

To Our Readers

This booklet was compiled based on the *Quality of the Environment in Japan 2003* (White Paper), an annual report on the environment by the Government, published in accordance with a Cabinet decision made on May 30, 2003. The content of this booklet was edited to gear to a wider readership.

The theme of this year's White Paper is "Local Communities Leading the Transition to a Sustainable Society." It introduces that daily voluntary activities carried out in local communities mark the first step in the transition to a sustainable society.

The White Paper first shows the close interaction of the environment, society and economy, and the seriousness of the deterioration of the global environment. The Paper demonstrates that steady efforts at the individual and community levels will be essential for resolving global environmental problems. Individual actions are explored with an emphasis on the idea that if more individuals pursue environment-conscious activities, their activities will influence other actors, such as the government and businesses, and make it possible to reform the socio-economy as a whole. Initiatives by local communities are also examined. The Paper concludes that transition to a sustainable society is possible by (1) raising the awareness of the whole community and building capacity (local environmental capacity) for the creation of a better environment and a better community, and (2) creating a model for protecting the environment and reinvigorating the community at the same time, and spreading the practice to other communities.

There will be no greater joy to us than knowing that this booklet has prompted the interest of readers in environmental issues and provided an impetus for concrete actions towards the building of a vibrant and sustainable society.

The drawing on the cover page is the work of Machi Takewa, a first-year student at the Osaka City Chikko Junior High School. Machi's piece won the Minister of the Environment Award (Elementary and Junior High School Student category) at the Year 2003 White Paper on the Environment Cover Page Illustration Contest sponsored by the Ministry of the Environment and the Japan Environment Association.

Machi said "I hope the oceans will be as beautiful as this in the future. Because the ocean in the Minato Ward is very dirty, I want it to become an ocean with many fish."

The drawing at the back cover is the work of Wakako Okano, a sophomore at the Utsunomiya Media Arts College (Tochigi Prefecture). Ms. Okano won the Japan Environment Association Chairman's Award (general category) at the Year 2003 White Paper on the Environment Cover Page Illustration Contest.

Ms. Okano said, "I pictured what each one of us can do. I drew with the wish that everyone would be considerate to the earth. It will be nice if people can have the self-awareness that they are the residents of the earth and help build a friendly living environment."