

Subsidies and Local Government Employees

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1) Introduction

The COP10 biodiversity strategic plan agreed in Aichi in 2010 stated that its mission was to *"take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity."*

One of its concrete objectives, "Target 3", states:

"By 2020, at the latest, incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity are [to be] eliminated, phased out or reformed in order to minimize or avoid negative impacts, and positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are [to be] developed and applied, consistent and in harmony with the Convention and other relevant international obligations, taking into account national socio-economic conditions."

Clean air and sea, the fish in the sea; we cannot exclude anyone from using them, but if any one person uses them, the amount available for everyone else is reduced. Unlike resources that can be traded at cost-linked prices, we cannot hope that the market forces of supply and demand will maintain a balance for shared resources such as biodiversity. Far from it: Whether from lack of knowledge or from the desire to win in the economic race, market economics has not regarded the conservation of biodiversity as one of its internal goals. In recent years however, the number of enlightened businesses that make the conservation of biodiversity an internal goal, or at least show some consideration for it, has grown. The conservation of biodiversity is a duty for everyone, but in this field where the forces of supply and demand are out of balance, the government has both the power to improve economic activity and the duty to apply that power.

Subsidies are an important tool for national and local government projects, but it is private sector organisations that actually carry out the projects and, as such, exert great influence on market economics. From this starting point, we plan to construct a questionnaire for the local government employees who actually handle the matter of subsidies, concerning the relationship between subsidies and conservation of biodiversity, and as a preliminary investigation for that, we held a hearing for local government employees. The results are below.

2) Subsidies in local government

Whenever the national or local government carries out a project or grants a subsidy for a project, documents are required to support it. Local government employees carry out the project based on these documents.

The first of these documents is the Policy Objective, the realization of which requires the construction of an outline of the project's operations. A policy objective of preventing damage from floods might be realized through a forestry project or through dam construction. This Project Outline includes the project objective, the executing authority, and such details of the project as practical descriptions of the design standards and procedures to be used. If it does not specifically mention "conservation of biodiversity," it will usually include similar terms such as "regard for the environment" or "consideration for the ecosystem."

However, even if the outline mentions neither "regard for the environment" nor "consideration for the ecosystem," dam construction is governed by the River Act, which specifically states that river improvement projects must adhere to the Basic Environment Plan. MAFF-subsidised projects may include land improvement projects many of which carry the title "agricultural infrastructure improvement and rural development", but the Land Improvement Act which governs them contains the phrase "consideration for harmony with the environment." In the regulations for road and drainage construction, regard for the environment is specifically mentioned and there are even official "guidelines for environmental considerations." MAFF has drawn up its own "MAFF Biodiversity Strategy." So, from the point of view of the local government employee, there is a general principle that the official position is that¹ projects must be undertaken with consideration for the environment.

Each local authority has its own policies and carries out a variety of projects to realise them, but, because of the financial benefit, they also carry out subsidized national projects.

As explained above, all public projects are specifically required to conserve biodiversity and consider the environment as a general principle, but a major point is how the conservation of biodiversity is actually realized on-site.

The local government employee with an awareness of biodiversity will have studied the problems and have followed a particular project, from the feasibility study through the EIA, and will use that knowledge in the design and construction methods to be used. However, it can happen that, while the employee has great awareness and high ideals, and wishes to ensure that the subsidy is used with consideration for the environment, it may be difficult or even impossible to gain sufficient understanding from residents. For example, when farm roads or irrigation channels are improved and there arises the selection of methods to be used, the local farmers frequently prefer the method which will reduce the effort of mowing banks and other maintenance. An environment where a variety of species can live cannot be covered in concrete, so it will be an environment where somebody will always have to keep the weeds under control. First-class rivers² have a managing authority that will do such work itself so the problem rarely arises, but whether or not the local government

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employee can designate subsidies with consideration for the environment may depend greatly on the thinking of the local people.

There are also projects where the project itself can be extremely political, but there are plenty of aware local government employees who make it possible to consider and conserve the environment even while carrying out the project.

As for the quality of these local government employees, though there are some who are highly aware of the problem, there are also many who are unaware, and uninformed with regard to conservation of biodiversity or even with regard to consideration for the environment. As a result, outdated design and construction methods may still be employed, while the instructions in the manuals for environmental conservation may sometimes be executed without regard for the biodiversity on the site.

Some of the local government employees who participated in the hearing were of the opinion that the majority of their colleagues were unaware that their assigned projects threatened biodiversity, or lacked a concrete understanding of the negative effect of subsidies.

3) Conclusion

The questionnaire has not been used but the results from the preliminary meeting provided plenty of material. In order to realize Aichi Target 3, it may be necessary not merely to include conservation in the general principles, but to include it clearly in each project outline, and, instead of having staff sections for conservation of biodiversity and consideration for the environment, to deploy specialist staff within the construction, forestry, fisheries and farming sections that actually effect changes on the environment. With the questionnaire, we hope to investigate more deeply the relationship between subsidies and local government projects.