



NGOS WITH NON-WESTERN CULTURE CAN INCREASE CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS AS A WHOLE

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Abstract: *To address the need for fundraising among humanitarian organizations, the authors of this paper have constructed a mathematical model and conducted empirical testing based on financial information from humanitarian organizations, referring to interviews with two NGOs that support refugees and internally displaced people. Previous literature often separates NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture. Our results demonstrate there are at least two types of contributors, each of which perceives NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture as having different degrees of appeal. Because contributors view these NGOs as fundamentally different, NGOs with Western culture do not experience a loss in contributions even when NGOs with non-Western culture gain additional contributions. As NGOs with non-Western culture gain positive recognition among contributors, these NGOs can increase overall contributions to humanitarian organizations. This increase exceeds findings from previous studies examining different environments for potential contributors.*

JEL classification: L31, G30, C50

Key words: humanitarian organizations, contributions, non-Western, multi-agent system, information

1. INTRODUCTION

While humanitarian organizations need to raise funds, the issue of addressing the need for volunteers at humanitarian organizations has received relatively greater attention in the prior literature (Nurmala et al., 2024; Meijeren et al., 2023). There is prior literature dedicated to



humanitarian actions following military conflicts (Betts and Collier, 2017), and this paper aims to address fundraising needs during such military conflicts. This paper finds that NGOs with non-Western culture can increase overall contributions to humanitarian organizations.

It has been advocated that academic research be inclusive of different types of beneficiaries (Ullah, 2024), as academic research that is more inclusive of different types of NGOs and potential contributors may yield valuable insight into humanitarian actions as well.

There are at least two types of humanitarian organizations, NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture. The classification of “Western NGOs” is well-established in academic literature (Betts and Collier, 2017). While geographical location serves as one basis for classifying NGOs into Western and non-Western, another basis for this classification is the culture integrated into their missions. Whether the culture places greater emphasis on rights or peace is one example of the milestones that divide Western and non-Western NGOs (Namli, 2018; Butcher and Hallward, 2017). From this perspective, organizations with cultures different from that of an NGO with Western culture characterize NGO with non-Western culture. Research on NGOs with non-Western culture is a relatively new area (Liu and Bennet, 2023).

Classification by culture has particular significance for this paper. Potential contributors can be classified into two categories: those that prefer NGOs with Western culture and those that prefer NGOs with non-Western culture.

As Médecins sans Frontières has stated widely as its position, limiting partnerships with armed forces typifies NGOs with Western culture. In academia, however, research indicates that civil-military partnerships can be effective for humanitarian actions (Grave et al., 2023). It is not surprising that some potential contributors prefer non-Western NGOs, which do not refuse partnerships with military forces, though numerous other differences exist between NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture.

Not only do humanitarian organizations possess their own culture, but the culture of the country it is located in influences potential contributors’ decision-making (Fuchs et al., 2020). Conducting interviews with humanitarian organizations within the same country allows for more meaningful comparisons.

This pilot study was conducted in Japan with a dataset constructed from financial information from humanitarian organizations in Japan. NGOs have historically lacked recognition in



Japanese society, especially humanitarian organizations (Szczepanska, 2022). Research has shown that the combination of perfect information and perfect rationality is impractical in the donation market, even after minimum financial accountability requirements have been fulfilled (Caviola et al., 2020). Therefore, the situation in Japan is not surprising. This situation also suggests the possibility that potential contributors may revise their beliefs over time as they observe the activities of NGOs. For NGOs whose activities potential contributors were unfamiliar with, the degree to which they may revise their beliefs may be significant.

There is a recent tendency to analyse contributions to NGOs mathematically (Schmitz, 2021). One such method is to construct a mathematical model as a multi-agent system (Chan et al., 2024). Multi-agent systems have been systematically researched in economics to such a degree that several books have been written (Kolokoltsov & Malafeyev, 2019; Namatame & Chen, 2016; Chen, 2016). Multi-agent systems can be sophisticated; however, simplification often proves useful for economic modelling (Mankiw, 2021).

