

Appropriate Assistance

Responses to Offers of Foreign Support Following the Great Hanshin Earthquake

ABSTRACT

Beginning just an hour after the violent earthquake which devastated Kobe and its surrounding area, offers of assistance began pouring in from governments and other organizations abroad. Most post-disaster evaluations agree that government officials were poorly prepared for such a large-scale earthquake, but criticisms were particularly leveled against bureaucrats who appeared to obstruct the implementation of foreign assistance. In fact, it is alleged by many individuals that lives would have been saved, and homeless people's conditions would have been restored more quickly if certain foreign assistance had been accepted. Through interviews with responsible government and NGO personnel in Japan and an examination of documents related to foreign disaster assistance, this study attempts to analyze the bureaucratic response to offers of assistance from abroad. By noting the difficulties caused by the offers of aid, recommendations are made for those wishing to assist disaster areas, particularly in economically developed foreign countries. Most important among them is the necessity of knowing the organizational, personnel, and cultural situation, as well as the material needs of the affected region before sending relief.

Key words: disaster assistance, Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, Japanese bureaucracy, foreign assistance