

Giving and Volunteering among Filipinos¹

Ramon L. Fernan III

Introduction

The Philippine Nonprofit Sector Project was established in 1998 in order to study the local nonprofit sector and the giving and volunteering behavior that is the lifeblood of that sector. Part of this effort was the conduct of a survey in 1999 and 2000 in six areas around the country in order to determine the altruistic behavior of Filipinos and the motivation behind that behavior.

Background

Almost by definition, nonprofit organizations generally depend on the generosity of benefactors and on the support of volunteers in getting their work done. The largest nonprofit organization in the country, the Roman Catholic Church, depends significantly on private donations although it has real properties and other income-earning assets to supplement private giving. However, some church officials have recently floated the idea of requiring tithes from church members because of a supposed fall-off in church giving in recent years. Protestant and other non-Catholic churches and religious organizations, far smaller than the dominant Roman church, probably depend to an even greater extent on members' regular contributions for their operations. Foreign-based groups have also traditionally received significant subsidies from their mother churches.

Large health delivery institutions, such as hospitals, and educational institutions such as schools, rely on service fees for a large part of their revenues. Many of the country's older hospitals were established by church groups, while post-secondary education is largely a private sector endeavor, with religious groups also taking a lead role. These continue to thrive despite competition from private, for-profit enterprises and expanded government-provided services.

In the eighties, the apparent inability of government to deliver certain basic services, particularly at the community level, led to the establishment of small nonprofits calling themselves development-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and, later, civil society organizations (CSOs). Due to the difficult political conditions then existing, many of them also took on advocacy roles and were involved in community organizing and encouraging people's organizations as part of the growing movement to empower people. They became the darlings of the international philanthropic community, receiving liberal doses of foreign funds based partly on their perceived role as a counterweight to the authoritarian and ineffective Marcos regime.

Today, local nonprofit organizations are finding it more and more difficult to raise funds from their traditional foreign benefactors. New priorities have drawn the interest of donors elsewhere, but increased competition from other nonprofits and better government delivery of services are among other reasons for this change.

For nonprofit and voluntary organizations, a growing concern has been how to fill this gap that only promises to grow wider. The logical answer seems to be "from local sources," but that is obviously dependent on whether such resources are available and if they are of sufficient quantity as to be able to support the sector. Here we are speaking both of financial resources as well as human resources as they pertain to the following questions: Do Filipinos give to charitable and other nonprofit causes? Do they volunteer for such causes? To what specific causes are these resources now

¹ This is the revised version of a paper presented at the Fifth International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, 7-10 July 2002, Cape Town, South Africa.

directed? What are the prospects for increasing these resources over time and broadening the causes that they support?

The Project and Survey

The Philippine Nonprofit Sector Project is an effort to map the nonprofit and civil society sector in the Philippines and to understand the phenomenon of altruism among Filipinos as expressed in their giving and volunteering behaviors. This paper expounds on the results of the project's study of the giving and volunteering behavior of Filipinos and what this implies for the sector in terms of raising local resources.

The survey was conducted in six areas spread among the three major geographical divisions of the country over the period of several months in late 1999 and early 2000. The surveys occurred at a time of general economic slowdown. The repercussions from the financial crisis of 1997 were still being felt and drought was negatively impacting agricultural production, agriculture being the dominant source of livelihood for the majority outside the Metro Manila region. According to a World Bank report, between 1997 and 1998, a million people were added to the jobless ranks, and the unemployment rate rose from 10% to 13.3% (World Bank, May 2002). In 1997, three out of every four households considered themselves to be poor (Mangahas 1999, 3).