NGOs may use certain signals in interactions with potential contributors. These signals are typically financial information (Exley, 2020; Van Voorst et al., 2022). Some of the prior literature indicates that the total amount of contributions to NGOs can increase to a certain extent through competition among NGOs. The more competitive the donation market is, the more contributions NGOs receive (Schmitz, 2021). However, prior literature indicates that contributors' monitoring of NGOs on the ground is more accurate than financial information (Van Voorst et al., 2022).

Studies have indicated that empirical research on the performance measurement of humanitarian organizations remains scarce (Konrad et al., 2024). The necessity of accountability for humanitarian organizations and the relationship between accountability and potential contributors' trust in NGOs are well-established (Hilhorst et al., 2021; Ghoorah et al., 2025).

This paper investigates the next stage after accountability requirements have been met and conducts empirical test using financial information from humanitarian organizations. Changes in financial information are expected to reflect the performance of humanitarian organizations as disclosed in management commentaries and similar publications.

Some scholars may question whether all financial information since 2019 has been abnormal due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic certainly presented worldwide obstacles



for NGOs, these organizations have continued to utilize the managerial know-how acquired during the pandemic (Hyndman, 2020; Van Steenburg et al., 2022; Daolei, 2024). Thus, financial information after 2020 may demonstrate continuity.

2. METHODS

For the pilot study, we conducted interviews with two prominent NGOs that support refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) to define the research questions described in the previous section. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has waived review requirements for the authors on the pilot study; however, if interviews were used as the methodology for a qualitative research paper, they would require formal review by the IRB.

Instead, this paper is quantitative research that leverages financial accounting knowledge. For the main study, we constructed a mathematical model and analysed financial data to test the model. These results are then discussed. Having a mathematical model allows for strict discussion. When building the model, ChatGPT o1 was used as an assistive tool to verify the mathematical accuracy of the model and to generate graphs using Python.

Our dataset was constructed using financial information from humanitarian NGOs in Japan and contains contribution amounts recorded the year after the start of the pandemic. These NGOs were selected from the Global Database Humanitarian Organizations by Humanitarian Outcomes (GDHO), as of March 19, 2025. The selection process involved two steps. First, a list NGOs with data was created based on this database and filtered to identify organizations with headquarters in Japan. The sample consisted of all NGOs with information available on OPE (operational program expense), except in cases where the NGO was actually classified as a public sector organization by the Japan government. Second, financial information for each NGO was collected from its financial statements. Financial information from CARE and AMDA was also collected. Each NGO was then classified as either culturally Western or non-Western. Although this classification is sometimes self-evident, we based classification on the NGO's official website.

3. PILOT STUDY

Interviews with humanitarian organizations were conducted in Japan, an Eastern country.



CARE is a prominent NGO with Western culture. We interviewed a trustee at CARE International Japan who has experience as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). He described one case of humanitarian action coordinated with NATO during the Yugoslav civil war as an exceptional case. He explained that such ties increase an NGOs' risk of retaliation from militants and can trigger criticism from contributors, who may subsequently withdraw their contributions. Highlights of the interview with the trustee are cited below:

NGOs will be attacked. Armed forces are organizations for combat and thus have enemies. For example, when NATO has a hostile relationship with the Serbian Armed Forces and was their enemy, the fact that UNHCR was acting with NATO naturally put them at risk of being attacked by the Serbian Armed Forces. It had been the convention among humanitarian organizations to carefully set themselves apart from military organizations to prevent such attacks.

If CARE staff are killed or injured because of attacks triggered by the fact that it works with armed forces, CARE will be held responsible. Donors will say 'Why did CARE take such actions? CARE engages in dangerous acts, so we do not want to donate to CARE going forward.' In this way, the humanitarian actions themselves end up being prevented.

He opined that what is necessary for NGOs is financing and advertisement. He also referenced the cluster approach in conflict zones.

