

AAINews

**APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL
CO., LTD**

1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN.
TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250 Email: aai@sk9.so-net.ne.jp

For whose good?

At the referendum held on 23rd January in 2000, the residents of Tokushima Prefecture expressed their disapproval of the Ministry of Construction's plan to build a barrage on the Yoshino River. Since the old days the Yoshino has been feared for its occasional rage. This construction plan was to replace traditional fixed barrage No. 10, which has become so old that it may no longer be adequate to prevent floods when the water level rises. It was supposed to be a precautionary measure against the sort of flood disaster which can be expected at the average rate of once in 150 years. The construction cost of one such barrage is said to be 95 billion yen. There is no doubt about the importance of flood control, but just as with many other recent cases of large-scale public construction works, this construction plan seems to be based on the reasoning of the construction contractors. Some might question who would take the responsibility once the anticipated disaster happened, but with the majority of the residents in opposition, how can the Construction Minister and the Governor of Tokushima Prefecture justify their forceful construction plan? Their argument focused solely on flood control, and it seems that not enough consideration was given to other aspects of the river basin relationship, which are embedded in the daily activities of the people living along the Yoshino. Though, certainly, it would be tempting for rural prefectures to invite large-scale construction and civil engineering work in order to create employment and revitalize the local economy.

A river serves the daily lives of local people in a most intimate manner from its upper stream area right down to the lower stream where it reaches the sea. It provides water for drinking and agriculture and industrial activities. It is anything but a mere watercourse to discharge and drain unwanted water into the sea as quickly as possible. Thus it is natural for them to have their banks eroded, for them to accumulate piles of sand and pebbles, and for their running courses to meander. The barrage construction would straighten this type of natural watercourse with concrete and the barrage would render the living river a dead canal; all in the name of flood control. Can this be fully justified if it is said that it is for our good, to secure our daily life? Considering the negative impact of such construction works on the natural environment, there is a move to go back to traditional construction methods using natural materials such as "jakago (gabion)" and "sodachinshoh (fagot mattress)".

The residents in the vicinity of the No.10 barrage must be desperate to have proper flood-proof protection for their houses and fields, and there are also various other needs in the upper, middle and lower stream areas to consider. For example, some people may wish to keep the recreational use of the river, while others may need to secure the environment for their agricultural or fishing activities. The planned barrage, however, seems to serve more of the interests and needs of the Ministry of Construction, politicians well connected with the construction industry, and huge general construction companies. The residents of Tokushima perceived that Japan's current administration does not reflect the wishes of its citizens, and probably that was why the result of the recent referendum regarding the barrage construction showed 90% of the voters opposing the ministry's plan. Irrespective of the range or number of people who cast their vote, if the construction work continues ignoring the result of the residential voting, what about the residents' articulated wishes?

Today, "community participation" has become a keyword in the field of development aid. It is rather ironic that a donor country, which is actively taking part in aid activities in developing countries, is not able to ensure community participation in its own domestic administration. For whose interest should we expect the Yoshino to exist? If it is for the local people living with the river, the administration and the people should have more active discussions to come up with various suggestions from both parties. Only by working out a better solution in this interactive, participatory way, can genuine administration for the people and locality be expected, and our taxes utilized more sensibly and meaningfully.

(By Fuyuki KOJIMA, February 2000)

P.S.

The Ministry of Construction and residents along the Yoshino River are continuing discussions after the voting.

