

ASSESSMENT REPORT: PAST AND FUTURE

1. Name of the Course: Local Governance in Global Perspectives

2. Name of Applicant and Country: NGUYEN THANH THAM - Vietnam

3. Major Theme of the Report:

**Strengthening Local Governance in the Environmental
Management: Case study in Japan and Lessons for Vietnam**

3.1. Background and Research Questions

Studying local governance in environmental management in Japan is important for Vietnam. On the one hand, Japan is one of the developed countries that has been very successful in environmental governance in general and in promoting the dynamic roles of local governments in efforts to solve environmental problems. On the other hand, although Vietnam has achieved huge economic strides in nearly the past four decades, the extended development model has been leading to significant environmental pollution and ecological decline. The main cause of the problem is the lack of environmental governance among provinces in Vietnam. The design of effective governance arrangements to initiate and deliver the necessary transformations is complex, multi-scale, and multi-actor and many knowledge gaps remain. The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) shows the perceived lack of local governments' commitment to environmental protection, lack of citizen' participation and finance sources...

With this in mind, it is important for studying and integrating some of the policies in Japan into the policy framework of Vietnam's local governments to improve their environmental management. The paper aims to examine local governance in environmental management in

Japan, followed by some lessons for Vietnam. To do this, there are two key research questions as follows:

- 1) **WHAT** are the roles of local governance in environmental management in Japan?
- 2) **WHAT** lessons can Vietnam learn from Japan in enhancing the roles of local authorities in environmental governance?

3.2. Local Governance in Environmental Management in Japan and lessons for Vietnam

In Japan, the local government system operates across two tiers: prefectures and the municipalities within them. Both prefectures and municipalities are recognized as equal local public entities; they collaborate in local governance based on their respective responsibilities. Prefectures operate as regional authorities, encompassing multiple municipalities, overseeing broader regional administration. Japan is composed of 47 prefectures, with Tokyo serving as a notable example of such a regional authority.

Local governments in Japan have been pivotal in addressing environmental concerns, assuming diverse responsibilities within their jurisdictions. The most important thing made by Japan's local authorities regarding environmental governance is *making frameworks of environmental regulations and projects*: By using bottom-up and top-down approaches, Japan's local governments integrate and establish their Basic Concepts and Plans that form policies for community development. For example, Mitaka city sets their goal of Community development for a strong environment and strong welfare, based on the desire for peace, respect for human rights, and promotion of self-government. Two key pillars are included in the city's Basic Concept

and Basic Plan, namely: (1) *Strong environment* - Resilient to disasters, comfortable and lively, environment, green and water park city; (2) *Strong welfare* - Connections among people, living with security, rich culture.

The second, *attracting citizen's participation* has been also a crucial factor that significantly contributes the success of environmental management among localities in Japan. These can be found in many local initiatives such as Mitaka Areas Point programs, Project to create a mutual support society held by Shikishima House Management Council and so on.

Besides that, some of policies have been carrying out by Japan's local governments in efforts to deal with environmental issues, namely Promoting private public partnership; Financing and building facilities (23 special cities in Tokyo...); Adopting technology in Waste Management (i.e. Koto city...); Enhancing international cooperation¹ and so on.

The practical experience of environmental management policies in Japan's localities brings about valuable lessons for Vietnam, including: 1) More decentralization; (2) Improving capacity and awareness of local governments and citizen in environment protection; (3) Enhancing public engagement; (4) Promoting private public partnership; (5) Promoting International Cooperation (i.e JICA projects...)/

¹ Prefectures and designated cities in Japan are primarily responsible for advancing international cooperation in environmental conservation. According to a survey by the Ministry of the Environment, numerous prefectures and designated cities engage in hosting trainees from developing countries, dispatching specialists, and offering technical cooperation and guidance to support these nations.