



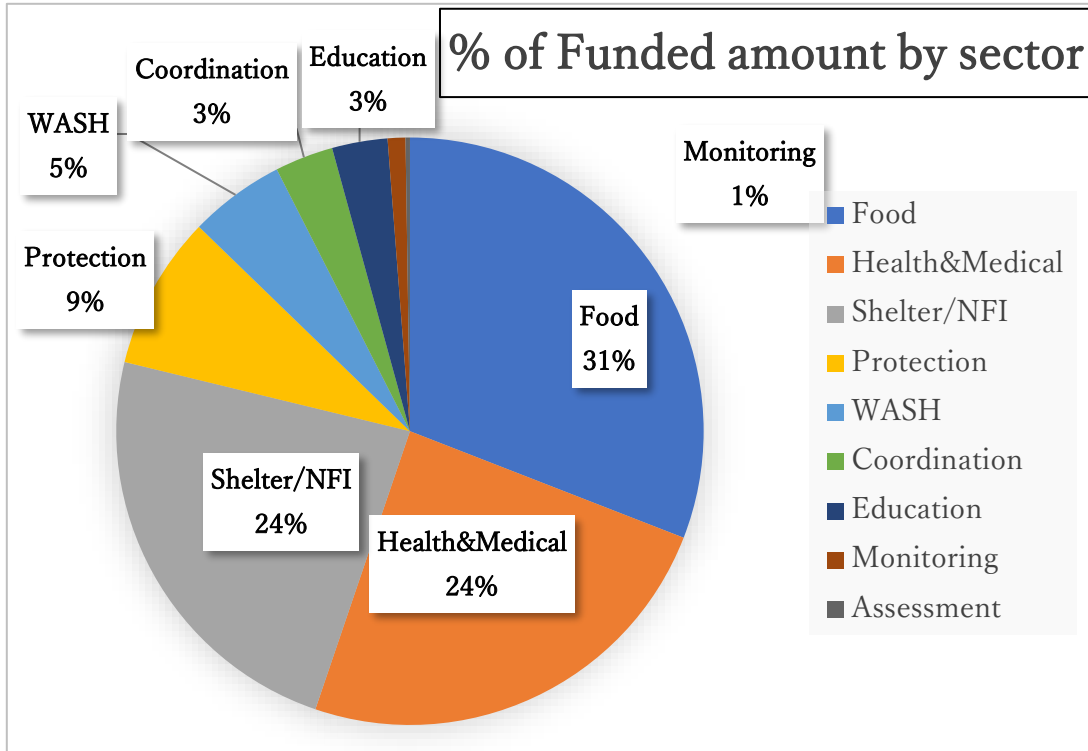
JANUARY 30, 2023

UKRAINE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM
INITIAL RESPONSE REVIEW REPORT

