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GOVERNMENT COLLABORATING WITH CITIZENS

ON CITY PLANNING:

THE CASE OF MITAKA CITY, TOKYO

By ICHIE TSUNODA

With a trend of decentralising reforms underway in Japan, municipalities are expected to function more based on resident self-governance, in which citizens voluntarily participate in settling local issues, in order to realise a unique, autonomous community.

Deciding on how to protect the local environment and pass it on to the next generation is an issue that requires democratic consensus building and decision-making through proper information disclosure and the participation of citizens -- not something that local governments can decide on their own.

Since the Devolution of Power Law in Japan came into force in 2000, an increasing number of local governments have adopted innovative sets of ordinances on environmental conservation and community development, and citizens have been participating in their formulation. Even though the participation of citizens is taken more or less for granted, the efforts of the people of Mitaka City in metropolitan Tokyo are nothing short of extraordinary. Mitaka is relatively advanced in terms of community administration, and has been engaged in community development based on citizen-government partnerships for more than 30 years.

History of Community Administration

The city is a typical residential municipality with a population of 175,000, located roughly in the middle of metropolitan Tokyo, about 18 kilometres west of its core. The city's slogan of "park city of greenery and water" is a good way to describe it. In the northeast part of Mitaka, for instance, there is a prefectural park called Inokashira Onshi Koen, a prime cherry blossom viewing spot, and in the centre of the park is Inokashira Pond, the source of the Kanda River that flows southeast.

Community participation in the administration of Mitaka City began in the 1970s when Mitaka was experiencing rapid population and economic growth. The city decided to build community centres equipped with gymnasiums and libraries in seven community residential districts. Then in order to promote community development, it entrusted the management of the facilities to a residential council, which was an autonomous organisation of residents in the community.

The residents, at first puzzled by the city's proposal, began to see community morale grow as they took part in designing, managing, and then operating their own facilities. In the 1980s, the residential council created a

"community record", which includes the inspection results of the residential community as well as any requests from residents. It then formulated a community development plan and in the 1990s, the council used workshops to invite participants from all levels of the community, ranging from children to adults and members of the residential council, to participate in the planning and building of parks and the rebuilding of elementary schools.

Establishment of Mitaka City's Fundamental Ordinance of Autonomy

After these experiences and activities, Mitaka decided to formulate a plan from scratch with citizens to produce the city's Third Basic Plan in 1999. Thus, the Citizens' Plan 21 Conference was launched. The city and conference participants reached a partnership agreement that defined roles and responsibilities, and began activities based on the promise of equal footing and mutual cooperation.



Photo by JUMPEI WATASE

The conference had 375 voluntary citizens split up into ten working groups, and held 400 meetings. One of the unique characteristics of the working groups was that they discussed broader issues more comprehensively, including topics like the types of citizen participation and

local community development. The conference's final proposal was submitted to the mayor in October 2000, and was based on four main pillars -- the Earth, cooperation, circulation, and coexistence. The paper suggested the establishment of the Mitaka City Fundamental Ordinance of Autonomy, a ruling that would assure citizen participation.

Based on the proposal, the city set a new goal in its Third Generation Basic Plan (formulated in 2001) to establish the ordinance, which was to detail the autonomy of citizens and the basic principles of city government management, as well as the responsibilities and roles of everyone in the city. As it precedes the Basic Plan and other ordinances that the city established, it can be considered as the municipal constitution. Promoted by each local government, effective citizen participation and proper information disclosure are sure to be more stable systems when they are based on the ordinance.

Mitaka City set up a study group consisting of professors and citizens in 2002 to formulate and work on drafting the Fundamental Ordinance of Autonomy. The study group was held with open doors twelve times until October 2003, and a forum was also held to let citizens know what had been discussed. The ordinance was drafted in a highly transparent manner, and through revisions that incorporated comments from the public, the Mitaka City Fundamental Ordinance of Autonomy was established at the end of the three-year study in April 2006.

Mitaka City Basic Environmental Plan (Revised)

In March 2007, the city revised its Basic Environmental Plan with the participation of the citizens. The city guarantees citizens' participation in the process of formulating administrative plans under its Fundamental Ordinance of Autonomy. The revision was therefore discussed in collaboration with the Citizens' Conference Mitaka City Basic Environmental Plan (or Citizens' Conference, for short), consisting of voluntary citizens and businesses. It was finalized through deliberations at the Mitaka Environmental Preservation Council and after receiving subsequent public comments.

At the Citizens' Conference, the members had lively discussions at its nine separate meetings. The Revised Plan lists three main projects to be carried out, in collaboration between citizens, businesses and the city in a targeted four-year period, from fiscal 2007 to 2010, as well as an assessment of the past five years of efforts, from fiscal 2002 to 2006.

The first project is to promote and enhance the environmental awareness of citizens, with the aim of encouraging their participation and increasing each participant's motivation to learn. The second one is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions to cope with global warming. The third is to create favourable green spaces, securing the cultural environment, and coexisting with the surrounding natural environment.

Because these projects are aimed at reviewing the lifestyles of citizens and the activities of businesses, their active participation in planning will increase the feasibility of projects succeeding for the benefit of all. Moreover, the collaboration with people from business organisations and agricultural cooperatives at the Citizens' Conference has made it possible for children to go on factory tours and gain farming experience as part of their environmental studies.

Energy Saving Measures

Of course, there are some measures that the city needs to proactively take on its own, such as the project to reduce green house gas (GHG) emissions by implementing energy saving measures at public facilities via the Energy Service Company (ESCO) project.



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The ESCO project provides comprehensive energy saving services to factories and buildings. The expense of the project is partly covered by the financial benefits stemming from the energy saved by the ESCO service, such as lower electricity bills. Therefore, the city can implement energy saving measures without adding extra financial cost. Moreover, as ESCO guarantees the energy saving effect of its services, the city can count on steadily reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

Mitaka City introduced the ESCO project to the city hall's main building in fiscal 1998. In fiscal 2004, they introduced the system to three additional facilities: the Arts Centre, East Water Treatment Facility, and Environment Centre (waste incinerator). From April 2005, when ESCO started to provide its services, till December 2007, the total accumulated electricity reduction at the three facilities was 5,144,680 kilowatt hours of electricity, while 49,749 cubic metres of gas and 3,990 cubic metres of water were saved at the Arts Centre alone. When converted to the equivalent of carbon dioxide emissions, the total reduction over the period was 2,042 tonnes.

In addition, in August 2007, the city set up the Mitaka City Environmental Activity Promotion Council, again consisting of citizens and businesses to promote projects based on the Basic Environmental Plan. To steadily implement the



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plan, it is important to create a system to monitor and review the progress of achieving the environmental plan jointly formulated with citizens.

The priority for a local government is to promote environmental projects according to local culture and the lifestyle of its citizens, which reflect their opinions and vision of an ideal town. As Mitaka's example shows, under the citizens' participation scheme, it is important to decide on the ideal environmental goals in a democratic manner after honest discussions are held with a variety of participants. At the same time, each citizen has a responsibility to play their role in steadily achieving the environmental goals decided by local consensus. 49

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Article Link:

<http://www.city.mitaka.tokyo.jp/english/index.html>

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