AGREEMENTS: RIO DECLARATION

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Summary

The UNCED, with its "Rio Declaration", was a significant incentive for Japan to change its policies to more comprehensive ones towards a sustainable society. In the 1960s to 1980s, Japan's environmental policies were limited to pollution-abatement. Since the UNCED in 1992, however, rapid change was observed in Japan's decision-making in three aspects. The first was to implement environmentally-sound policies and measures at domestic (especially at national) level. The second was the participation of various actors of the community. The third was that Japan started to take a more active role in the realization of sustainable development at international level. As for the national level, new basic environmental laws and a new basic environmental plan were established to give general direction for environmental policies. They were followed by other decisions such as national Agenda 21 and specific laws necessary to implement international treaties. Domestic issues such as waste management have also been tackled seriously. As for the local actors, not only local authorities but also other actors of the community, such as the business community, environmental NGOs, and individuals, are starting to participate actively in policy-making as well as implementation of environmental policies. Local authorities have been interested in international activities such as ICLEI and the establishment of local Agenda 21. Environmental NGOs are being supported

financially and technically by the government. As for the international arena, Japan is becoming increasingly active in its contribution to developing countries in environmental fields. Japan hosts various kinds of environmental meetings in the Asia-Pacific region, and offers more support to international activities including that of the UN bodies. This trend is likely to continue in this new century.

1. Objectives

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992, Japan announced its commitment to increasing its Official Development Assistance (ODA) intended for environmental purposes at around 900~1000 billion yen (7.0 - 7.7 billion US$) during the five year period starting from 1992 in addition to the amount of ODA in the previous years. It was surely a considerable fund, (and after five years it was proven that the ambitious target was more than fulfilled; ODA in the environmental field increased by more than forty percent, providing 144 billion yen (approximately US$13.3 billion)). However, Japan did not attract much attention from other countries as a "green" country at that time. It was perhaps because there was little to advertise other than the fund; i.e. non-existence of a key person who could fully elaborate Japan's activities towards conservation of the global environment, and no commitment to action other than offering funds. In addition Prime Minister Miyazawa was not able to attend the meeting because of domestic affairs, and only his message was conveyed and was recorded as an official speech. The absence of the Prime Minister also weakened Japan's impression.

Global environmental problems were not high on Japan's agenda in those days, either. The general public in Japan considered that pollution abatement measures in the 1960s and 1970s had been successful and that environmental problems were things of the past. Two international environmental conventions that were opened for signatory at the UNCED, the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity, did not attract much of the Japanese public's attention. The Council of Foreign Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had completed a report entitled *Global Environmental Problems and Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation* just one year prior to the UNCED. This report contained recommendations concerning the future role of Japanese aid in the environmental field. Japan was rather in a rush to prepare for the UNCED, having little idea how to respond to the growing demand from other countries for Japan's contribution.

Two significant commitments were adopted at UNCED: the Rio Declaration, which stipulated the concerns of Head of States gathered at the Conference, and Agenda 21, which listed numerous policies that were raised during the UNCED in order to achieve sustainable development. For Japan, signing the Rio Declaration meant that Japan would commit herself to aim for a sustainable future. Thus, UNCED was a starting point for Japan to become a more environmentally aware country. Rapid changes towards sustainable development were observed in Japan's decision- making after the UNCED. This chapter will discuss these changes from three different angles. The first is implementation of environmentally sound policies and measures at national level. The second is participation of various actors of the community in decision making, as well as in actions related to environmental policies. The third is the recognition of a more active role in the realization of sustainable development at international level. Each principle set by the Rio Declaration became part of the fundamental core for building a new environmental policy in Japan.

2. Activity or Pressure

Although the Rio Declaration agreed at UNCED stimulated changes in Japan toward being an environmentally aware country, it was not the only reason why Japan shifted its position in the 1990s. There were several other important incentives for Japan to strive for the implementation of the Rio Declaration.