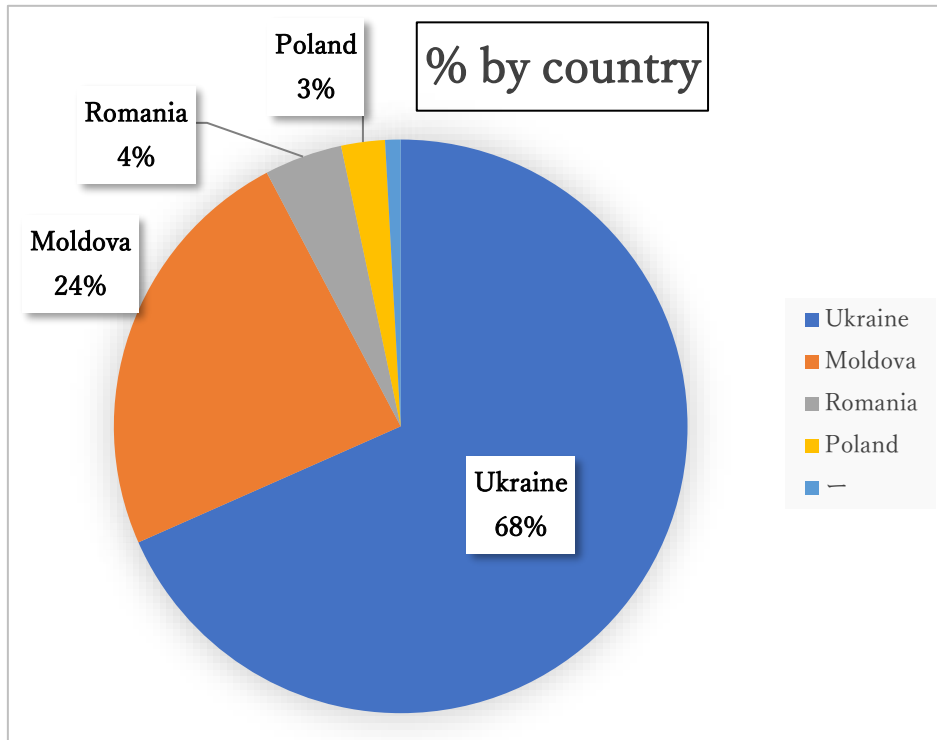
JAPAN PLATFORM

SUMMARY of UKRAINE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Graph1, % by Intervention Sectors



Graph 2. % by country



JAPAN PLATFORM Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program Initial Response Phase Review Report

Masako Ishii, Rikkyo University

I. OVERVIEW

1. Background

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine. This resulted in a major humanitarian crisis, with two million people fleeing across the border and another million internally displaced by March 8, 2022¹.

On February 25, the day after the military invasion, Japan Platform's member NGOs began their emergency initial assessment. Then on March 7, the Ad Hoc Program Examination Committee convened to decide on mobilization and launched a six-month program on Response to Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis 2022 (with the program term subsequently extended to March 22, 2024). This review looks back at the Initial Response Phase of the program whose duration was six months.

When the decision was made on March 7 to mobilize funds for the Japan Platform's Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, there were 61,429,620 yen in government funds (remaining from the Fiscal Year 2021 emergency reserve fund) and 30 million yen in private funds. Subsequently, the Japanese government made two additional contributions on March 11 and April 5, bringing the total amount of government funds to 3.23 billion yen. The private sector also contributed over 500 million yen as of July 12, 2022. This is the largest total amount in donations for a program resulting from an armed conflict since Japan Platform was established, indicating a high level of interest from the general public and the media. During the Initial Response Phase, nine member NGOs implemented 21 projects in Ukraine and neighboring countries of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, and Poland. The total budget was 2.222 billion yen.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program presented new challenges for Japan Platform in the following respects. Firstly, it was not an internal armed conflict but a response in the midst of an ongoing inter-state war. While Western countries and Japan condemned Russia's military aggression as a violation of international law, Russia justified its use of force in the name of self-defense. Under these circumstances, the question became how Japan Platform was to comply with the four humanitarian principles, especially the principle of *independence*, in providing humanitarian assistance using government funds.

Secondly, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine attracted the attention of the Japanese media and the general public to an extent unmatched by other humanitarian crises that were simultaneously unfolding in other regions of the world. The fact that Japan Platform was able to secure a budget of over 3.7 billion yen during the Initial Response Phase made it possible for the NGOs to operate on a large scale, but it also created a gap between the humanitarian

¹ UNHCR. 2022. Ukraine Situation Flash Update #1. March 8.

responses in Ukraine versus Myanmar, Afghanistan, and other countries. This posed a challenge to the Do No Harm principle in humanitarian work, especially how this could be considered placing “different values for different lives” in practice.

Thirdly, with the exception of one member NGO involved in the Initial Response Phase of this response program, none of the member NGOs had previous experience implementing projects in Ukraine and neighboring countries. Except for the member NGOs that are affiliated with international NGOs (INGOs), this was their first time having a project in Ukraine, working with a new partner organization whom they had never worked with before. In addition, Ministry of Foreign Affairs regulations dictated that no NGO staff of Japanese nationality enter Ukraine. In other words, most were to conduct the projects remotely managed with new partners at inexperienced project sites where they could not physically visit.

2. Objectives

In light of these new situations that this response program has faced, this review was conducted with the following objectives.

- 1) To review **what kind of attention was paid to the Humanitarian Principles (impartiality, neutrality, independence) and the Do No Harm principle and how these were observed** during the Initial Response Phase of the JAPAN PLATFORM Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, and to contribute to the formulation of future humanitarian assistance policies in areas of armed conflict.
- 2) To review the project implementation system and to contribute to the discussions on the **member NGOs’ remote project management policy and Japan Platform’s localization policy**.
- 3) To draw lessons for **Japan Platform’s program operations** in humanitarian crisis response to areas of armed conflict.

3. Methods

In order to fulfill the above objectives, the following methods were used.