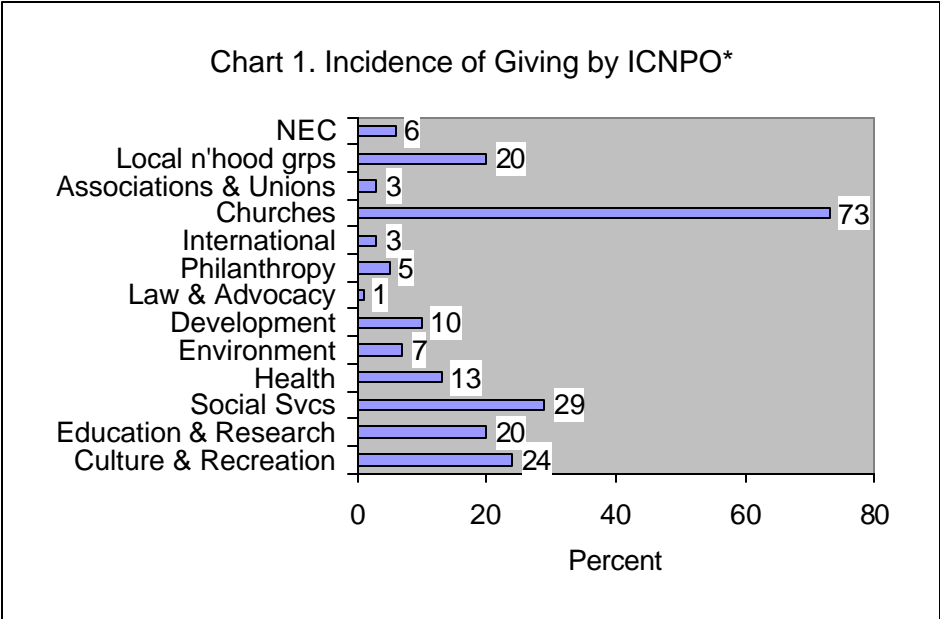
Giving Among Households²

Despite the economic slump, a high proportion of households claimed to have given in the past year. More than eight out of every ten (86%) households said they gave to organizations in the twelve months immediately prior to the survey (1998-99), while two out of three (74%) also gave directly to persons in need. This incidence is much higher than household giving in the United States where 75 percent is the norm (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996, 13).

This giving was directed primarily at churches with a 73 percent level of support (chart 1) and a 44 percent share in the total amount donated to organizations (chart 3). Churches traditionally depend on individual giving for a large portion of their revenues. The obligation to support the church, the Catholic Church in particular, is deeply embedded in the psyche of the Filipino masses even if this is manifested mainly in Sunday giving at mass, much of which probably comes out of spare change. For good measure, the church has a plethora of services covering its faithfuls' needs over their entire life cycle, services that are "paid" for by "voluntary donations."

The incidence of giving to other sectors pales in comparison to church giving. Less than a third (29 percent) of households also gave to social services organizations, while one out of four (24 percent) gave to culture and recreation groups. One of every five households (20 percent) gave to education and research, mostly local schools, as well as to the myriad neighborhood groups that tend to be crop up on occasion to address purely local concerns such as a religious feast, a sports competition, leisure and recreation activities, or peace and order problems. Rounding out these groups of recipients are those concerned with health (13 percent), and with development and housing issues (10 percent). These mostly community-based groups form a second level of recipients of giving, in contrast to a third group of nonprofits that have mandates that go beyond the confines of neighborhood or local community. This third group, consisting of environmental advocates, philanthropy promoters, professional associations and unions, and the like, benefited from the giving of less than 10 percent of households. From this pattern, it seems that people are still mostly worried about local concerns that affect them directly, and prefer to show their charity to organizations that address these issues. Organizations that go beyond the purely local and towards more abstract and policy-type issues tend to attract less individual giving.

² These are preliminary estimates based on my own calculations and do not carry the "official stamp" of the project.



*ICNPO = International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations

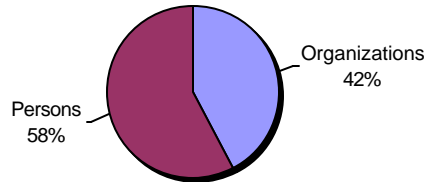
One popular perception about giving is that people give because they can afford to. What does “being able to afford to” mean? Surely, poor households are less able to afford to give. Yet household socio-economic classification information indicates that more than 80% of D and E households gave to charity in the past year, matching the rate among higher income households. Income becomes a constraint in the amount one is able to give but not, it seems, in the desire to do so.

