

GROUP ONE DISCUSSION SUMMARY

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1. Session: Satoyama issues

The main problem with Satoyama seems to be decreasing population in the local villages, leading to various ecological degradations. Satoyama is a battle zone between man and wild life, as shown with the bears entering human-populated areas. We discussed how people might be attracted to live in satoyama areas. There must be some incentive for people to live there. Some proposed to allow migration to Satoyama to solve this problem. Another strategy is to create new business opportunities. Many products previously produced in satoyama villages, like silk, mushroom etc., have been facing competition from China amongst others. To develop economies in Satoyama villages, traditional production should be promoted. Satoyama prefectures should develop some idea to make money out of tradition, to revitalize traditional production. Maybe internet business could help in selling products, connecting satoyama villagers to the rest of the world. The concept of “One village one product” found in Japan could be an example of such business opportunities. Also, in some areas, animal husbandry may help. At the same time, the group emphasized that it is not only about economics, it is also about preserving traditional culture.

2. Session: Millenium Ecosystem Assessment

Having been presented with the serious problems facing ecosystems and hence human well-being, we discussed the question: how do we change our style of life? The basic idea proposed is that a sustainable lifestyle is about recycling resources. Some suggested that Europeans may have better experiences with this than the Japanese, with more environmental sensitivity. Either way, we still face mass production and mass consumption in the developed world, and we should do something about it. For instance, the Kyoto protocol should be carried further by developed countries. Of course, production processes are important, as when multinational companies use developing nations resources, and developing countries are weak to impose regulations. But consumer preferences are also important. If consumers become more conscious about the environment, things may change, as seen for example with the “fair trade” movement. Hence, government policy, consumer side and production side are all involved, and there needs to be global cooperation. In dealing with these issues, we should think about the next generations, and of how to make a better world for our children. Here, education is important. So, it is important to focus on what each of us can do, but we all face dilemmas, and changing lifestyles is not easy.

3. Session: Climate Change

From Ms. Habiyas presentation, we agreed that there is strong evidence for serious negative effects from global warming: glacier melt, ecosystems change, sea water level rises, more floods, more draughts, tornados and hurricanes, like in USA, Hokkaido etc. Although we sometimes don't see the effects in our own countries, it is obvious it is happening in other parts of the world, such as in Greenland. For some countries, global warming is a matter of live and death, as when the islands of Kiribati and Samoa will sink in 20 years due to sea level increases. Industrialized countries should take responsibility since they caused the problem. Americans are ahead of any nations to pollute, but even with the Katrina hurricane affecting poor people, American policy still doesn't change. They don't want to take responsibility since they are afraid of decrease in GDP growth. In the short run, America might gain from this, but in the long run they will lose. Environmental impacts are long-term, so it is difficult for human to compare short term benefit and long term optimality. Still, we can reduce our own pollution. Consumption patterns should be changed to mitigate these negative trends. One example might be tourism, which deteriorates nature, but eco-tourism can help, as examples from Australia show. Also, using global taxation on natural resources, like a carbon dioxide tax, would help, but then we need a supranational government body

4. Session: Environmental policy and science

Here, we focused on issues of traditional knowledge, and of NGO/NPOs. Traditional knowledge can be protected if indigenous identities are recognized, and this may enhance ecological sustainability. As for NGOs, the group emphasized how essential they are for policy changes. However, NGOs face various problems, not least in Japan, which we discussed in some detail. Compared to Europe, NGOs in Japan have limited political power. Funding is a basic problem, so charity and stakeholder support is needed. But also, in Japan NGO is a rather new concept, and it breaks with the traditional idea that government takes care of all problems. Some people suggested that the Japanese no longer can depend only on the government when it comes to serious environmental degradation. Cultural factors may influence how Japanese people express themselves, but in the 60s and 70s, people did protest against pollution, like Minamata disease. Public opinion can be very important in terms of popular voting/saying. It is important to use available skills and knowledge, in a collective effort including people, government, stakeholders, and NGOs.

5. Session: Mongolian Development

This presentation about economic development and nature cost in Mongolia highlighted how humans used to have a more balanced relationship with nature. In this sense, the Mongolian case may be similar to traditional gatherer and agricultural societies in parts of Africa and Asia. This raises the question of how to protect this kind of traditional life style, which stayed within certain restrictions. For instance, native Americans never had any notion of ownership, but they just hunted the required amount of buffalos. Such self-sustaining life-styles, like in Mongolia and in satoyama areas in Japan, have been destroyed, but present campaigns seek to revive the old systems. There are things we can all learn from such traditional lifestyles. Also, trying to “think locally and act globally” may be a notion leading to greater sustainability and equality. However, lifestyles vary greatly, and applying solutions from one local setting may not work for modern, urban areas. We discussed, if all this means that we should not have development, like we have had in the rich part of the world. The group was divided into more pessimistic and more optimistic viewpoints. Some argued that new technology may help to sustain and supply, as in organic agriculture. The question is how to combine ideas of traditional and modern production. Ignoring either one can be problematic. In the end, technology cannot solve all the problems, love, cooperation, knowledge and human interaction is needed for sustainability.

Session 6: Transportation and clean energy

The main question we discussed was how to reduce the environmental problems, like CO₂ emissions, from car usage. New technologies, like hybrid cars and electric cars, are part of the answer. But other methods should be included, like raising taxes on car use, better public transportation, and urban planning that reduces the transportation needs. However, reducing CO₂ involves choices that may vary in countries, such as the option to use mass transport in China and India because of population density. We discussed the problem of developing countries receiving used, polluting old cars from developed countries. We also discussed various systems of car sharing and car pooling, which is being encouraged in places like Yokohama and Kanazawa in Japan, and has a long history in Europe. Sometimes, car sharing can be trendy these days. Also, using bicycles should be encouraged. However, there may be problems of infrastructure. Finally, it would be good to make Americans use less big, polluting SUV cars!