- 1) Interviews with Overseas Organizations
 - a) Dr. Unni Krishnan
Global Humanitarian Director, Plan International (international NGO)
 - b) Dir. Miran Bengora
Director, Swiss Solidarity (Switzerland, intermediary support organization)
 - c) Dr. Markus Moke
Project/Quality Assurance, Aktion Deutschland Hilft (Germany, intermediary support organization)
- 2) Interview with an Expert
 - ① Dr. Yukie Osa

Professor, Rikkyo University; Chairperson of Association for Aid and Relief Japan (AAR Japan); Former Chairperson of Japan Platform

- 3) Interviews with the NGOs
 - a) Interviews with 6 member NGOs² that have implemented medical aid projects in Ukraine
- 4) Interviews and Questionnaire for JAPAN PLATFORM Committee Members and Emergency Response Division
 - a) Written questionnaire sent to and answered by Mr. Shusai Nagai, Chairperson of Japan Platform
 - b) Interviews with Mr. Ken Shimizu, member of Project Examination Committee, and Dr. Megumi Kuwana, member of Standing Committee
 - c) Interviews with Mr. Takeharu Takahashi, Secretary General and staffs of Emergency Response Division, Japan Platform (Ms. Yuko Shibata, Mr. Kazuyuki Tateno, and Ms. Seiko Tomizawa)
 - d) Interview with Mr. Toshio Matsuda, Director of the Non-Governmental Organizations Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs³
- 5) Reviews of Relevant Documents (including member NGO project proposals, program policies, and response plans)

4. Reviewer

Dr. Masako Ishii
Professor, Rikkyo University; Former Board of Director, Standing Committee member and Project Examination Committee member

5. Schedule

From October 2022 to January 2023

II. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Verifying Observance of the Humanitarian Principles (Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence) and the Principle of Do No Harm

² 6 member NGOs are GNJP (2 projects), IVY (2 projects), MDM (1 project), NICCO (1 project), PVB (2 projects), and PWJ (3 projects). See Table 1.

³ Questions (See Appendix 1) were sent in writing to the Non-Governmental Organizations Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and were answered in an interview. However, specifically with regard to Objective 1, the NGOs Cooperation Division has stated that its director could not respond on his own, and that if a response was necessary, then a formal question must be addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the NGOs Cooperation Division.

1.1 Observance of the Humanitarian Principles

Among the humanitarian principles, the four principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence are the main humanitarian principles that have been established since World War II, when the International Committee of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ICRC) took the lead in summarizing the principles of operation since the founding of the Red Cross. With the end of the Cold War, civic humanitarian organizations were confronted with new circumstances: complex armed conflicts that contained a mixture of international and internal armed conflicts, diversion of humanitarian supplies by armed groups, dominance of military organizations in providing humanitarian aid in dangerous settings, and the emerging challenges of civil-military relations. In light of these situations, the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and six international NGOs developed the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* (hereafter the *Code of Conduct*) in 1994. Of the ten articles of the *Code of Conduct*, articles 1 to 4 correspond to the four humanitarian principles. NGOs affiliated with JAPAN PLATFORM are required to sign the *Code of Conduct*. In other words, JAPAN PLATFORM is required to adhere to these four humanitarian principles in the implementation of all of its projects.

In JAPAN PLATFORM's response to the Ukraine humanitarian crisis, what kind of attention was paid to these four humanitarian principles and how were they observed? The following discussion will focus on impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

1.2 Impartiality

Code of Conduct, Article 2:

Aid is given regardless of the race, creed, or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind.

1.2.1. Beneficiary and Site Selection

During the Initial Response Phase, 11 projects by 7 member NGOs were developed in neighboring countries and 12 projects by 7 member NGOs in Ukraine. One NGO developed its first project in a neighboring country and then moved its next project to Ukraine in order to provide assistance to those in greater need (See Table 1).

With the projects within Ukraine, since Japanese staff were not allowed to enter the country, target beneficiaries and sites was initially selected by partner organizations, with final decisions made in consultation with the JAPAN PLATFORM member NGOs. In the midst of an ongoing war and ever-changing circumstances, it was difficult to determine the appropriateness of the target beneficiaries and sites in terms of overall needs and to confirm them against objective facts. (Recommendations regarding this will be discussed in Section 3.3.3. of this report.)