The Amount of Giving

Total giving amounted to an estimated P32.184 billion (US\$631 million) with 42 percent of this amount going to organizations while 58 percent was given directly to persons in need (table 1 and chart 2). Thus, while relatively more people said they gave to organizations, the amount given was less than that provided directly to persons in need.

	Giving to orgns	Ave. per HH	Giving to persons	Ave. per HH	Total Giving	Ave. per HH
Pesos	13,634,448,095	893	18,549,761,961	1,214	32,184,210,056	2,107
US\$	267,342,120	18	363,720,823	24	631,062,942	41

Chart 2. Distribution of Giving Amounts by Beneficiary Type



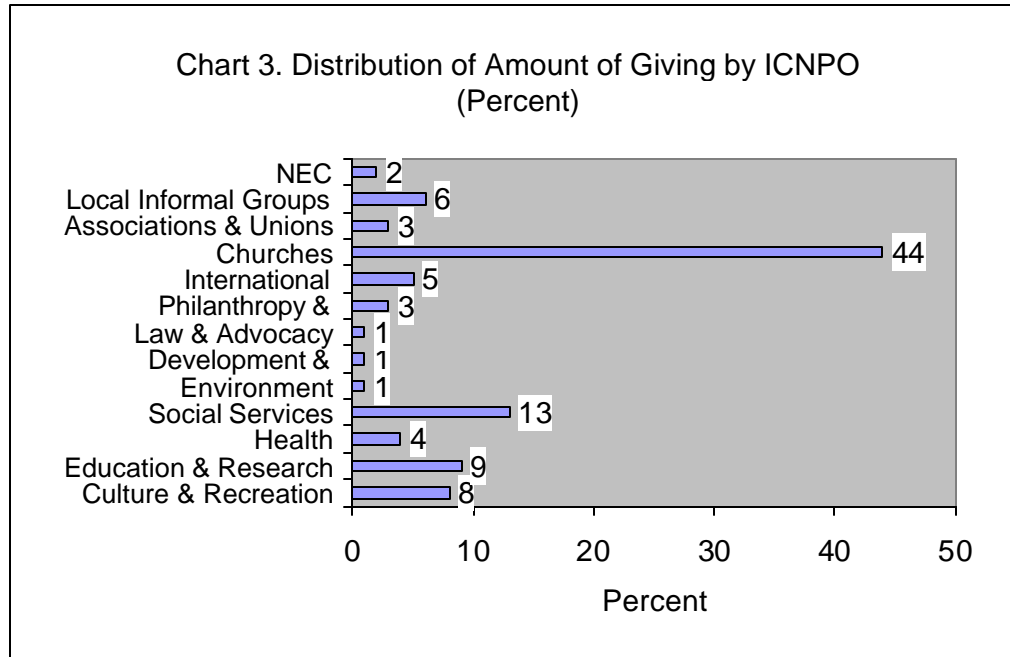
This amount of total giving represented 1.2 percent of the value of gross domestic product in 1998 and was about 18 percent of total government expenditures on social services for the same year. In comparison, giving in the United States was 2.1 percent of GNP in 2000, and between 0.63 and 0.77 percent of GDP in the United Kingdom. The relatively lower giving in the UK is attributed to the fact that the state is expected to take care of its needy citizens whereas this is less true in the U.S. (Wright 2001, 401). No state welfare system exists in the Philippines and families are often expected to take care of less fortunate relations, however distant they may be. This familial welfare system also often encompasses “friends.”

Average giving per household was just a tad over P2,100 (US\$41). Out of this, P1,214 (US\$24) on average went directly to persons in need while an average of P893 (US\$18) was given to organizations. Household charity amounted to 1.8 percent of average family income in 1997. Family income sustains many more than just the core family members or even the already extended families that are common in many households.

