

Masa Kogure, Director of TABLE FOR TWO International

# Social Entrepreneurship – an Adventure for Young Japanese in the 21st Century

By Japan SPOTLIGHT Editorial Section

Japanese entrepreneur Masahisa Kogure talks about his NPO, TABLE FOR TWO International, a new bridge between the rich and the poor. Mr. Kogure, a former McKinsey consultant, started a unique business trying to introduce simultaneously effective remedies for obesity as the most serious cause of chronic diseases in wealthy nations and for starvation in poor countries. The first Japanese NPO founder to succeed in acquiring an international reputation talks about his struggle and success.

**Q: Could you please tell us about the business model of TABLE FOR TWO as simply as possible?**

**Kogure:** The idea behind our business model was to curb excessive nutrition or calories consumed by wealthy people in developed nations in restaurants or dining venues and to give this saved nutrition to people in poor countries suffering from starvation. Of course, it is difficult to transfer such food directly to poor countries, and so TABLE FOR TWO was designed to replace this through donations. That is to say, we would recommend each restaurant or dining place to adopt a healthy menu with fewer calories than usual. And we ask them to add 20 yen as a donation to the price of each such menu with reduced calories. This 20 yen would then be considered as a donation to poor countries, where it would be enough to pay for a lunch for children at schools. This is our basic business model.



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suffering from chronic malnutrition, while there are another 1 billion suffering from obesity or lifestyle-related diseases due to excessive consumption of food. It is incredible that human beings have not been able to resolve these issues.

I had been thinking about possible solutions, and then thought that these two issues should be resolved simultaneously, not separately, since they are caused by a dissociated cycle of food and alimentation. This model was based on such spontaneous thinking.

**Q: Since you used to work for a consulting company, McKinsey, you must have helped many private business people seeking corporate profits. However, now you are working to promote social interests. Why did you change your line of work?**

**Q: How did you start this business?**

**Kogure:** Among the global population of 7 billion, there are 1 billion people who are starving to death due to a lack of food and nutrition or

**Kogure:** I had originally been thinking about working for social interests since my younger days. Even when I was working for McKinsey, a company at the center of commercial capitalism, I maintained my interest in social entrepreneurship. After having worked for several years at McKinsey, I felt I had gained sufficient experience and competence to start a social project and thought I was ready to be a social entrepreneur. Though McKinsey is certainly a company seeking profits for businesses, there are quite a few former McKinsey consultants who are now serving public interests, such as Bill Drayton, a founder of the Ashoka Foundation, one of the largest associations of social entrepreneurs in the world.

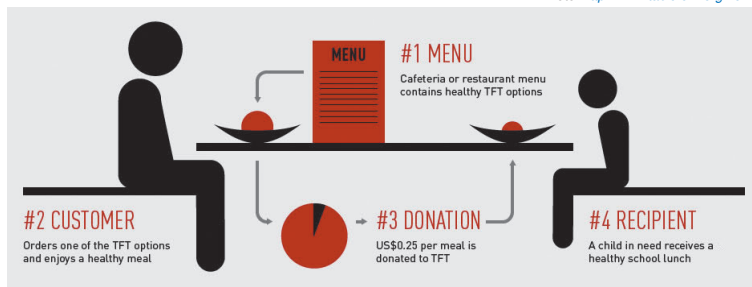


TABLE FOR TWO - How it works

**Q: Capitalism now may not be sustainable without solutions to many social issues. Social entrepreneurship is therefore becoming**

## Interview

### well accepted in our business-based society, isn't it?

**Kogure:** Negative effects from economic developments in the 20th century, such as global warming, large income inequalities, and insufficient levels of health care due to the rapid aging of populations, have emerged significantly in modern society and it would seem to take a long time to resolve them under the existing institutional framework. Under such circumstances, social entrepreneurship that tries to resolve such issues by using business as leverage has attracted much attention from people.

However, we will not be able to resolve these issues only through social entrepreneurs. After having talked with 550 companies through our project, TABLE FOR TWO, I found that our role should not be to find solutions for these social problems by ourselves but to connect the people who can provide solutions. Such connectors have not existed until now, but as globalization proceeds and such social issues become more global, we will need them more and more. Existing institutional frameworks, such as the United Nations or national governments, will not be able to work well as such connectors, and so the importance of the role of social entrepreneurs in particular is increasing.

**Q: A mindset dominant during the Cold War used to be “Capitalism versus Socialism”. However, today there seem to be many areas where capitalism and socialism work together to pursue solutions to economic growth and social issues simultaneously. What do you think about this?**

**Kogure:** I think you are right. We are pursuing a new socioeconomic model by which we hope to solve what cannot be solved only under the existing capitalistic regime. But we have not found the answers yet.

**Q: Was your working experience in McKinsey useful in creating such a new model which has succeeded in escaping from existing preoccupations?**

**Kogure:** Yes. It is still useful. I believe I am bringing new ideas developed by my working experience in McKinsey into the social sector in Japan. One of the values of McKinsey as a business consultant is to provide ideas on specific issues from a completely new angle, free from vested interests and existing preoccupations or values. McKinsey consultants are advised by their seniors not to accept any “common sense” in a business sector considered to be an impediment to achieving reform. We are fully taking advantage of such a lesson in our NPO activities presently in promoting TABLE FOR TWO in Japan as well as globally.

