

Citizens' Movements to Protect the Environment of Rivers Flowing into the Seto Inland Sea—An Example of a Citizens' Movement Along the Toga River

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The River

The Toga River, which originates on the highest peak (931.3 m) of the Rokko Mountain Range and flows through a densely urbanized area of the city of Kobe before emptying into the Port of Kobe in the Seto Inland Sea, is a typical urban river with a steep gradient and a total length of about 7 kilometers. For this reason it has flooded numerous times during extremely heavy rains in the past and at present, the river bed and the embankment are covered with concrete.

During Japan's period of rapid economic growth, which began in the 1960s, household waste water and water discharged from resort facilities located upstream turned the river into a sort of silty flow. However, after the implementation of related laws, improvement of the sewage system, and a citizens' movement to protect the river, the BOD which had been as high as 52 ppm in 1973 had improved to 1.3 ppm by 1989.

The Citizens' Movement

In line with increasing public awareness of environmental problems, including river pollution, that began growing in the 1970s, people living along the river formed the Group to Protect the Toga River in 1977 with the aim of protecting the river in their neighborhood and turning it back into a beautiful river through their own efforts.

At its start, the group's main themes were to change the consciousness of the local people who had grown so accustomed to government-led measures, to secure the necessary funds to finance its activities, and to seek concrete and practical measures.

Special Nature of the Group

1. **Activities:** Practical activities based on the creativity and ideas of the people in the neighborhood, and their zeal to prod the local government to take action.
2. **Management:** Individual membership system not relying on any of the existing neighborhood organizations. Stable supply of funds secured through membership system, which in turn has led to enhancing neighborhood consciousness.
3. **Expansion of activities:** Begun as a movement to preserve one stretch of the Toga River, it sparked the development of the city-wide Kobe Citizens' Waterside Liaison Association, and on a wider scale, has made a considerable contribution to preserving the environment of the Seto Inland Sea, which forms a closed sea area.

Activities

1. Holding "Waterside Classrooms" aimed mainly at children and creating "Safe Water Play Areas"
2. River clean-up by members
The river environment is periodically cleaned by the members, strengthening their solidarity and deepening their awareness of the need to protect the river and improve water quality by being in real contact with the river

3. Active exchange with other groups

Communicating with similar groups in order to exchange and put into practice new activities aimed at preserving water quality.

4. The Group as a social movement

Moving beyond the original goal of protecting the river and water quality, there is now a move to create a system by which the local residents themselves can tackle the problems facing the local community, such as juvenile crime, welfare, and city planning policy.

The Future

1. Expanding the scope of our activities

In order to solve the many environmental problems facing the world, it is a recognized fact that in the end a great deal can and must be done at the individual level and the neighborhood level. Through this movement to protect the water quality of one small river called the Toga that flows into the Seto Inland Sea, we would like to take up the challenge of creating a better neighborhood, creating a better city, and creating better citizens.

2. Inspiring future generations to act to preserve water quality

In order for our movement to continue, we must attract the young with more varied and interesting activities. There is an ancient Japanese concept about water: "Love it, fear it, respect it." Our ancestors believed in a god of the spring, of the lake, of the sea, and they followed the "rules of water", sublimating them into our culture. The theme for us, we think, is to recreate this respect for and love of water in our modern age. We will do our best to achieve our goals and pass our movement on to the next generation, keeping the above in mind.