Editorial

World Water Forums in 2000 and 2003

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In March 2000, the Second World Water Forum (WWF) was held in the Hague, the Netherlands. Over 4500 people participated. In this paper, I would like to describe the Forum and discuss several points.

Water is related to many sectors, including irrigation, domestic water, industrial water, electric power, and flood control. For some time, a large number of international organizations were active in each water sector, with no communication between them. Keeping this fact in mind, two umbrella international organizations were set up in 1996. One of these organizations was the Global Water Partnership (GWP), with its office in Sweden; the other was World Water Council (WWC), whose office was in France.

One of the organizations, the WWC, organizes a WWF every three years, with the participation of people from all water sectors. The first WWF was held in Morocco in 1997, and the second was held this year in The Hague.

A large number of reports were published on the Second WWF. Among those reports, three reports especially draw our attention:

a) World Water Vision. This is the main output of the Forum. The compiling of World Water Vision was first proposed at the First WWF to develop a world water policy for the 21st century. The GWP and the WWC together then established World Commission of Water, to implement the proposal.
c) ICID Strategy Paper. In the formation process of Sector Vision: Water for Food and Rural Development, the ICID organized national committees for each region in the world, cooperating with the World Bank. The result was published in the form of a Strategy Paper of the ICID.

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While a) World Water Vision and b) Sector Vision: Water for Food seem to be strongly influenced by bankers, this ICID Strategy Paper is mostly based on the experience of practitioner in actual implementation of irrigation projects in the field.

Among many controversial points included in these reports, probably the most controversial is the idea of "water as an economic good". This idea implies that water should not be delivered for free, that if all water is sold and bought by volume, water users will be more careful not to use water wastefully. This idea is more or less influenced by the economic theory that water resource distribution among sectors can be optimized by market mechanisms. From the practical viewpoint, however, it is apparent that it is not always possible to charge farmers for water.

It has been decided that Japan will host the Third Water Forum in 2003. The author hopes that many people will participate and also hopes that many good discussions will be held firmly based on actual practice in the world, not only on theories.