Of the total amount given to organizations, 44 percent or almost P6 billion went to churches and other places of worship with the bulk going to the Catholic Church to which 80% of Filipinos belong. Social services groups received 13 percent or about P1.8 billion of donations. It seems that even the small yet regular contributions of members total to significant amounts for churches, a point that should not be lost on other nonprofits. However, only those organizations that have broad appeal and that are able to mobilize massive numbers in support of its cause or causes can hope to replicate these kinds of numbers. It is no wonder then that even newly established religious charismatic movements, often attracting members from the lower socio-economic classes, have had relatively good success in soliciting donations. Only social service organizations seem to be in a position to currently capture a significant amount of charitable giving from the general public. Many other nonprofit organizations, particularly those in advocacy work, currently depend on foreign grants.

Despite this rather highly skewed donation profile, the Catholic Church has recently complained about a fall off in giving and has aired the possibility of imposing tithes on its members. This is probably less an indication of diminution in the total amount of giving to the sector than the result of more competition, particularly from religious charismatic movements that have become popular within the last decade or so. The fact that these movements thrive with mainly D and E household support is also revealing.

On the other hand, there is reason to be optimistic about the nonprofit sector. A potentially substantial base of support exists, especially should economic and political reforms result in greater income equity. Nonprofits must learn how to establish their niche in this market and endeavor to tap the resources that are available even now.

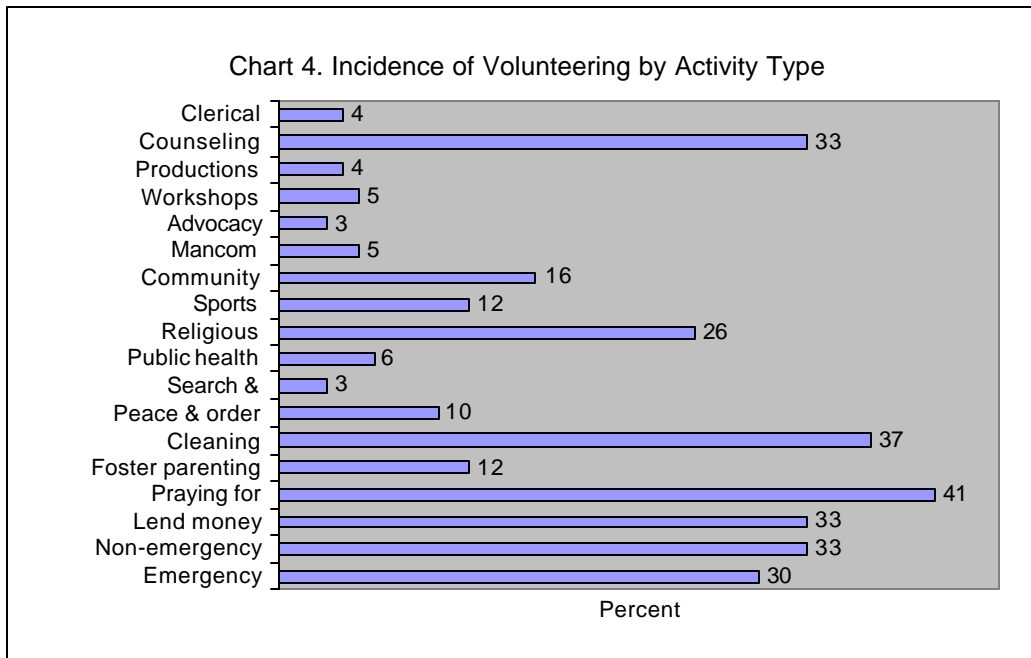


Volunteering

Three of every four Filipinos 13 years old and over volunteered in the past year (1998-99, based on 1999 population estimates). This is significantly higher than the incidence of volunteering in other countries, notably in developed countries such as the US (56%), Canada (31%) and the UK (48%).

Before initiating this survey, the project staff conducted focus group discussions in order to discover what activities Filipinos considered to be “volunteering.” Among the fairly common activities identified as volunteering were two that stood out – “praying for someone” and “lending money without interest.” Both are curious concepts that do not appear in conventional (i.e., Western) descriptions of volunteering. It may help to think of these two activities as partly stemming from how Filipinos popularly regard volunteering, that is, an act that involves actually helping out someone in need rather than being merely the generic manifestation of an inner compulsion to be charitable. In the case of praying for someone, this assistance takes on a purely religious form, not surprising in a country that stubbornly clings to the legacy of four hundred years of Spanish Catholicism.