1.2.2. Regional Differences

The situation differed greatly between the neighboring countries (11 projects by 7 member

NGOs) and western Ukraine (6 projects by 6 member NGOs), versus eastern and southern regions of Ukraine (9 projects by 6 member NGOs) where the risk of shelling was ever present. Under these circumstances, there is no doubt that the people in the eastern and southern regions are the most in need of assistance. However, in these same regions, with safety being the top priority, it was not feasible to gather enough information beforehand and the partner organizations just had to be trusted to carry out their projects under uncertain circumstances.

In project sites facing great danger, there is a trade-off between security and precision in project planning. In particular, humanitarian assistance in the midst of developing armed conflicts requires program management based on conflict analysis of individual project sites. Therefore, it is possible that Japan Platform did not adequately take into account the different levels of risk of the project sites in their program management.

1.2.3. Gender and Minority Considerations

In Ukraine, with the exception of the eastern part of the country, there did not seem to be much need for consideration of the social divisions triggered by the war⁴. On the other hand, since most of the displaced persons to neighboring countries were women and children, gender considerations and consideration for minorities, such as the Roma people, were necessary.

Gender considerations were made in projects targeting displaced persons in neighboring countries. On the other hand, medical assistance projects in Ukraine targeted hospitals and other medical facilities were essentially based on the assumption that patients would be accepted without discrimination. With regards to the minority considerations, the special attention needs to be paid in continuing this response program, such as whether minorities are excluded from the support or not. To ensure that aid is delivered without discrimination, activities such as the establishment of a mechanism for collecting opinions [Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Commitment 5] and deeper learning of the situations in the target regions among staff and organizations (CHS Commitment 7) would be desired.

1.2.4. Considerations for Ukrainians Displaced on the Russian Side of the Border

On the Russian side of the border, there were one million displaced Ukrainians as of June 2022⁵, and three million as of October 2022⁶. This situation was noted by some Japan Platform committee members but was never confirmed by the committee. The reason for this was the impracticality of implementing projects on the Russian side. However, there was a possibility that the situation on the Russian side was not taken into account in the first place, being

⁴ The interview results do not indicate that certain ethnic groups, such as Russian speakers, were being marginalized by Ukrainian society in the wake of the war. However, this point continues to require attention.

⁵ Vorobyov, Niko. 2022. Ukrainians in Russia align with Moscow but lament refugee camps: More than a million Ukrainians have sought shelter in Russia since the war began. *Aljazeera*. June 17. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/17/ukrainians-in-russia-blame-european-governments-for-ongoing-war> Accessed January 20, 2023.

⁶ UNHCR. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> Accessed January 20, 2023.

influenced by the prevailing perspective in the West, including Japan, which appealed for relief for Ukrainians as victims of this war. From the principle of impartiality, Japan Platform should have paid attention to the movement of persons fleeing to the Russian side of the border, taking into account that the situation may change depending on the course of the war.

1.3. Neutrality

***Conduct of Conduct, Article 3:
Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.***

Humanitarian assistance to Ukraine was provided during an ongoing armed conflict. As such, humanitarian aid organizations must be wary of military diversion of aid supplies. The three Western organizations I interviewed were particularly mindful of this point, even refusing to provide bulletproof vests when asked to do so.

Japan Platform member NGOs also ensured that distributed medical supplies were not diverted to military use through various means, such as signing MOUs with partner organizations (PWJ), having confirmation by locally stationed international (non-Japanese national) staff (PWJ), selecting hospitals for civilians (IVY, PBV), confirming via photos and videos (GNJP, PBV, IVY), frequently confirming the course of daily operations (IVY), managing relief supplies in a separate warehouse (NICCO), and coordinating with mayors and other government officials (NICCO, PWJ).

On the other hand, since it was not possible to physically enter the project sites and directly confirm the situation, there were inevitable limitations in confirming the final beneficiaries of the distributed supplies and the effects of their use, whether diverted to military use or not.

Some member NGOs expressed concern about whether the treatment of wounded and sick soldiers in the hospitals to which they provided medical assistance would violate the principle of neutrality. However, since the Geneva Conventions stipulate the protection of "wounded and sick members of the armed forces," this should not be a cause for concern.

1.4. Independence

***Conduct of Conduct, Article 4:
We shall endeavor not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.***

In response to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese government has expressed its diplomatic position condemning Russia. Under the principle of independence, member NGOs should not align themselves with the Japanese government's position. That is, attention should be paid to ensure that government-funded projects by member NGOs under the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program do not become instruments of diplomacy for the Japanese government. However, it is difficult to say that sufficient attention has been paid to this principle of independence.

