

Status Report on Water in Asian Countries – Data Sheet

Name of Country: JAPAN

1. Nature of Water Crisis / Status of Water delivery

Current coverage of water in Japan is 97.1 %. In major cities, it is 98.6%. In some rural areas it is 10-50%. 2.9% of population (about 3.5 million) lives in unsupplied areas.

Water utilities in Japan have developed since the end of WW II, especially during the 1950s when the Japanese economy saw a massive growth, and so many people moved into big cities. In order to meet their needs for water, the government built dams, while water rights for agriculture had been recognized as conventional ones. From the 1960s to 1970s, water resources were broadened and bigger dams were planned. Now that the population is decreasing and needs for water seem not to grow anymore, local municipalities still have to pay debts for dam constructions.

2. Form of Public Management

Water supply in Japan is to be managed by local municipalities in accordance with Water Law (enacted in 1957). Those other than local municipalities can operate water supply only when residents are agreed.

So, Local municipalities are responsible for water supply and management and they establish local public enterprises, but because of the government's policies these related works such as operation & management, checking bills, collecting tariffs, maintenance of water pipes are now being privatized

Water Regulatory Authority is a department of the Ministry for Health, Labor and Welfare, whose aim is to secure stable water supply and quality. However, rivers for agriculture are regulated by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. So, Japan has plural authorities for water regulation.

Talking about water management by community, since Japan has had constant rainfall, people could use wells, ground water, springs and rivers. Now that average water coverage is over 97%, water pipes are not delivered to some rural areas where the main industry is farming or fishing. The Ministry for Health, Labor and Welfare has taken initiatives to connect these areas. The problem in these areas is, water tanks are not managed so adequately that surface water from mountains comes in and water quality is lessened.

3. Policies relating to Financial and Tariffing issues.

Who determines the price or cost of water; who settles water conflicts? On what basis is water charged, in urban and rural areas. Please add other information, if you have it.

Since local municipalities manage water supply, they regulate the price of water. However, even though it needs to raise the price, sometimes people's demand or the President's political will had stopped it. As a result, they have to cut savings for renovation and lay-off technical staffs.

In major cities, the full cost recovery is wide spread. The price is regulated according to the cost of withdrawal, clearing, delivering water and sewage. In addition, advance water purification, strengthening earthquake resistant and renovation of water pipes make the cost higher. In many cities, the price steps up along with the consumption. This is because to encourage people to use water wisely.

Water utilities are public enterprises and the finance is independent. However, investments for facilities and water resource development need to use general account, so it is hard to manage water utilities by tariffs alone. These investments are included in the price.

4. Law relating to water as part of the Commons.

Does your country recognize citizen has fundamental right to water? Who controls ground water extraction? Is water considered to be part of common resource?

Even though it is not written clearly, we can recognize the Article 25 of the Constitution, Survival Rights, and secure fundamental rights for water.

Withdrawal of ground water is regulated by local municipalities, such as the width of pipes and so on.

It may be safe to say that people in Japan generally think about saving water consumption and keep it clean, so even though there is no specific rule, water is considered as common resource.

5. History of water conflicts

While Water Law says that local municipalities are responsible for water supply, they (local municipalities) are regulated by Local Government Act. This act is now revised that private companies can manage public utilities only when local governments appointed them. So, water utilities can be also managed by private companies. In 2006, the local government of Atacama City of Gifu Prefecture, the middle of Japan, decided to let private companies to manage water supply. The public enterprise did not have enough workers, money and facilities to maintain water supply. Zensuido, All-Japan Water Workers Union, was against privatization, but the Mayor of Takayama City was inclined to the idea of privatization and forced it finally. Zensuido did stop water privatization in other areas such as Saga City, west Japan.

It is reported that Sapporo City Water Department was offered from Veolia Water to buy out including enterprise debts, but the detail is not available.

Water and Traditional Practices

Can you send as many local proverbs, stories, folktales and other literary forms including pictures / pictorial representations, which deal with the subject of water, water conservation, and respect for water and so on?

A list of traditional water management practices from different regions, including practices which may have disappeared or changed in the last 2-3 decades. Please also describe the social practices underlying such traditional water management practices (as for example any particular community which was traditionally assigned the task of repairing wells or water ways for which they received remuneration from the community).



We call water “Mizu” and the picture on the left shows how we write “Mizu” in Japanese.

We have some proverbs and metaphorical words about water.

“Mizu-Shobai (Water Business)” means a kind of business depending on the popularity by people.

“Mizu-Irazu (Without Water)” means conversation among friends or colleagues, not with strangers.

“Tateita-Ni-Mizu (Water on the standing board)” means a person who speaks fluently.

“Nemimi-Ni-Mizu (Putting water when you’re asleep)” means surprising at unexpected things.

“Mizu-Ni-Nagasu (Draining away)” means forgive all quarrel and conflicts in the past.

“Mizu-Ni-E-Wo-Kaku (Writing a picture on water)” is an analogy of impossibility.

“Fukusui-Bon-Ni-Kaerazu” is the same as “Crying over split milk.”

“Mizu-Wa-Houen-No-Utsuwa-Ni-Shitagau (Water fits the shape of glass)” tells that people grow along with friends and environment.