Preface

Investing in Ourselves—Giving and Fund Raising in Asia had its origin in the International Conference on Supporting the Nonprofit Sector in Asia, sponsored by the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium (APPC) in January 1998.[1]

The central theme of the conference was the need to explore ways in which governments, international financial institutions, philanthropic foundations, corporations, and others could contribute to the continued growth and financial sustainability of nonprofit organizations in Asia during a period of economic decline. Although planned long before, the conference took place at the height of the Asian economic crisis, which began in Thailand in July 1997 and had just a few weeks earlier, in December 1997, brought the Korean economy to the point of collapse.

The economic crisis represented a setback to what had been until then more than a decade of steady growth of philanthropic foundations and other forms of organized philanthropy in Asia. In the short term, the economic crisis ensured that foreign funding would continue to be essential to the economic support of NGOs, but as I stated in my opening remarks at the conference:

> From the perspective of long-term resource mobilization, Asian and other nonprofit organizations will ultimately depend for their survival on the quality of the relationships they are able to establish with public opinion in their countries and with their own governments, and only secondarily and for the short-term on their relationships with international public and private donor agencies.

In other words, the fundamental challenge to Asian NGOs was, and remains, to develop local sources of sustained funding.

The Asian Development Bank was represented at the conference by Gordon Wilkinson, who was at the time responsible for the ADB's work with NGOs. Wilkinson took the initiative to approach Jaime Faustino, who was then APPC's Executive Officer (and, concurrently, The Asia Foundation's Assistant Representative in the Philippines), to express ADB's interest in discussing how ADB and APPC might cooperate to assist NGOs in their quest for financial sustainability.

Subsequently, APPC and Venture for Fund Raising, a newly established nonprofit consulting and research firm, developed a proposal and began the complicated process of negotiating co-financing arrangements with the Asian Development Bank. Before that deal could be consummated, however, USAID became interested in the project and provided funding for research on NGO resource mobilization strategies in the Philippines, a study that served as the pilot test for the eventual seven-country project. Subsequently, the Nippon Foundation in Japan also joined the project as a donor. We are grateful to all three donors for their support, and to The Asia Foundation for its role in facilitating the project and managing its finances.

Investing in Ourselves—Giving and Fund Raising in Asia had four principal objectives:

- to build awareness of successful methods of fundraising employed by Asian NGOs and to identify innovative best practices;
- to increase understanding of the need for transparency and accountability among Asian NGOs if they are to be successful in fundraising;
- to increase the capacity of Asian NGOs to mobilize resources; and
- to establish benchmarks against which to measure the nature and scope of philanthropic giving in selected countries.

The study also sought to document Asian fundraising experience in order to supplement or replace imported models and experience for use in local training; and to demonstrate that charitable giving and volunteering takes place even in relatively poor countries that do not share Western cultural traditions.

The study produced 112 case studies of successful local fundraising in seven countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand) and household level surveys of charitable giving in four of these counties (India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand).

Investing in Ourselves is a pioneering study. The household survey on charitable donations in Indonesia is the first ever conducted in that country, and the surveys in India, Philippines, and Thailand complement surveys being conducted by the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project. As a pioneering effort, there are few benchmarks against which to compare our survey findings and only limited experience on which to estimate the impact of potential sample bias. It will take repeated future surveys to validate or revise these results. We hope that publication of these findings, with all the methodological caveats discussed in Chapter 3, will encourage others to continue to gather empirical data that will eventually result in a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of charitable giving in Asia.

These caveats aside, the surveys and case studies begin to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of philanthropy in the countries studied.

The surveys confirm in a practical way what cultural anthropologists have long taught—that philanthropy takes place everywhere, in all cultures. The frequently heard arguments that there is no cultural tradition of philanthropy in Asia, or that it is a Western import, or that philanthropy only occurs in wealthy countries, are once again refuted by the results of this study. In all four countries, almost all high to middle income households, as defined in the local context, made philanthropic gifts during the preceding twelve months, a pattern similar to that found in "developed" countries.

In addition, the amounts donated to charitable causes are substantial in local terms. In Thailand, Philippines, and Indonesia, for example, the average amount given per capita was reported to be US$546, $400, and $123, respectively. Restated in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), which provides a more meaningful international comparison, these amounts convert to the equivalent of US$1610, $1385, and $538, respectively. On the other hand, the Indian respondents reported significantly lower levels of giving and a lower giving *rate* (that is, fewer of the respondents reported giving).