The opinion that attention should be paid to this principle of independence was raised at the

Project Examination Committee on May 20, 2022, and the importance of confirming the humanitarian principles was discussed within the Working Group (of NGOs participating in this response program) and the Program Strategy Meeting. However, while the issues were shared by the JAPAN PLATFORM Secretariat with the Working Group, they were not confirmed at the Program Strategy Meeting nor with the Standing Committee. On one occasion, during a project review, a member NGO was asked to "wave the Japanese flag," indicating a lack of awareness of the principle of independence.

Member NGOs were *not* unaware of the humanitarian principles. However, they did not discuss issues pertaining to them with Japan Platform. This was because the NGOs felt that: 1) there was low likelihood that a project would be implemented on the Russian side of the border anyway; 2) even if private funds were used, Ministry of Foreign Affairs would not allow for a project on the Russian side; and 3) when implementing any project with Japan Platform, they would have to act as a GONGO (government-organized non-governmental organization). Practically speaking, as the NGOs have said, the feasibility of projects on the Russian side was low, so even if they had confirmed and discussed this principle of independence, the actual situation would not have changed. However, there is a significant difference between having confirmed the principle of independence and then determining that projects could not be implemented on the Russian side versus not having confirmed this principle at all in the first place.

What we see in the second and third opinions above is this sense of resignation that it is too difficult to guarantee independence as long as they are implementing projects with Japan Platform. It is also possible that they were psychologically more prone to avoid anything that could become obstacles in obtaining government funds, where raising issues with the government was seen as a potential obstacle.

In the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, Japan Platform's own Standing Committee should have confirmed 1) whether government funds can be used on the Russian side, and 2) if they could not, then how private funds are to be utilized. Even if the condition was imposed that the government funds can be used only on the Ukrainian side of the border, uncritical use of such funds may violate the principle of independence.

The three Western organizations that I interviewed for this review were also providing aid only on the Ukrainian side at the time of the interviews. Just like Japan Platform, they considered developing projects on the Russian side unrealistic and did not take them into consideration. On the other hand, they work under the assumption that they would not be subject to any donor restrictions with regard to where the projects would be implemented. In contrast, some government funds that were to be contributed to Japan Platform could not be utilized in the past for diplomatic reasons, such as for the Emergency Response to IDPs in the Southern Philippines Program⁷ (June-September 2017) and the Emergency Response for Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar 2021 Program⁸ (October 2021-May 2022).

⁷ As there were internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the southern Filipino island of Mindanao, the initial plan was to utilize emergency reserves in launching a response. However, when the Japanese Embassy in Manila informed that the Philippine government did not need foreign assistance, it became impossible to mobilize this response using government funds.

⁸ Following the coup d'état in February 2021, two NGOs launched an emergency initial assessment in June of the same year, and a letter of intent to mobilize a response program was submitted in August.

In July 2011, the Japanese government formulated the *Humanitarian Aid Policy of Japan*,⁹ which outlines humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence as the basic principles of humanitarian assistance. The principle of independence is defined here by the Japanese government as “providing humanitarian assistance while maintaining autonomy, uncontrolled by any political, economic, military, or other positions.” According to Dr. Yukie Osa, this concept of autonomy was originally defined in the UN General Assembly Resolution "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations" in September 2003, and the Japanese government has followed suit. It does not mean that it is independent of the governments or authorities of the countries concerned, so this definition is different in meaning from the independence outlined in the *Code of Conduct*.¹⁰

In accordance with the *Humanitarian Aid Policy of Japan*, the Government of Japan does not restrict government funding to areas where serious humanitarian crises are occurring as long as no diplomatic problems arise. Strictly speaking, as the principle of independence defined by the Japanese government is different from its counterpart in the *Code of Conduct*, it is assumed that government funding to Japan Platform is subject to diplomatic concerns. In light of this situation, in providing humanitarian assistance in areas of armed conflict, it will be necessary to strategically position private funding as a guarantee of independence from diplomacy.

However, the problem is that approximately 90% of the Japan Platform's operating expenses are government funds (as of 2019),¹¹ and it is especially difficult to attract private funding for humanitarian assistance in areas of armed conflict where this principle of independence looms as an issue. As such, there is little room for NGOs to ensure *Code of Conduct's* definition of independence at Japan Platform through private funding, posing significant challenges in the observance of this principle.