**Q: I think it will be important for Japan to have many young people breaking with conservative ideas or systems – otherwise our society will not be able to evolve in the way it has so far. Innovative young people will have to fight against conservative people. Or, in the case of your business, you have to**

**persuade such conservative people to donate to your project and become involved in your business. How have you coped with this challenge in pursuing your project?**

**Kogure:** Our job is ultimately to save the lives of human beings in poor countries and, at the same time, to resolve the obesity problem or chronic diseases possibly caused by fatness in advanced countries. In order to realize our mission, we need resources and funds. We created a market in order to realize our mission. Namely, convenience stores, company dining-rooms, and restaurants have become our market where we can find financial resources. We were very excited to see that the money collected in this market could provide people who are starving with food. Business people's motivations to participate in our project are very diverse. Some of them may want to raise their social value. Some of them may want to sell more of their goods and win more popularity among their customers. We need to understand the variety of motivations and propose specific plans for cooperation between us.

We cannot fight against them, even though their motivation is winning profits, while ours is to save human lives. Instead, we should think about how we can maximize their interests through our business. Otherwise, our business model will not work well. Though we have an ideal, we should not impose it on our partners or members. Today, many college students are interested in joining our NPO and most of them would like to enjoy working for whatever they are personally interested in as an individual.

Therefore, we will let them work as they like in principle. Helping people to realize what they truly want to do is our policy. This is how we would like as many people as possible to become involved in our project. If only a limited number of people join our activities, we can collect donations, but we cannot persuade the entire society in developed nations to change its habit of excessive eating. We would need to devise incentives to involve a wide range of people in TABLE FOR TWO to achieve such a large scale social reform.

**Q: Your NPO is now expanding. How big has your organization become and what are your current activities and future plans?**

**Kogure:** We started TABLE FOR TWO in 2007. In its first year it did not do well. Only 10 or 20 companies supported us. Now, however, there are 560 firms supporting us. In terms of the number of supporting firms, our NPO has probably become the largest in Japan. The number of meals provided to people in poor countries is more than 20 million, which means more than 20 million people have joined in our activities in developed nations. This is truly a huge number. It is also unusual that an NPO in Japan has won an international reputation. We are now active in 10 countries around the world and trying to expand our activities and make TABLE FOR TWO more globally well known. I believe it will be possible, since we are winning a number of prizes all over the world.

**Q: Your secretarial office is rather small for a big NPO?**

**Kogure:** Yes. We would like to keep our operations as lean as possible, but a small professional team is leading our activities. This is what we are pursuing. Competent young people in Japan today working for large companies may have lost their incentive to work hard, because their jobs are too divided into small portions and they cannot get an overview of the entire picture and see how their particular work contributes to the whole company. It would provide them with a stronger incentive to work hard if they were given an opportunity to undertake entire business with great responsibility. They would be more creative and more aggressive in their jobs. Workers can find true satisfaction in a job through self-fulfillment, even though they are not working for a large company but for a small organization. We want to be such a small company stimulating entrepreneurship among young people.

I think people working for smaller companies would find it more fun than working for larger ones. With 100 such small and stimulating companies, the Japanese economy would be able to achieve higher economic growth. The pleasure of work should be considered crucial to the revitalization of the Japanese economy.

**Q: Now I see how TABLE FOR TWO is pursuing social reform in Japan by stimulating young people's desire for self-fulfillment. Your NPO is the first in Japan to win an international reputation. What do you think about Japanese NPOs in general? It has been pointed out that since the disaster of March 11, 2011, NPO activities have been expanding in order to contribute to reviving the badly-hit Tohoku area. Do you think this is true?**

**Kogure:** In Japan, we are lucky to have an excellent social environment where the quality of various social services such as health care, caregiving, social welfare, and education are among the best in the world. Since high quality social services have been provided by the central as well as regional governments in Japan, NPOs would not have been necessary in complementing the functions of the public sector in those areas. This is a significant difference from the case in the United States where NPOs play an important role in supplementing the functions of the public sector by providing the nation with social services that are not of such high quality as in Japan.

However, in the case of unexpected incidents on an unimaginable scale like the Great East Japan Earthquake, the existing social services in Japan are not sufficient to meet the needs for restoration of areas most seriously hit by the disaster. Therefore, NPOs' activities have been highly appreciated in the Tohoku area.

It is certainly big progress for Japanese NPOs but not all of them won the appreciation of the inhabitants in the disaster areas. We still need to improve the quality of NPO activities. In addition, we need more NPO contributions to the global agenda, such as the global

environment or poverty. They should not necessarily be limited to issues in Japan.

**Q: You will need more PR internationally to promote the activities of your NPO. What would be your strategy for this?**

**Kogure:** I think we should promote our activities at big international conferences such as the Davos World Economic Forum or APEC conferences.

**Q: How about TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development)?**

**Kogure:** We had a booth there. We are supporting poorer people than those considered to be at the bottom of the pyramid in Africa. However, we help these people not only by providing them with food but also supporting their agricultural activities and enabling them to earn cash by those activities. In this regard, it is similar to cooperation with those at the bottom of the pyramid to enable them to earn money through their businesses supported by developed nations' aid agencies.

I think there will be an increase in demand for Japanese companies to set up business facilities in Africa as a further contribution to Japan-Africa relations. It will be necessary for Japanese companies to have business facilitators familiar with the African market and will also be necessary for them to adapt Japanese goods to this market with those business facilitators' help and advice in order to achieve business success in Africa.

We are working not only in Africa but also in Myanmar. However, we are not preoccupied with the GDP level of a nation but keener on helping poor people wherever they may be.

**Q: My last question is about the connection between excessive eating and health in developed nations. How would you assess this issue in Japan?**

**Kogure:** Food and beverage businesses in Japan are today increasingly aware of this issue. In the US, it is now obligatory for a restaurant to show how many calories are contained in each meal. Without such a concern for health, food businesses cannot be sustainable in the US.

Although food businesses in Japan are not so highly conscious of excessive nutrition as a cause of obesity or other signs of poor health as in the US, they are definitely moving in that direction.

**JS**

