

Changing the Face of Overseas Aid

NGO from Fukuoka makes a difference

For nearly two decades a doctor from Fukuoka and his supporters have been aiding Afghanistan refugees in Pakistan.

Although Japan is one of the world's largest overseas aid donors, the faces behind its projects often remain anonymous. Fukuoka's Peshawar Association, however, has gained a high profile during nearly 20 years of providing medical and other aid to regions centering around Peshawar, in Pakistan. The group makes news headlines frequently and holds public talks throughout Japan. Its key representative, Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, has published six books describing the group's activities to date.

A non-government organization (NGO), the Peshawar Association was formed in 1983 by Fukuoka citizens to create a support network for Dr. Nakamura's overseas aid activities. Even before gaining his medical diploma in neurology at Kyushu University in 1971 Fukuoka-born Nakamura had dreamed of bringing medical welfare to Japan's remote islands, and other underdeveloped regions. Several years' treating patients in Japan and overseas eventually led him to Peshawar. "Dr. Nakamura was as taken by Peshawar's spectacular mountains as he was by its people," explains one of Peshawar's volunteer spokespeople, Mitsuji Fukumoto, who met with FAN recently. "With its colorful bazaars and



Dr. Nakamura attends to patients in the field.

unfamiliar culture, Peshawar seemed very exotic at first. But this inspired Nakamura and helped him set new goals.

Today, the Peshawar Association treats approximately 180,000 patients annually free of charge (that figure increased to 250,000 in 2001) at its hospital in Peshawar, two clinics in Pakistan and eight clinics in Afghanistan. It employs 220 local staff in these areas, and five to six Japanese medical staff. A further 700 local workers and three to five Japanese are engaged in its water supply projects, which have overseen building of 750 wells and thirty underground waterways. The association's 8,000-plus members ensure it has funding for hundreds of additional wells planned, and maintaining food aid to the value of 120 million yen annually. To date, the Peshawar Association has collected 760 million yen from around Japan to rebuild Afghanistan, a remarkable achievement for a Japanese NGO.

Fukumoto believes that the association's success can be attributed to the fact that they have accurately met the needs of people there. The group implements projects it believes in and does not merely appease the wishes of large sponsors in Japan. "Sponsors here talked about building schools or improving women's rights, but Peshawar and Afghanistan had more basic needs: drinkable water; medical aid; revived agriculture. We worked with locals to determine what they wanted, and that led to the tangible projects that we have completed," he says.

Working from Fukuoka has had advantages. "In Tokyo it's easier to summon official help, but

more time is also wasted through lengthy discussion. Here we had fewer members and less professional guidance, but everyone wanted to help Dr. Nakamura and start aid projects right away," recalls Fukumoto. The Peshawar Association still operates entirely on the energy of its volunteers, and even Dr. Nakamura earns no income from his involvement. However, says Fukumoto, "Japanese NGOs have come a long way. Once, sending money was considered



The Peshawar Association office in Fukuoka City.

enough; now, many NGOs implement concrete projects." Although it could be a while before NGOs generate income for their organizers, they have gained a foothold in Japanese society.

"Thanks to the generosity of the Japanese public, we continue to provide a lot of aid through our hospitals. Recently, we've started sewing classes to give women new work skills, and we're developing drought-resistant crops at two pilot farms in Afghanistan," says Fukumoto.

"We are on the road to achieving our long-term goal; which is to overcome poverty through the establishment of realistic, sustainable lifestyles."