From the Russian side, it may well seem that a particular political viewpoint is being promoted when the Japanese government's position is in condemnation of Russia and when Japanese assistance is only provided on the Ukrainian side. However, it seems that there was insufficient awareness of these objective situations among some regarding this response program at Japan Platform.

1.5. Do No Harm: Different Values for Different Lives

While government funds of approximately 3.2 billion yen have been allocated to the Ukraine

However, due to concerns that providing cross-border assistance to Thailand and Myanmar would become a diplomatic issue, no government funds were provided, and the program was funded by private funds of approximately 30 million yen.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. "Humanitarian Aid Policy of Japan" 「我が国の人道支援方針」, July 1, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/jindo/jindoushien1_1.html Accessed January 20, 2023.

¹⁰ Osa, Yukie. 2017. "A Study on the Concept of 'Independence' Regarding Humanitarian Assistance" 「人道支援をめぐる『独立』概念をめぐる一考察」 *Journal of Humanitarian Studies* 6: 40-54..

¹¹ Shibata, Yuko, and Masako Ishii. 2022. "Japan Platform (JPF)" in *The Century of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance: New Responses to Conflicts, Disasters, and Crises* 『緊急人道支援の世紀：紛争・災害・危機への新たな対応』 Edited by Seiji Utsumi, Megumi Kuwana, and Kensuke Onishi: Nakanishiya Shoten. P. 121.

Humanitarian Crisis Program, the 2021 Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis Program was temporarily suspended even though it was a similarly severe humanitarian crisis happening at the same time. Regarding this suspension, all NGOs interviewed agreed that this was contrary to the principle of Do No Harm, as it does implicate harm when placing “different values for different lives.” In fact, some NGOs were careful in ensuring that the use of their own funds would not make the organization's activities contribute to "different values for different lives.”

On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took a position where it included the Japanese Embassy in Myanmar in its consideration of Japan Platform’s response program for Myanmar. The conclusion was that it could not contribute government funds to this response at the start of the program because of concerns that it might worsen diplomatic relations.

Also, it must be noted that another critical issue was raised. Concern was expressed regarding “different values for different lives” regarding international staff with Japanese nationality not being allowed to enter Ukraine, while their counterparts without Japanese nationality could.

1.6. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)

With regard to the *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)*, the Japan Platform project proposal form has a section for describing how CHS will be implemented. Many organizations state that they will “manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner” (CHS 5.3), but in reality, no complaints are received, with requests only being raised from time to time.

1.7. Recommendations

In humanitarian assistance in the midst of ongoing armed conflicts, program operations need to take into account the level of risk at the project sites. Special attention needs to be given to safety assurance as well as to uncertainty and risks resulting from it.

I recommend that the Standing Committee confirm whether government funds are subject to diplomatic constraints in providing humanitarian assistance in areas of armed conflict, and if so, how the four humanitarian principles can be observed.

If government funds are subject to diplomatic constraints, the use of private funds in areas of armed conflict should be strategically differentiated from government funds. Never have private funds for an area of armed conflict been raised as much as they have for the humanitarian response to Ukraine. As such, measures are required on how exactly to appeal to businesses circle and the general public for donations.

Regarding CHS 5.3, a suggestion was made to have the Japan Platform Secretariat serve as a point of contact for receiving complaints and requests from beneficiaries, since beneficiaries are reluctant to complain directly to the relief-providing organizations. Establishing a contact point at Japan Platform to collect beneficiaries' opinions will not only lead to observance of the principle of impartiality, but it would also serve effectively as an anti-fraud mechanism. However, it would require an increase in the number of staff in Japan Platform’s Emergency

Response Division.

2. Remote Operations and Localization

2.1 Collaborations with Partner Organizations

Of the six organizations interviewed, all but five of their projects – one with MDM and four with GNJP – were with first-time partner organizations.

When it comes to how the partner organizations were selected, some were through personal connections [IVY, NICCO, PBV], others were found on the web [PWJ], and yet others were connected through an inquiry for support that they received via e-mail [one project with GNJP].