This act of praying is a purposive act as it involves taking the time to invoke divine intervention for someone who needs assistance. Its popularity may also be attributed to the fact that it involves relatively little cost – the few minutes it takes to say the prayer. This had the highest incidence among all the activities identified as volunteering with a 41 percent share (see chart 4).



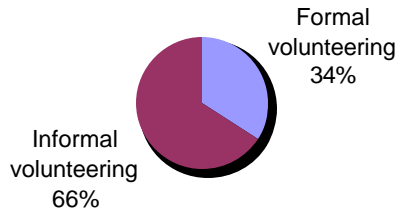
Lending money is also an act of assisting someone in need, with 33 percent of respondents saying they engaged in this activity. Apparently, people consider this to be a form of charity even though the money lent out is eventually returned. In an environment where poverty is still widespread or where cash flow is a problem, having to borrow money is quite common. Ordinarily, lending money, particularly without any collateral, is a money-making activity, more associated with loan sharking rather than with altruistic behavior. Therefore, in contrast to the exploitative nature of loan sharking, the logic of lending money without interest is helping someone in need without extracting a payment or penalty while involving some cost to the lender, thus a form of charity.

The other volunteering activities that had significant incidence levels were community cleaning (37 percent), helping someone in non-emergency situations, and counseling (all 33 percent), and assisting in emergency situations (30 percent). About a fourth of volunteers helped in organizing community religious activities (26 percent).

The weighted mean hours volunteered per week is 6.7 hours. This is significantly higher than that recorded for northern countries. These hours are heavily weighted by the type of activities that Filipinos say they volunteer for, particularly those types that are done informally, that is, done for persons rather than organizations. In particular, volunteering by "praying for someone" pushed the hours up significantly. Volunteering activities were also classified into formal (for organizations) and informal (for persons) volunteering. Chart 5 shows that volunteering for individual persons made up about two-thirds of all volunteering activities. Formal volunteering averaged just under five hours per week while informal volunteering averaged 8.2 hours per week.³

³ Formal volunteering activities are: community cleaning, peace and order, search and rescue, public health, religious activities, community sports, community festivities, management committee work, advocacy, workshops, doing production and performance, and administrative work. Informal activities include helping someone in both emergency and non-emergency situations, praying for someone, lending money without interest, foster parenting, and counseling.

Chart 5. Incidence of Volunteering, by type



Profiling Volunteers

Volunteering tends to be high among all respondents regardless of age and education, although high school and college graduates tend to have slightly higher volunteering rates. There also seems to be a slightly higher proportion of volunteers among older respondents, that is, those thirty years and old and above compared to those younger. The surveys were conducted among respondents as young as 13 years old, that is, beginning high school students, since formal volunteering tends to begin in schools at this level. Metro Manila volunteers tended to be slightly older than the average. In all areas, volunteering appears to be just as appealing among men as among women.

Volunteering is higher among those who regularly attend religious services (at least once a week) compared to those who do not. In fact, volunteering corresponds positively with the frequency of such attendance. It is also higher among those who are married than those never married. Volunteering is also more common among members of an organization compared to non-members. About 25 percent of the population 13 years old and over are members of voluntary organizations.

Beneficiaries of Volunteering

As with giving, volunteering among Filipinos tend to show their charity first and foremost towards persons they know, either members of the family or friends. Helping out relations, no matter how distant, or friends is, in fact, considered a social and personal obligation. The third most popular beneficiary of volunteering are victims of calamities. The personal nature of volunteering (as well as giving) can also be inferred from the type of activities volunteers say they do, with those activities principally benefiting persons directly being the most popular (the informal types).