Regarding the possibility of contributors participating on the ground, he said:

Visiting our refugee aid efforts and IDPs on the ground is dangerous for amateurs. [...] If a person says, "I am a contributor to CARE, so I want to see your efforts on the ground," we must refuse it. Such a visit is only a burden for us.

For NGOs active in conflict zones, it is unpracticable for contributors to monitor NGOs on the ground. Lessons from prior literature cannot be applied to NGOs active in conflict zones.



Instead, contributors need to rely on financial information, financial statements, and management commentaries.

AMDA, meanwhile, is a prominent NGO with non-Western culture. We also interviewed a former trustee at AMDA, who regarded ties with armed forces as necessary for humanitarian activities, citing successful cases such as one in the Philippines during the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos:

NGOs sometimes need to partner with armed forces to provide aid. For example, there were anti-government militants in the Philippines during the administration of President Marcos. At that time, there was a major earthquake that killed many people. Although medical teams from around the world came to the Philippines, they were unable to go beyond the capital due to the presence of guerrillas.

However, since AMDA had a partnership with the armed forces, it was able to go beyond the capital under the protection of the military and was thus able to provide medical aid. In this way, partnerships with the armed forces are sometimes necessary to deliver aid to earthquake victims in areas where guerrillas are active.

He also referenced several ideas specific to the East that NGOs in the West may not agree with. For example, he describes how Japanese communities are formed by regional relationships and Chinese and Korean communities by blood relationships.

He explained that AMDA maintains a negative stance regarding advertisements to solicit contributions, though it has been able to generate funding.

4. BUILDING A MODEL

We postulate that there are at least two types of potential contributors: those who prefer traditional NGOs with Western culture and those who do not. Our model proposes that these types are randomly assigned. In game theory terms, this would be described as "nature" allocating a type to each potential contributor.

Random contribution variables can explain why the contribution amount among potential contributors differs. Each potential contributor possesses different random variables

governing whether they contribute to typical NGOs with Western culture or NGOs with non-Western culture. One type of potential contributor makes many contributions to typical NGOs with Western culture along with their set of random variables regarding contributions. Another type of potential contributor does not do this because their set of random variables regarding contributions differ from the previous type of potential contributor. To simplify, it is useful to assume that random variables regarding contributions are independent of one another for each potential contributor. Fig. 1 depicts these random variables roughly as graphs.

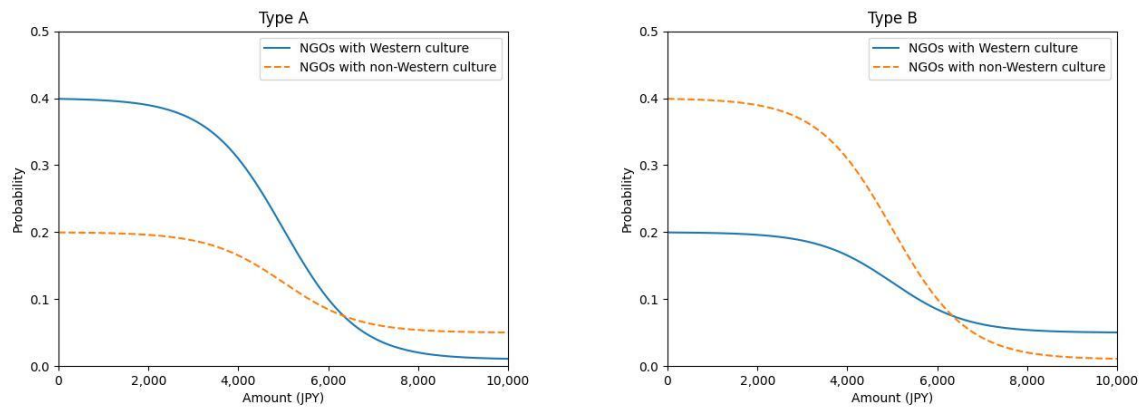


Fig. 1. Rough images of the contribution amount from each agent as random variables.

