the notion of a global civil society are fissures in the so-called 'earth culture as green nationalism' which frequently take on a North-South dimension. I

referred earlier to the complexities of how environmental issues are defined and the examples of global NGO collaboration that fail, often reveal competing priorities between NGO partners. 'Debt-for-nature swaps' may well be a good strategy to retain membership in Northern NGOs, but they do little for the local support for Southern NGOs where they involve excluding indigenous people from the forests. Similar tendencies have been observed in Brazil where the support of US NGOs was vital in raising the profile of the destruction of Amazonian forests. But all too frequently US NGOs then took over the campaigns by working directly with the Brazilian government over the heads of both local people and local NGOs (Hawkins 1993).

There are therefore times when global NGO collaboration does not deliver the additional sources of influence that is supposed to follow.

In my view the forest campaigns of NGOs in Japan, for instance, may not really be helped much when partners in the West lead boycotts of Mitsubishi electrical products or motor vehicles simply because a trading company which happens to have the same name is deeply involved in logging the forests of Sarawak. The knowledge that people in North America are refusing to buy the TV sets from a different company may not add much weight to NGOs in Japan who are attempting to target the real Mitsubishi trading company. Similarly counterproductive for NGOs in Japan are Western campaigns that mistakenly vilify Japanese people for using throwaway chopsticks made from tropical timber or for being solely responsible for the destruction of the world's stock of whales.

In contrast, successful global NGO collaboration require the partners to be fully aware of national differences throughout the life of the partnership which means that before collaboration begins partners have to be chosen carefully. It is not simply a matter of using the newly available means of electronic communication, but of ensuring that what is communicated is designed to empower both sides. Careful preparation and continuous management of partnerships is crucial to their success and too many Northern NGOs are not prepared to make the commitment this requires.

Now let me finish on a more optimistic note because in Japan I have found one of the best examples of a form of collaboration which did produce positive results. In the case of CNIC's association with Greenpeace International it was not just a matter of improving the information flow to an NGO in Japan about reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in French plants. CNIC also had something to offer Greenpeace in return in the form of their closer connections with NGOs in Asia and Latin America along the route of the shipments journey back to Japan. Even so, without personal contact through trips of key personnel back and forth to Europe, the ground rules for the partnership could not have been established properly. It is exactly this kind of coalition management that political scientists like Hinckley have highlighted as making the difference between a successful and unsuccessful coalition (1981). Although the CNIC-Greenpeace coalition has so far not stopped any of the shipments of nuclear materials, the international profile of these joint campaigns has opened access routes into the bureaucracy which were previously closed (Manning 1995).

This example incidentally allows me to make a couple of concluding observations on the current position of NGOs in Japan. First to remind you that their presence as continuously organised interest groups with a global as well as national focus is relatively recent which makes comparison with longer-lived Western NGOs misleading. Secondly, that while evidence of short term influence to bring about a shift or reversal of government policy is rare,

at least during the 1990s access routes to key policy makers in the bureaucracy have been opened up. If Western environmental NGOs have had any major successes, and these are often exaggerated, they could not have been achieved without first establishing their legitimacy in official circles. It seems to me that NGOs in Japan, despite all the structural obstacles, have now been legitimised which in highly circumscribed policy making circles is no mean achievement.

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