Defining Giving and Volunteering Close to Home

This personal nature of charity among Filipinos can also be gleaned from the way they define the acts of giving and volunteering. This came out first at the focused group discussions conducted prior to the surveys as respondents named activities not traditionally associated with the received concept of volunteering. The two that stood out were: praying for someone and lending money without

interest. Praying for someone can be regarded as the easiest way that a Filipino can express his or her altruism while at the same time keeping it couched in the religious terms that are commonly associated with good works among people steeped in Christianity. It is difficult to put this activity in secular terms for the object of that prayer is often to ask for divine intervention regarding that person's welfare. The question is, what is the cost (or the pain) involved in praying for someone if it is true that altruism indeed involves some cost to the do-gooder?

Another form of charitable act that seems popular among Filipinos is the giving of advice, or counseling. In contrast to the usual western concept where counseling is a professional activity, giving counsel to persons is something that is freely asked and freely given among Filipinos. It is someone's experience that counts in evaluating who can be a good counselor, rather than the presence of a university degree.

While offering or sharing something tangible is central to the idea of giving, an emotional "hook" is also associated with the concept. People are expected to show concern or sympathize with someone's less fortunate plight. Feeling compassion for someone is often enough especially when the sympathizer has nothing of material value to share. Respondents in the focus groups said that the intention to help is just as important and, in fact, "completes the act of giving."

It seems that praying for someone (in the broadest sense rather than just the Christian one), lending money without interest, and counseling or giving advice are traditional ways of helping others that have been carried forward into the present and persist despite the intrusion of similar western concepts albeit imbued with the aura of professional services (with their corresponding professional fees). Understandably, these types of assistance are generally directed towards people known to the provider. Unlike within the professional context and even other forms of giving and volunteering wherein assistance is given in the most generic and anonymous of terms, these traditional forms of assistance developed within the close knit communities of pre-Hispanic settlements where everyone was related to each other in one way or another.

The Role of Culture and Tradition

It is clear that people perceive giving and volunteering in the broadest possible sense, and that represents a problem in trying to measure one form of altruistic behavior against another. It also makes it difficult to make cross-cultural comparisons when people's perceptions differ so markedly or are so culture-bound. Handy, et al. (2000, 46) address the measurement aspect of this problem by proposing a net-cost approach but the problem goes beyond this one dimension. Culture and tradition also clearly play a part in how people define altruistic behavior

In a country where over half of the population consider themselves to be poor⁴, altruism is alive. Much of this altruism is directed towards assisting people known to the giver. The giving of alms also continues to be a popular way for expressing altruism despite laws prohibiting mendicancy. Even giving to institutions is often facilitated by personal ties between donor and solicitor.

Only in religious giving is this personal mediation superfluous. Four hundred years of religious upbringing with a heavy dose of Catholic guilt conditions this behavior. There is also no denying that churches have continued to be major providers of community services and, therefore, to be a major presence in communities, particularly in the poor and rural areas. Otherwise, people's charity appears to be primarily directed at family members and friends, and, to a certain extent, towards the immediate community.

There is a problem with this definition when taken in the context of philanthropy and charitable giving as they are commonly understood in the West and that is that altruism is supposed to benefit some public good. However, specific forms of direct giving and informal volunteering appear to

⁴ While official government statistics cite a poverty incidence of 33% (NSCB 2002), a recent poll shows that 58% of the people perceive themselves to be poor.

have only private benefits without the impact on the broader public good that is called for (Wright 2001, 402).

It is noteworthy that volunteering for specifically political goals or advocacies received little mention. It is true that the surveys occurred before the events of early 2001 that led to the ouster of former President Joseph Estrada. Still, it would seem that political activism should attract a bevy of volunteers considering its recent dramatic effects on several societies. It may be that participation in these events leading to more organized civic involvement and volunteering is true only to a limited extent. Just listen to the complaint about lack of political consciousness among young people heard from the activists of the protest years of the seventies and eighties.

