

Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta
in the trend of international cooperation and integration

Can Tho, October 30, 2022

Professor Ha Thanh Toan, Rector of Can Tho University,

●●, Ministry of Education and Training,

all the distinguished guests,

1. Background

I am SHIMIZU, Akira, Chief Representative of JICA Vietnam Office. It is my great honor to join the first international forum on Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta. I would like to congratulate Can Tho University for being entrusted to host this forum.

As you are all aware, the Mekong Delta has become a focus of the Vietnamese Government in its action plan for sustainable and climate-resilient development, and that has been driven by the Government resolution No. 120 issued in 2017 enabling climate resilient and sustainable development of the Mekong River Delta. In March 2021, at the Third Conference of Mekong Delta Sustainable Development under Climate Change, the Former Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, pointed out CTU as a hub for organizing dialogues for Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta toward 2045. For undertaking the role suggested by the former Prime Minister, it is honorable to join the very first SDMD forum, which outreaches a step further with the participation of the international community. I believe the forum will be a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration towards common goals for sustainable development of the Mekong Delta.

2. JICA - CTU cooperation in relation to climate-resilient and sustainable development of the Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta is the agriculture and aquaculture hub of Vietnam. Keeping the production growth while coping with the multifaceted environmental problems of sea level rising, land subsidence, soil salinity, and land erosion is a regional challenge that requires integrated and collaborative efforts of the government, enterprises and academia.

In this regard, Can Tho University has been playing an excellent role in connecting with the enterprise community, the provincial authorities in the Mekong region and the international researchers. The cooperation between JICA and CTU has been equipping CTU to enhance its capacity for playing such role better.

Looking back to the first years of CTU foundation, in 1969 we started the first technical cooperation to develop the Agriculture Faculty through joint research and training. The cooperation continued in 1993 by a grant aid for upgrading the Agriculture College of CTU, and then the second technical cooperation in enhancing education and research in environmental science in collaboration with Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology in 1999-2002. This period is an important foundation to develop CTU as an important education and technology transfer institute and the confidence of the Japanese universities and researchers in collaboration with CTU. [The Japanese crown prince at that time Akihito published his discovery of a new fish species called Goby in the Japanese Journal in 1976]

The present cooperation is a comprehensive hybrid of financial cooperation to support the construction of high technology and advanced laboratory complex, human resource development, joint research; and technical cooperation towards developing CTU into an excellent institution of education, scientific research and knowledge transfer. This morning we have had a great honor to celebrate the opening ceremony for the laboratory

complex after 5 years of designing, construction and equipment procurement supported by Japanese Yen Loan Scheme.

Under the human resource development pillar, the new Master Programs focusing on climate change have attracted hundreds of students from the local governments, companies and universities in the Mekong Delta regions. CTU lecturers graduated from the PhD programs in Japan are actively engaged in these climate change Master courses. We encourage CTU to foster the “climate change” alumni network who are driving forces for tackling with the environmental and economic challenges that the Mekong region is coping with.

The joint research projects are excellent collaborations between researchers in the Mekong Delta region and universities in Japan coordinated by the technical cooperation program. In total 40 research projects in the fields of agriculture, aquacultures and environment surrounding the theme of climate change adaptation have been completed and presented in seminars for the Mekong region local governments and industries.

The research outcomes are treasures of the region and neighboring countries in the climate-resilient and sustainable development of the Mekong Delta. They can only contribute to this development if they are widely applied by the local governments and enterprise communities. I strongly encourage the cooperation of local governments, researchers, enterprise communities and development partners to utilize these research outcomes and join hands for suitable actions on climate change in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

3. Prospective for sustainable development of the Mekong Delta

We also highly welcome the idea that Can Tho University aims to extend the concept of SDMD to the Mekong basin. Japan has committed ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership over the past years and supported for ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific (AOIP) to share the fundamental principles in promoting peace and cooperation of the region. In order to achieve the regional

development comprehensively, development of “climate resilient” human resources and research projects alone may not address all the challenges in the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta. Building necessary infrastructure is indispensable for the climate-resilient socio-economic development of the region. Development partners have been actively responding to the implementation of the Mekong Delta Regional Master Plans in 2021-2030 with a vision to 2050.

JICA is joining the integrated efforts for the Regional Master Plans coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and Investment and is studying sustainable urban development infrastructure in Can Tho city and connection road and bridge between Can Tho and Hau Giang. JICA is also working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to develop coastal dykes in Ben Tre, Bac Lieu and Ca Mau in an effort to mitigate the coast erosion and salinity intrusion.

We are committed to continue supporting Can Tho University in delivering high-quality human resources for the sustainable socio-economic development of the Mekong region. We will support the construction of a new international education and training center by using the remaining unused loan amount, so that Can Tho University can enhance and outreach its educational and research activities to the international community. We believe that the cooperation of local governments – Can Tho University – enterprises in the Mekong region will be a driving force toward sustainable development of the region.

Thank you for your attention!