

A Heartfelt Gift

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Last summer, I took part in a seminar held by a Japanese aid organization for the Third World. To my surprise, there were many high school students who were interested in the foreign aid program. I thought it was a great idea to offer young people the opportunity to discuss the Japanese international role with the guests from abroad. Yet during the seminar, I was confronted with some shocking news. This was the profligate waste by the Japanese government's aid program.

Today Japan has become one of the world's largest aid donor. However, in most cases, Japan has supplied billions of yen worth of sophisticated facilities and technology which have remained practically unused by the recipient nations.

For example, the Asahi Newspaper on April 25th reports the follows: In Indonesia, X-ray equipment and brain scanners, which cost 28 million dollars ave remained gathering dust for 10 years because doctors have not been shown how to use them. Foolishly enough, Japan donated more money to buy expensive gadgets last year.

At the recent Tokyo seminar, Japan's ODA spending was ironically described as a water faucet without a plug. Japan spends a large amount of its national budget like water, but this expenditure will never be successful for Japan doesn't think much about its usage nor does it take good care of the projects. The water quickly goes down the drain and nothing is left.

Behind these problems there is the fact that the Japanese Government cannot interfere in the policies of the recipient countries, so that our aid programs tailored to the recipient nation's governments' requests.

However, I think the main reason is that the number of those specializing in this kind of aid are very few. Although Japan is giving a large amount of its money, she only has 1000 aid specialists, while the U.S.A. has more than 5000. As a result, there is almost no time for Japanese specialists to study the real situation in the Third World nor to review her plans. The government's decision to provide

facilities is made only on the basis of documents and all details are left up to the Japanese firms or recipient nations.

Just to give money is the easiest and fastest way to spend up the budget. But if it is not used to help people's lives, it can never be called aid. We are merely losing a great portion of our tax payments and gaining doubt and anger of recipient countries' citizen.

Essentially, why does Japan aid the Third World? Today Japan's economic power is greatly supported by other countries' resources and markets all over the world. If Japan lost others' trust, her economy would surely fall apart. After all Japan was one of the Third World just 40 years ago. Aid therefore must be a heartfelt gift which symbolizes the desire to maintain good relations with other countries in order to create a better future.

To make more useful gifts, Japan should spend not only money but also more time and manpower in order to understand the recipient countries daily lives and there should be discussions with local people to find out what is most needed. This approach has been adopted by some Japanese private aid organizations. They send volunteers to 41 countries all over the world. With their support, locals were able to get enough harvest to provide for their daily lives.

Voluntary activities can also go on inside Japan. Ms Chantason Intabon, who is the representative of the "Organization to send Books for Children in Laos" has opened a branch in Tokyo with the help of some Japanese citizen. This March they wrote an article for the Asahi Newspaper to ask for donations to build a school in a poor village. They recently reported that they have collected 580,000 yen from all Japan. As you can see, good understanding through person to person communication can lead to successful gifts.

So I suggest the Japanese government should cooperate with these non-government organizations. With the official support, they can educate more assistants to send into the world. In return, they will gather a lot of information which will surely help the government plan a practical aid project.

In recent years, we have been donating to the Third World through paying taxes. So it is our duty to be more aware of these aid problems and try to change our aid projects into effective ones by voicing our opinions. Also I would suggest that you take a step forward to join voluntary activities either in or out side of Japan.

Our aid project still has a long way to go, but let us remember that our heartfelt gifts will be helpful not only for the developing countries, but also for the world peace, which means peace for Japan as well.