Regardless of whether it was a personal connection or not, NGOs working with their first-time partners proceeded to carefully verify the capacity of the partner organization in the following ways: 1) conducting a small-scale trial of the first project with their own funds [PWJ], 2) having a concept paper prepared in order to assess the current situations and administrative capacity [GNJP], and 3) explaining CHS to the organization [IVY]. As a result of such careful verification, the projects were completed without major problems.

2.2. Problems Regarding Not Being Able to Enter Ukraine

Partner organizations had higher expertise and were more professional than expected. They had a comparative advantage over Japan Platform member NGOs in terms of language skills and security management, so the member NGOs were able to delegate their activities in Ukraine to these partner organizations. Within the discussion on localization, this proves that even when working with a new organization at a new project site, it is possible to delegate a part of the decision-making authority for the operation of the project if certain conditions are confirmed.

On the other hand, it is not a sufficient condition for international staff to not be physically present at the aid site even if a certain partner organization has a comparative advantage in project management and part of the decision-making authority for project management can be delegated. Site visits and on-site collaborations are indispensable even in supporting the aid project from afar, as well as in understanding the situations on the ground, building relationships and trust, and in explaining the project to donors.

2.3 Recommendations

In the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, it was proven possible to implement a remotely managed project with a first-time partner at an inexperienced project site where direct on-site observations could not be made. This was a result of member NGOs carefully assessing the competence of partners, building trust, and proceeding with the project, as indicated in Section 2.1 above. On the other hand, it was also confirmed that in localizing projects, by no means

does it mean that member NGOs do not have to go to the field.

As Japan Platform moves in the direction of localization, it is important to review its own roles once again. The Japanese government has expected Japan Platform since its establishment that it serves as the platform for: 1) Japanese NGOs providing “aid with a face” (Japanese visibility and presence) and 2) Japanese NGOs providing prompt initial response activities (i.e., strengthening the capacity of Japanese NGOs)¹².

Regarding the first point, the Non-Governmental Organizations Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that visibility of Japanese NGOs continues to be the expectation. On the other hand, they added that they also fully understand that localization has become a global trend in recent years and that the NGOs have strong requests for it as well. Hence, they are continuing discussions as to how feasible it is to proceed with localization. On the part of Japan Platform, it would be necessary to negotiate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the revision of the term “Japanese NGOs” when promoting localization.

Regarding the latter expectation, the experience and scale of Japan Platform member NGOs vary widely, and some of them do need capacity building. In the case of the Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis Program, a smaller NGO that was operating abroad for the first time had a lot of difficulties, especially in their first project, due to the trial-and-error processes.

Swiss Solidarity and Aktion Deutschland Hilft (ADH) are intermediary support organizations, just like Japan Platform, but they have stricter membership requirements for NGOs, and only NGOs with high expertise are eligible for funding. In contrast, Japan Platform allows NGOs to join as long as they meet certain structural conditions.

At Japan Platform, member NGOs are divided into four categories based on organizational structure, experience, and other factors. The categories are currently only applied in setting different grant ceilings. However, with more than 20 years having passed since its establishment, Japan Platform may be at the stage where it needs to distinguish NGOs with ample experience in management of their projects from those with limited experience, and perhaps start applying these categories to conditions other than grant amounts, such as in how simple project reviews can be or the degree of localization allowed in project implementation.

On the other hand, applying these categories to other conditions would require careful consideration as it would change Japan Platform's approach that emphasizes equality among member NGOs. Now, in promoting localization, it may be worth considering a system akin to the Living Together Fund, an entirely privately funded program within Japan Platform's response program to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. In this scheme, Japan Platform Secretariat provided small grants directly to local organizations that met certain conditions. In order to realize this using government funds and for aid efforts overseas, it would be necessary to review the aforementioned “Japanese NGOs” phase and condition as well.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2001. “Financial Contributions to the Japan Platform” 「ジャパン・プラットフォームに対する資金拠出について」 July 31.
https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/jisseki/keitai/kinkyu/010731_1.html Accessed January 20, 2023.

3. Lessons Learned on JAPAN PLATFORM Program Operations

3.1. Issues in Program Policy and Decision Making

It must be noted that the Program Direction for this Initial Response Phase was approved by the Standing Committee on May 20, while the Response Plan for the Emergency Response Phase was not approved by the Standing Committee but was submitted to e-mail deliberations and approved by the Project Examination Committee. In addition, the delay in developing and approving the Response Plan for the Emergency Response Phase created a 10-day gap between September 22, when the Initial Response Phase ended, and October 3, when the Emergency Response Phase began. As a result, the Initial and Emergency Response Phases were not seamlessly connected, and some NGO projects had to be suspended.

