

Japan/Tohoku: Only 30% of donations reaches victims

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Only about 30 percent of money donated to help victims of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami has reached people in the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned.

A shortage of manpower at local governments in the affected areas and complicated application procedures are being blamed for slow distribution of the cash.

Only about 5 percent of money donated to Miyagi Prefecture had reached disaster victims there as of Thursday, and about 7 percent had reached people in Iwate Prefecture as of May 13—more than two months after the disaster.

Fukushima Prefecture residents have fared considerably better with about 67 percent of donations reaching them as of Tuesday, as the prefectural government has been distributing donations to households near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Yomiuri Shimbun analyzed 65.1 billion yen donated to the three prefectures via four institutions including the Japanese Red Cross Society, and 19.1 billion yen citizens directly donated to the prefectures. The figure does not include donations that the prefectural governments have yet to earmark for municipalities.

The Iwate prefectural government had distributed about 1 billion yen of about 14.5 billion yen donated as of May 13, the Miyagi prefectural government about 1.9 billion yen of about 40.5 billion yen as of Thursday, and the Fukushima prefectural government about 19.5 billion yen of about 29.3 billion yen as of Tuesday.

As of May 13, only 11 of 27 municipalities in Iwate Prefecture that have residents eligible to receive the contributions had started transferring money to victims' bank accounts.

"Municipalities don't have enough staff to handle the situation," an Iwate prefectural government official said. "We've sent officials to help the municipalities, but they still can't keep up with the mountain of work involved in processing applications to receive donations and transferring money to bank accounts."

In Rikuzen-Takata, where many officials died in the tsunami, the city office began accepting applications to receive donations on May 16. However, the office said it will take at least a month until victims see the money.

As of Thursday, half of Miyagi Prefecture's 34 municipalities that have residents eligible to receive donations were yet to start disbursing the money.

Minami-Sanrikucho plans to begin distributing donations this month. However, the city office is

struggling to confirm who is eligible to receive the donations because the tsunami washed away family register documents.

In Fukushima Prefecture, 72 percent of money donated to residents of 13 municipalities near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has been transferred to disaster victims. However, municipalities in other areas are getting bogged down evaluating damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami and in other work needed to determine who can receive donations.

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P.S.

* The Yomiuri Shimbun, May 23, 2011:
<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110522002795.htm>