2.1. Japan's Position in the International Community

Japan succeeded in recovering from the aftermath of the Second World War by rapid economic growth. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by around 10% each year. Although this speed of growth slowed down in the 1970s and 1980s partly due to the Oil Crisis of 1973 and 1979, Japan became one of the top economic countries in the late 1980s. Once it came to be one of the major economic superpowers, Japan was expected by other countries to make a contribution to tackling global issues. In such a case, it was considered among Japanese policymakers that enhancement of international cooperation on global environmental issues would be the most advantageous political issue through which Japan could contribute to the international community. Japan had experienced heavy contamination at the time of rapid economic growth. It had technologies and know-how to get over pollution. It was thus in a good position to share its experience and know-how with other countries.

Geographically, Japan is one of the Asian countries. It is today one of the few developed countries in the region in terms of GDP per capita. This situation makes a difference between the role of Japan and that of the other developed countries. At the regional level, there has been a growing recognition, especially among Northeast Asian countries, that air pollution and acid rain are the most serious environmental problems of the region. Cooperation on mitigation of acid rain in the region is still at a monitoring stage, but some studies indicate that cooperation in the region is the key to solving regional air pollution as well as solving domestic air pollution in the developing countries. For example, improvement of energy efficiency reduces emission of both sulfur and carbon dioxide (CO2) per unit of electricity generated. Thus, projects in Northeast Asian countries on energy-efficiency improvements will contribute to the mitigation not only of air pollution of that country, but also of acid rain at regional level, and of global warming at global level.

2.2. Japan's Dependency on Overseas for Natural Resources, Especially Energy Resources

In general, conservation of the environment requires additional economic cost, at least in the short term. This is the case for Japan. For example, Japan's energy efficiency is one of the lowest among many developed countries, and it is said that the marginal cost of further improvement of energy efficiency is higher in Japan than in most other countries. It is, however, still considered to be advantageous for Japan to further improve energy efficiency because it will lead to reduction of import of energy resources, which will then lead to energy security of the country. This also relates to energy security at regional level. Natural resources are not equally distributed in Northeast Asia. Japan imports 98% of coal consumed and almost 100% of crude oil. Korea is also dependent on overseas for energy. On the other hand, China has a great amount of coal, but suffers shortage of oil. With rapid economic growth, China is expected to increase its demand for oil. Countries in Northeast Asia worry that this growing demand of China may tighten oil supply in the future. Countries in this region thus support measures that reduce the speed of growth of demand for oil in China. Offering technological assistance to improve energy efficiency in oil-consuming equipment such as automobiles has been beneficial for both Japan and China.

Similar accounts can be given for food. Food consumption in Japan is dependent on import; the rate of import of food over total food consumption is 70 percent for cereal, 95 percent for beans, 43 percent for meat, and 51 percent for fruits (figures for 1996). If there should be any food shortage in other countries caused by climate change or by

other environmental changes, it would automatically be reflected in the food supply to Japanese consumers. It is considered in Japan that protecting the global environment is equal to securing Japanese basic human needs.

2.3. Growing Awareness Inside Japan

The UNCED was the first big chance for the Japanese public to be informed of what is going on at global level concerning environment and development. The term "sustainable development" became widely used among the media. Hosting the third Conference of the Parties (COP3) to the FCCC in 1997 was also one of the important opportunities for the public to become aware of the global environmental issues. Climatic disasters such as extraordinary rainfall in the summer of 1998 led to severe floods in China, Korea and Japan. More than 3000 people were killed in China. The summer of 1999 on the other hand was an extraordinarily hot summer with sudden heavy rainfall as in the previous year. Although it has not been proven whether this extraordinary weather was driven by climate change or not, there is now more awareness among the people in Japan about the impact of climate change. Especially after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol at COP3, more and more people recognized the issue, and supported environmentally–sound policies and measures.

In 1998, the media started to take up the issue of the dioxin that came out of waste incineration plants. Local residents and farmers who lived in the neighborhood of such plants began to protest against them. As these environmental problems began to attract people's attention, the government felt the support of the public towards implementation of ambitious environmental policies.

