

**P115. “TSUNAGARUKA” PROJECT, CONNECTION AMONG FORESTS,
RIVERS AND THE SEA FOR THE SOLUTION OF SEAFLOOR LITTER
PROBLEM**

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The problem of pollution on the seafloor of the Seto Inland Sea has not improved due to the fact that few people are aware of the problem, the invisibility of the litter, and shortage of garbage collectors. People don't take it as their own problem because they don't know that 70% of the litter on the seafloor contains plastic garbage, to larger items like bicycles, engines, and discarded every day appliances like washing machines and refrigerators which shows that the problem is closely related to our lives. As the enclosed coastal sea is greatly affected by its surroundings, it is critical that people who may affect it should correctly understand the current conditions in the sea and take proper actions.

To grasp the level of understanding of the litter problem, we asked residents along the Takahashi River, a major river flowing into the Seto Inland Sea, and those living in the coastal areas to answer questionnaires about the seafloor litter problem. The result I found was that the further from the sea residents lived, the less knowledge about the problem they had. I noticed that the towns far from the sea rarely had events to learn about seafloor litter as it was not important enough to them to be considered, while the coastal areas did have such events more often.

I also studied the characteristics of the seafloor litter more closely to identify where each piece of litter came from. I did research in the upper river basin and the coastal areas. Naturally, I found much litter from the coastal areas, but I also found quite a lot of litter broken into small pieces from the upper-river basin that flowed into the sea. It was confirmed that reduction of litter in the rivers is one of the key factors for the solution of the seafloor litter problem.



Explaining at the museum

Therefore I moved on to the next phase of our activity called *Tsunagaruka*, which literally means ‘connection’ in Japanese. Our activities include a simultaneous litter reduction challenge targeting the upper river towns and the coastal regions to raise awareness that forest, rivers and the inland sea are interconnected. I had campaigns for people in the different regions to share the information at grass-roots levels so that the entire region became interconnected to solve the problem together. I conducted educational presentations in the forest and river areas and the coastal areas, collected seafloor litter together with people from

various towns, exhibited posters in museums even on the opposite shore island of Shikoku.

I am confident that our activities strongly connected the residents in broader areas than before, and people’s attitudes towards the environment of the Seto Inland Sea changed positively no matter where they lived.

Our activity which started from a small area has spread and is becoming more influential. Our idea is becoming a movement. Communities are coming together to solve the seafloor problem hand in hand. I hope that our efforts around the Seto Inland Sea can be mirrored by communities around the world.