There is a similar hierarchy of giving in all four countries. Individuals are the main recipients of philanthropy, followed by religious organizations, then voluntary organizations. Individuals were the recipients of about 40 percent of charitable giving in three countries, and about 58 percent in Thailand. Although the four countries have different religious traditions, in each of them religious organizations received almost a third of all giving except in Thailand. In that country, although 95 percent of the respondents reported that they had made "religious contributions" during the previous year, only about 16 percent of their cash donations on a per capita basis were reported to have gone to religious organizations.[2] (In contrast, the annual estimates of private charitable donations compiled in *Giving USA* indicate that almost half of all charitable donations made in the Unites States go to or through religious organizations.) Voluntary organizations, particularly social service providers and those in education, received between 21 and 28 percent of charitable donations.

Both the surveys and the case studies suggest that there is considerable scope for increased fundraising from local sources in the seven countries studied, but that some significant obstacles need to be overcome. On the one hand, the household surveys and the case studies demonstrate that there is already a significant pool of current contributors in each country. As fundraisers everywhere know, it is often most fruitful to focus on increasing donations from those who already give. It also appears that at least some fundraising approaches common in the US and Europe, but previously presumed to be inappropriate in Asia, such as direct mail, media advertising, telephone solicitations, selling tickets to special events, workplace giving, and selling NGO products, publications, and services, have also been used successfully by NGOs across the region.

In a statement that draws together the survey findings and the case studies, the authors of the chapter on fundraising principles assert that "people don't give money to causes; they give to *people* with causes." While individual donors in each of the seven countries studied may differ in their motivation to give to others, they share the need for a sense of connection to the organization and its cause. Most often, that sense of connection takes a personal form—knowing the organization's founder, trustees, or staff; believing in the personal integrity of key organizational leaders; serving as a volunteer; or being approached in a manner that takes into account the potential contributor's interests and concerns. Advocating a good cause may not be enough to attract local funding; even more critical is building and nurturing positive personal and community relationships, based in large part on the organization's demonstrated legitimacy, accountability, transparency, and impact.

The challenge for voluntary organizations, particularly for development-oriented NGOs, is whether and how they can increase their share of charitable giving from local sources. Given the importance of religion as a motivating force for charitable giving in all the countries studied, the obvious question is whether those who give to religious organizations also give to voluntary organizations or whether these are separate markets. Is it possible to increase local levels of giving so that both types of organization benefit, or does giving to one come at the expense of the other?

From the perspective of an NGO fundraiser, we now know that ordinary people in relatively poor countries do make charitable contributions to causes they believe in, but voluntary organizations, even those that provide direct educational and social services, appear on average to receive less than a quarter of those contributions. Even less appears to be donated to development-oriented NGOs, except possibly in Indonesia, where the survey respondents reported that they give slightly more to development NGOs than to education providers. Is it because NGOs are still not well known to their communities? Is it therefore a matter of public education and better media coverage? Or are there also deeper issues at work—perhaps related to public expectations about the role of the State, or to issues of NGO legitimacy and accountability? The data in this study do not allow us to address these questions, but we now know that it is not simply a matter of "poor" people not having funds to give, or not having a tradition of charitable giving. If I were an NGO leader, I would be interested to ask: since local people do give money, why doesn't more of it come to us? what can I and my organization do to raise our share of the charitable gift market? This book may help provide some of the answers, based on Asian experience.

I would like to express my thanks, on behalf of the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium and The Asia Foundation, to the Asian Development Bank, the Nippon Foundation, and USAID for their financial support, and to all the researchers and participants who contributed their energy, enthusiasm, and insights to make this project a success. Above all, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to Jaime Faustino and his colleagues at Venture for Fund Raising for having the vision and the managerial capacity to conceptualize and implement so well this complex, multi-country and multi-donor effort.

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Notes

1 Reported in Lori Vacek, *International Conference on Supporting the Non-profit Sector in Asia*, Bangkok, January 9–11, 1998 (available from The Asia Foundation)

2 Higher than average educational levels and employment patterns in the Thai sample may account for their unexpectedly low level of support for religious organizations, in a country otherwise known for its well-endowed temples and generally well-funded religious societies.