Another random variable allocates the type of potential contributor—whether they prefer NGOs with Western culture or NGOs with non-Western culture—with each potential contributor as an agent. Of course, even within the same type of potential contributor, the set of random variables depends on a probability distribution function. There are two probability distribution functions that correspond to the two types of potential contributors.

This can be interpreted as a multi-agent system, with the amount of contributions by each potential contributor as an agent represented as a vector.

This allows presumptions about humanitarian sector information to be established. Each potential contributor views information from the humanitarian sector, such as management commentaries, and annually revises their beliefs regarding how much they should contribute. Such information serves as a signal from the humanitarian sector, and this revision of beliefs follows the principle of Bayesian inference.

These relationships are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The model.

i: Identity number for agent i.

C: Contribution amount from agent i.

S: Annual information about an NGO as a signal.

θ : Random variable representing agent i's type.

F: Probability distribution function.

A and B: Type of agent i.

α and β : Type of a function representing the contribution from agent i.

$$\left(C_i^\alpha(\theta_i), C_i^\beta(\theta_i) \right) = \begin{cases} (C_i^\alpha, C_i^\beta)^A \sim F_A, & \text{if } \theta_i = A, \\ (C_i^\alpha, C_i^\beta)^B \sim F_B, & \text{if } \theta_i = B. \end{cases}$$

Here:

$$F(C|S) = \frac{F(S|C)F(C)}{F(S)}$$

5. RESULTS

We identified six NGOs with sufficient financial information found through the GDHO. With the addition of CARE and AMDA, our sample included eight NGOs. All NGOs in the sample disclose financial statements, including income statements.

Table 2 presents financial information regarding contributions, categorized into membership fees, normal contributions, and grants from governments and institutions.

**Table 2.** Financial information (JPY).

Name	Year	Membership	Contributions	Grants	Total	Culture
AAR	2020	3,397,000	374,067,762	1,273,674,754	1,651,139,516	Western
AAR	2021	3,396,000	482,709,331	886,800,444	1,372,905,775	Western
AAR	2022	3,278,000	802,343,045	1,102,727,219	1,908,348,264	Western
AAR	2023	3,105,000	632,315,151	1,078,314,770	1,713,734,921	Western
PW	2020	557,129,013	659,448,790	3,470,295,705	4,686,873,508	Non-Western
PW	2021	705,631,781	446,750,057	3,206,801,882	4,359,183,720	Non-Western
PW	2022	955,099,377	937,375,455	4,163,769,394	6,056,244,226	Non-Western
PW	2023	1,148,210,427	1,272,095,917	4,590,666,237	7,010,972,581	Non-Western
SAA	2020	0	0	1,343,323,796	1,343,323,796	Non-Western
SAA	2021	0	0	1,315,179,275	1,315,179,275	Non-Western
SAA	2022	0	0	1,871,013,372	1,871,013,372	Non-Western
SAA	2023	0	0	2,198,317,155	2,198,317,155	Non-Western
SVA	2020	22,902,500	351,997,413	115,607,005	490,506,918	Non-Western
SVA	2021	21,457,000	314,606,139	165,503,423	501,566,562	Non-Western
SVA	2022	21,909,000	358,061,645	395,914,934	775,885,579	Non-Western
SVA	2023	21,052,000	362,584,562	743,502,415	1,127,138,977	Non-Western
BAJ	2020	1,070,000	8,768,099	285,706,857	295,544,956	Western
BAJ	2021	1,080,000	5,615,286	159,586,706	166,281,992	Western
BAJ	2022	960,000	12,754,870	89,422,392	103,137,262	Western
BAJ	2023	900,000	10,635,262	73,933,699	85,468,961	Western
JPF	2020	17,880,000	511,247,346	4,190,836,953	4,719,964,299	Non-Western
JPF	2021	18,425,000	171,312,164	3,405,574,525	3,595,311,689	Non-Western
JPF	2022	18,905,000	677,341,003	8,575,662,939	9,271,908,942	Non-Western
JPF	2023	19,815,000	1,230,728,044	6,505,018,238	7,755,561,282	Non-Western
CARE	2020	19,967,800	32,835,891	147,700	52,951,391	Western
CARE	2021	22,684,000	31,920,133	0	54,604,133	Western
CARE	2022	25,827,000	44,555,000	0	70,382,000	Western
CARE	2023	28,649,800	75,294,046	0	103,943,846	Western
AMDA	2020	5,794,000	68,143,816	614,877	74,552,693	Non-Western
AMDA	2021	5,582,000	78,341,881	4,343,667	88,267,548	Non-Western
AMDA	2022	5,365,000	194,447,211	5,583,833	205,396,044	Non-Western
AMDA	2023	5,303,000	135,444,903	106,136,520	246,884,423	Non-Western