The "Organization of Procedures for Each Event" (Japan Platform Secretariat, May 22, 2020) needs to be reviewed to determine which committee will make decisions related to program policies and to organize them for all concerned parties. In addition, those whose voices have been included in this review have expressed regret on the lack of a seamless connection between the phases, so an increased sense of responsibility and urgency will be required.

3.2. Recommendations

Presented below are the recommendations based on the above reflections on the project review procedures.

3.2.1. Reviewing the Project Proposal Format

In formulating the project proposal, a format is provided to ensure consistency. The project list shows that more time was required at the stage where the Secretariat organizes the proposals. Therefore, I recommend that Secretariat and NGOs review the necessary items to be specified in the format again.

3.2.2. Cautions Regarding Projects Formed Via Personal Connections

When an NGO formulates a project based on personal connections, more questions tend to be asked about it at the Project Examination Committee. In this case, from the standpoint of validity, it is warranted that the project in question should be checked to see if it is not created out of sheer nepotism. However, one must note that projects that rely on nepotistic connections are not uncommon in inexperienced project sites, such as in the case of Ukraine, and may in fact be desirable from the perspective of trust. On the other hand, in such cases, special attention should be paid to the description of validity, including the position of the project concerned in the overall crisis situation and the presentation of the need for the project based on objective data.

3.2.3. How to Incorporate Uncertainty into Project Proposals

Projects in the midst of an ongoing armed conflict, such as the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, involve uncertainty. Japan Platform, which provides emergency humanitarian assistance, needs to reaffirm its agreement to acknowledge and support projects that involve uncertainty. NGOs are then required to carefully state the reality of the uncertainty in project proposals without concealing it. An important part of this process is the detailed description of risk analysis. In other words, it is important to state what is not known and what has not yet been determined just as they are, explain how the risks are assumed, and how they will deal with those risks.

3.2.4. Reviewing the Project Review Committee

The number of Japan Platform's project has been on an ever-increasing trend since its establishment. For example, in Fiscal Year 2021, 147 projects were reviewed annually. Of these, 85 were submitted to the Project Examination Sub-committee, and 62 were deliberated by email. In other words, the Project Examination Committee is tasked with reviewing 12.25 project proposals each month, bearing additional burdens compared to in the past.

Naturally, there is difference in the difficulty and expertise involved in reviewing projects in response programs for armed conflict, such as the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Program, vis-à-vis those for natural disasters. One idea may be to divide the Project Review Committee broadly into these two groups, giving them different expertise and having this burden shared between the two.

3.2.5. Other Issues

There was a comment that the on-site monitoring by the Secretariat staff contributed greatly to the ease of project proposal reviews. Indeed, there is a limit to the amount of support that can be provided without knowing the actual situation on the ground. Monitoring site visits, accompanied by Secretariat staff and sometimes Standing Committee members or Project Examination Committee members, will help ensure effective project reviews. Q&A sessions are also effective in promoting mutual understanding and building trust between NGOs and Project Examination Committee members.

NGOs requested that Japan Platform disclose who is asking which questions at the Project Examination Committee and Project Examination Sub-committee (i.e. more transparency). However, this could jeopardize the position of the reviewers and, in turn, weaken the checking function. In general, committee members' names may be disclosed in the screening process but not the exact identity of the questioners, so meeting the NGOs' demands may prove difficult.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

For JAPAN PLATFORM, with more than 20 years of existence and ample experience in

responding to humanitarian crises around the world, responding to this particular humanitarian crisis in Ukraine was a major challenge. By reflecting on the response to a humanitarian crisis caused by war between states, we are reminded once again of the importance of affirming the humanitarian principles. As Japan Platform receives a large percentage of its operating expenses from government funds, it will need to reaffirm the difference between independence and autonomy as defined by the *Code of Conduct* (the former) and Japanese government (the latter) and develop strategies on how to ensure the principle of independence among its member NGOs. In addition, some aspects of organizational management need to be reviewed all the more because 20 years have passed.

As a final note, I must mention that because this review was conducted in accordance with the three objectives agreed upon in advance with the Japan Platform Secretariat, it does not examine Japan Platform's performance in detail. As such, it should be noted that this document shall not be taken as a review of program performance or outcomes.

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