2. 4. Japan's Anticipation of Emission Reduction Credits for Greenhouse Gases

The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty adopted in 1997 that sets emission targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from Annex I countries (developed countries and countries whose economies are in transition to market economies). In the Protocol, Japan committed to reduce its GHG emission by 6 percent from the level of 1990 by 2008-2012. The reduction target is considered to be a tough target for Japan.
On the other hand, there are three mechanism in the Protocol that allow Annex I countries to acquire a kind of emission permit, or credits, from other countries. Article 6 allows so-called "joint implementation among Annex I countries". This is a mechanism which allows one Annex I country to invest in GHG emission mitigation

projects in another Annex I country, and acquire a reduced emission allowance from the project. Article 12 of the Protocol defines “clean development mechanism”. It is a similar mechanism to joint implementation but projects will be carried out in developing countries that have no emission limitation. Article 17 opened the door for the development of this emission trading scheme.

Japan is seeking for means to achieve the 6 percent target using all three mechanisms, having the most interest in Articles 6 and 12. With Article 6, Japan can initiate investment in the Siberian region with the cooperation of Russia. With Article 12, Japan can promote projects in China and other Asian countries. Cooperation for sustainable development with Asian countries and Russia will benefit Japan concerning the Kyoto target, and at the same time will benefit the world.

These situations and circumstances worked as incentives for Japan to look forward to implementation of the Rio Declaration, and to seek for sustainable development inside and outside Japan.

3. State, Detection and Diagnosis of Situation

Even before the Rio Summit in 1992, Japan had implemented various kinds of policies and measures to promote “pollution prevention” or “environmental protection”. There were, however, certain areas that called for additional action to achieve the goal of “sustainable development”.

3.1. Laws out of Date

Before the UNCED, Japanese environmental policy was designed mainly to overcome environmental problems in earlier days. In the 1950s and 1960s, together with rapid industrialization after the Second World War, industrial pollution became serious in Japan. Smoke, soot and wastewater emitted from plants had polluted the environment, which caused pollution-related health damage. Minamata disease was caused by mercury in seawater and fish. Yokkaichi asthma was caused by heavy smoke from industrial plants. These health hazards became serious social issues in Japan.
Two basic laws were established at that time to combat such problems. One was the Basic Law for Environmental Pollution Control, enacted in 1967, and the other was the Nature Conservation Law, enacted in 1972, to minimize the destruction of outstanding features of the natural environment. These laws achieved considerable success in

tackling the environmental problems they addressed in those days, especially industrial air and water pollution, noise, odor, and destruction of nature. The laws reflected the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) (Principle 13 of Rio Declaration), which became a basis of Japanese pollution abatement policies. In order to achieve and maintain environmental quality standards, more detailed legislation was agreed under the two basic laws. The Air Pollution Control Law was enacted in 1968, the Water Pollution Control Law in 1970, and the Law Concerning Compensation and Prevention of Pollution-Related Health Damage in 1973. The last one conducted activities for the prevention of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, health counseling to help people to recover from such diseases, health examinations, functional training, as well as improving related facilities and machinery. This was implemented by utilizing the operation profit from a 50 billion-yen fund of the Pollution-Related Health Damage Compensation and Prevention Association.

By the beginning of the 1980s, such pollution-related problems had mostly been overcome by the changes stimulated by legislation. However, since the early 1980s, Japan began to face a new type of environmental problem. These new problems were global environmental problems such as ozone depletion and climate change, as well as domestic environmental problems mainly due to the collective effect of individuals' daily lives, such as waste disposal, exhaustive gases from heavy traffic, loss of accessible nature in urban areas, and degrading environmental protection capacity in forests and farmland. When this new type of environmental problem arose, the two basic laws gradually became insufficient. This meant that a new law had to cover not only industry but also all sectors including transportation and residential sectors to tackle the problem.

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Biographical Sketch

Yasuko Kawashima (Ph.D. at Tokyo Institute of Technology in 1997) has been working for the National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) since 1992. Her areas of research are climate change negotiation at international level, comparative studies of countries' decision-making processes on climate change, and linkage between domestic and international levels of climate change policy. She was a visiting scholar at the Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland in 1999-2000. Her publications include "Japan's decision-making about climate change problems: comparative study of decisions in 1990 and in 1997," *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies*, (2000) Vol.3, pp.29-57; and "Comparative Analysis of Decision-making Processes of the Developed Countries towards CO2 Emissions Reduction Target," *International Environmental Affairs*, Vol.9, No.2. (1997) pp.95-126.