To provide additional context, Table 3 provides an overview of each NGO based on its website to understand what kind of organization it is.

**Table 3.** The overview of each NGO.

Full Name	Abbreviation	Brief Description
Association for Aid and Relief, Japan	AAR	This NGO supports refugees and explicitly emphasizes human rights.
Peace Winds Japan	PW	This NGO providing emergency aid, emphasizing peace over rights.
Sasakawa Africa Association	SAA	This NGO alleviates poverty in African countries, including conflict zones. This NGO does not emphasize rights, even within the theme of equity.
Shanti Volunteer Association	SVA	This is a Buddhist NGO that emphasizes peace over rights.
Bridge Asia Japan	BAJ	This NGO supports development in conflict zones and strongly emphasizes justice, though it does not emphasize rights directly.
Japan Platform	JPF	This NGO provides emergency aid, featuring Japan itself as the aid provider.
CARE International Japan	CARE	This is the Japan office of an NGO headquartered in the U.S. Its activities include support for refugees. It also protects rights in Japan.
Association of Medical Doctors of	AMDA	This NGO provides medical aid in conflict zones, emphasizing peace over rights.



Asia

In Japan, the amount of contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture have increased, while the amount of contributions to NGOs with Western culture have been sluggish, excluding CARE. The total increase in contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture far exceeds the total decrease in contributions to NGOs with Western culture in Japan.

6. DISCUSSION

The financial information strongly supports our mathematical model. It shows that potential contributors in Japan have increased contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture each year without decreasing contributions to NGOs with Western culture. This pattern persists despite a sluggish Japanese economy (The Japan Times, Mar. 2, 2023). Each contributor has different random variables that govern whether they tend to contribute to NGOs with Western culture or to NGOs with non-Western culture.

As information on the performance of NGOs with non-Western culture becomes more widely known, a certain type of potential contributor may revise their beliefs and increasingly contribute to NGOs with non-Western culture.

Gaining more contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture can increase contributions to humanitarian organizations as a whole. As Table 2, while increases in contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture may not be readily apparent, they are nonetheless significant. There is almost no competition in the donation market between NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture. The more contributions humanitarian organizations receive as a whole, the more support they can provide to refugees and IDPs.

7. CONCLUSION

To address the need for fundraising among humanitarian organizations, acquiring more contributions to NGOs with non-Western culture appears to be effective. Our results demonstrate that, rather than create tougher competition among NGOs, this significantly increases the total amount of contributions to NGOs by potential contributors. Prior literature has suggested tough competition in the donation market among NGOs (Schmitz, 2021), but



our findings suggest there is almost no competition between NGOs with Western culture and NGOs with non-Western culture.

This paper also provides complementary knowledge to the emerging area of research on NGOs with non-Western culture (Liu and Bennett, 2023).

A limitation of this paper is that potential contributors in Western countries may not exhibit decision-making patterns as clearly as those shown in the results of this paper, which focuses on Japan, an Eastern country. Even analysis on NGOs in China or South Korea may yield slightly different results from NGOs in Japan.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM: The authors declare no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The authors would like to acknowledge the trustee at CARE International Japan and the former trustee at AMDA who participated in the interviews. We would like to thank b-cause Inc. for its English proofreading service.

FUNDING: This research is based upon work supported by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research under award number FA2386-23-1-4008.

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