

The Implementation Process of “Reflection of Local Opinions”: The Role of Local Government in River Policy

Tomohiko OHNO

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1. INTRODUCTION

The River policy in Japan is at a turning point, because of not only individual and technological issues but of the fundamental governance system is in question. From the view point of watershed governance, I focus my discussion on the River Law amended in 1997.

2. AMENDMENT OF THE RIVER LAW

Under the River Law amended in 1997, river administrators have to establish fundamental river management policies and river infrastructure development project. When a river administrator sets a river infrastructure development project, "Reflection of Local Opinions" is required in its planning process. However, the specific procedure is not defined specifically in the River Law. Therefore, I examine its implementation process in depth.

3. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CLASS A RIVER

In this paper, I discuss the role of local government in the management of class A river for the following two reasons. Firstly, even though the prime administrator of class A rivers is the MLIT, about 88% of the class A rivers are the designated section, where the local governments are entrusted to do most of the river administration by the central government. Planning the river infrastructure development projects for the designated section of these class A rivers are also the responsibility of the local government in class A river.

Secondly, many policy implementation studies pointed out that there are often gaps between policy intention and outcomes. Especially, according to the past studies on the central-local government relationships, even if the policy is made by the central government, the local governments have a large influence on the policy outcomes through the implementation processes.

4. FORMER RIVER POLICIES AND THE ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

At the initial phase of the river policy, the objective was the flood management. As the goals of the river policy has become more complex, river planning that are more and more consistent throughout the watershed have been required. As a result of such change, the planning process has become closed to stakeholders other than Ministry of Construction. However, such a centralized planning process causes various problems, such as movements against a dam construction.

5. THE ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

Although, the new planning system has been introduced in 1997, there are only 27 fundamental river management policies and 93 river infrastructure development projects in 2004. If we focus on the time when the river infrastructure development projects were established, we can find that 72 (77.4%) of those projects had been established earlier than the time when fundamental river management policies were established.

Next, I compare the measures taken by central or local government for the "Reflection of Local Opinions" in the Yodo river system. According to this comparison, there is a difference in a significant point such as opportunities for participation or response to participation.

6. CONCLUSION

In this research, I showed that even in the class A rivers, local governments are implementing the "Reflection of Local Opinions" originally from central government. Because of its length of designated section in class A rivers, local governments have to play a positive role in the "Reflection of Local Opinions". To facilitate the role of local government, further studies on the factors that enable local governments to positively implement that are required.