Disaster Relief

Quick response to disasters in developing countries

Outline of Disaster Relief Program

When major disasters occur in developing areas, JICA carries out emergency relief activities in response to requests received from the governments of affected countries or international agencies. Rescue teams, medical teams, expert teams, or Self-Defense Forces are dispatched in the name of Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) teams as personnel assistance and emergency relief supplies are provided as material assistance.

Rescue Team
The main tasks of a rescue team are to search for missing people, rescue victims, provide first aid, and move victims to safety. The team is made up of rescue personnel of the National Police Agency, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, and the Japan Coast Guard. They leave Japan within 24 hours of a decision of dispatch in order to conduct search and rescue activities in an affected country.

Medical Team
The tasks of a medical team are to provide or assist in medical treatment for victims in the affected area, and when necessary they work to prevent infection and the spread of diseases. The medical team consists of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and medical coordinators registered with JICA. As of March 15, 2006, 794 members (222 doctors, 360 nurses, 33 pharmacists, and 179 medical coordinators) were registered under this scheme.

Expert Team
An expert team takes emergency response measures in the wake of disasters and provides guidance and advice on how best to achieve recovery. The team consists of technicians and researchers recommended by related government ministries and agencies according to the type of disaster.

Self-Defense Forces
When a large-scale disaster occurs and the dispatch is deemed necessary, Self-Defense Forces can be dispatched. Self-Defense Forces carry out rescue activities, medical activities (including disease prevention activities), emergency response measures, reconstruction, transport activities using ships, aircraft, and helicopters, and water supply activities.

Provision of Materials
Relief supplies such as blankets, tents, water purifiers, generators, and medicines are provided to the affected area to assist with relief activities for victims and the recovery process in the affected area. To ensure that relief supplies are provided promptly and in large numbers, it is necessary for the supplies to be procured and stored securely. Warehouses have been set up in four locations worldwide—Singapore, Frankfurt, Johannesburg, and Miami—and the supplies are properly managed. Medicines are difficult to store due to expiration dates and temperature control and it is desirable to have medicines with labels written in the local language. Therefore, they are provided after being procured from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other organizations if necessary.

New Movement of Disaster Relief

Many relief teams from all over the world rush to the site of a large-scale disaster. The UN normally plays a central role in coordinating their activities so that individual teams can cooperate while carrying out their own operations more efficiently.

However, the affected area of the Pakistan earthquake of October 2005 was so large that it was difficult for the UN to coordinate activities of all relief teams. In response, the Japan Disaster Relief team that was dispatched to Batagram, located in the northwestern frontier of Pakistan, approached the Estonia Team and the French Red Cross, which was also active in the same area, and other NGOs such as MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) and Save the Children to establish a cooperative mechanism that enables information exchange and joint meetings. This coordination effort by the Japan Disaster Relief team was highly evaluated by the UN (see p. 11).