Impact on Third Sector Organizations

Despite the high incidence of charitable giving, much of it appears to be giving in relatively small amounts. Only institutions with broad mass appeal, most prominently religious organizations, have any chance of raising significant amounts of money in this manner, as the popularity of religious charismatic movements has shown, a popularity concentrated among lower income households. Protestant and other non-Roman Catholic churches appear to be getting by on members' tithes although some of them probably receive support from mother churches or affiliates in the richer countries. The Catholic Church generates significant incomes from property as well as certain income-earning enterprises. However, it has recently chafed a bit about a supposed falling off in giving by its faithful, so much so that it floated the idea of tithing as a way of forcing its members to give more. Large nonprofits, specifically schools and hospitals, depend on fees for their income. Other nonprofits, particularly those with less immediately tangible products or services, such as advocacy groups, social service groups, and development and environmental NGOs, depend mostly on government as well as private, mostly foreign-sourced, grants for their sustenance. Little or no funds are raised from the general public by these nonprofits. For them to fundraise successfully, they will probably need to address their appeals to particular segments that can afford to give more than the cursory weekly collection box offering at church on Sundays. Otherwise, they will have to come up with a strategy that would dramatically broaden their appeal.

In order to increase formal volunteering, nonprofit organizations would have to channel people's willingness to volunteer towards more organized activities. One way of doing so is to get more people to become members of voluntary organizations, as these tend to volunteer more than non-members, particularly in areas outside Luzon. Organized volunteer efforts may also have broader and more lasting impacts on society compared to the highly personal nature of direct giving. There appears to be some pick up in this area as corporations eager to display their civic side sponsor voluntary efforts in house building and environmental clean-up and conservation⁵. It remains to be seen whether these efforts can be sustained beyond short-term public relations benefits.

Concluding Remarks

Despite being a relatively poor⁶, Filipinos are able to support a significant third sector presence. According to project estimates, there exist some 213,000 nonprofit organizations in the country. As in other countries, the majority of these are small, local groups that address neighborhood or community concerns, particularly in social services. Other than the historical inclination to give to religious causes, Filipinos tend to support those groups that produce immediate, tangible benefits and that keep the bonds of community alive. There is purpose in even this apparently random sort of giving.

⁵ Among those with recently active recruitment programs are Habitat for Humanity, Hands-On Manila and several corporate foundations.

⁶ Poverty incidence among families in 1997 was 32%. There is a national sweepstakes and lottery that collects and disburses substantial sums of money to select charities but this type of "giving" was not specifically included in the survey nor did respondents volunteer to cite this as being a part of their giving behavior.

Filipinos also tend to express their charity in a personal way, preferring to share time and resources directly with persons in need, many of whom they probably also know personally or are at least familiar with. In fact, personal networks that take this penchant for a personal, or at least familiar, connection into account often facilitate formal fundraising. Channeling more resources towards this more “formal” segment means having to find a way around this particular trait.

Currently, giving is primarily directed at religious groups and churches. Diversifying the recipients of giving would be a way to channel resources to other organizations struggling to deliver other services. Historically speaking, giving to the church was not purely made out of religious fervor. During the Spanish colonial period, the Catholic Church pretty much served as the social services arm of the colonial government, providing for education, health and other needs. This virtual monopoly was broken during the American colonial period when secularization of such services became a backbone of colonial policy, but church-provided services remain widespread to this day. Only in the last two decades has the non-church component of the sector exploded, not just in terms of the number of nonprofits created but also in the variety of services offered⁷. These NGOs and other nonprofits have depended heavily on foreign benefactors. They must now find a way to wean people away from church giving towards a broader altruism that acknowledges the diversity of the sector.

Could people increase their level of giving? Given the situation in other countries as a guide, giving incidence seems to be already quite high. On the other hand, there may be some leeway in raising the amount of money given to charity, if evidence from Thailand is any indication: Thais apparently give more per capita than Filipinos.⁸ This can only come from increased giving by middle and upper income groups. Otherwise, for total giving to increase significantly, the general level of incomes must rise first.



⁷ According to project estimates, close to 90% of nonprofits were established the last 20-25 years.

⁸ While results were obtained only for AB households by the survey conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration, it seems reasonable to make this generalization.

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