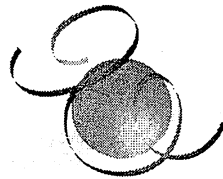


Global Youth Exchange Program 2006

Proposal

Environment and Economic Development

-Searching key ideas to create harmony in the 21st century-



GLOBAL
YOUTH
EXCHANGE

8 December 2006

Sponsor : Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

PROPOSAL FROM THE GLOBAL YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM 2006

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *Searching Key Ideas to Create Harmony in the 21st Century*

We, the participants of the Global Youth Exchange Program 2006, representing 31 countries and one international organization, have convened in Aichi Prefecture, Japan, site of the 2005 World Exposition, Aichi, Japan (EXPO 2005 Aichi), under the generous auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. We sought to articulate our views by sharing experiences and convictions, reaching a general consensus in our proposal.

Following on the main theme of EXPO 2005—"Nature's Wisdom"—we recommend key ideas on harmonizing environment and economic development.

Sub-theme 1: Nature's Wisdom and Cultures of the World

Nature's Wisdom

Nature is a complex, dynamic, evolving and creating system. Likewise, it is an interconnected whole larger than the sum of its parts, and so has diversity greater than any individual. Moreover, through its cycles, nature is able to heal and rejuvenate itself. We believe that humans should perceive themselves as one with nature rather than separate from it.

Indigenous Cultures

Culture was established from nature. Through observation most indigenous cultures developed an intuitive understanding of nature's cycles from ongoing trial and error, where flexible and adaptive rules were created over the long-term. This allowed them to develop sustainable natural resource governance practices, which were localized to their environments. Thus, we learned that despite the different descriptions of nature's wisdom, the common element amongst cultures is their capability to embrace diversity allowing them to co-exist in mutual harmony with nature.

Profit Maximization

Today, this fundamental ancestral wisdom is ignored because of the predominance of an orientation towards profit maximization alone. The problem with profit maximization in its present form is that it creates a dichotomy between humans and nature leading to exploitation, negative externalities, a loss of diversity and the belief of control and superiority over nature. Indeed, we believe that profit maximization has led to a focus on maximizing our individual wants, rather than satisfying our collective needs.

A Common Global Environmental Ethic

We recognize that all of us now live in a globalized society, rather than a localized environment separated by geographical boundaries. Hence, a common global environmental ethic must be realized in order to restore our adaptive balance and harmony between humans and nature. Indeed, there is reason for much optimism, as once we learn how to create flexible rules we need not just co-exist with nature, but we can co-create with nature, thereby exploring creative visions of nature for our own specific benefit. Thus, this ethic reflects and includes a universal principle of ecological responsibility so that we can in part internalize our negative externalities.

Recommendations:

In order to attain this common global environmental ethic, we propose that the international community should:

- **Embrace collectivity:** We need to approach environmental and development issues as one common global challenge, to be solved by collective international action. Collectiveness can be facilitated by emphasizing cooperation, which promotes tolerance and sensitivity towards diversity at all levels.
- **Adopt a new holistic learning paradigm:** To establish global cooperation, we need to adopt all forms of learning. Learning is both formal and informal, so that we can embrace intuitive and intellectual understanding. This new holistic learning paradigm should incorporate learning from our personal meditations, our families, our ancestors, our religions, and our academic and other social institutions. This will ensure that our intellect is attuned to our once held intuitive understanding of nature's wisdom. Effectively, then, this adoption of a new learning paradigm will allow us to "act local and think global" about environmental issues. Once we rediscover this way of learning, we can advance in our development.
- **Ensure diversity, flexibility and creativity for adopting rules:** Learning in our new holistic paradigm should not be absolute, but relative, as we should ensure that our developed diverse set of rules adapt to our ever-changing environment. We must not only be cautious of rule changes, but be courageous as well, to create new flexible rules that allow us to adapt to our environment.

Sub-theme 2: Striking Balance Between Economic Development and Preservation of Nature

Humans are integrally connected to the natural world, especially through economic activities. In order to strike a proper balance between economic development and the preservation of nature, we must focus on the sustainable use of resources. International environmental declarations guide governments in protecting the integrity of the global environment. In reality, however, crucial elements of these agreements are rarely successfully implemented and the precautionary principle is not sufficiently integrated in international or national policy-making.

Short-sighted planning, coupled with a failure to internalize the environmental costs that will affect future generations, has created disharmony between economic development and our environment. Often, special efforts are needed to act responsibly towards the environment and some countries are moving in that positive direction. We present here some key reasons for the existing situation and propose ways of minimizing environmental impact while maximizing sustainable economic development.

Analysis of Disharmony

There exist serious problems with the way that environmental issues are treated under current economic systems and trading regimes. For example, a lack of *incentives* for good environmental behavior, and similar lack of *disincentives* for bad behavior, leads to a situation in which economic players are not encouraged to act on environmentally-beneficial economic opportunities. In many situations, it is inconvenient to act as responsibly as possible towards the environment. Through our current systems of resource valuation, many important environmental resources and services are perceived to be free.

We recognize that **businesses** are important actors on environmental issues, both in creating problems and in leading the way with solutions. However, many corporations are reluctant to develop environmentally-friendly products because they can carry increased cost and present additional risk. There is not enough information-sharing between corporations of environmental knowledge. A new wave of “green” businesses holds promise; unfortunately, these businesses have yet to receive the support they deserve, and environmental products have not been supported to the extent possible.

Environmental issues are seen in a very narrow perspective. There is a lack of common commitment to environmental issues, especially in **government**. Many consumers, decision-makers, and business people lack a basic understanding of the ways in which economy and environment interact. **Individuals** have stopped listening to environmental messages, in part because existing ways of communicating environmental issues have become ineffective. Additionally, current environmental education campaigns organized by **civil society** often do not reach target audiences.

Countries are currently not held accountable for their environmental records, and little pressure is applied to change their behavior. The international community has failed to effectively monitor existing environmental problems or propose adequate solutions to these problems. In many regions of our world, there is still a lack of law and regulation promoting preservation of the environment. Where regulations do exist, enforcement is lax; this is especially true for vital international environmental treaties.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge already ongoing efforts and initiatives carried out by various stakeholders to preserve the environment while sustaining economic development. We recommend and encourage such efforts to continue to operate on a larger scale. We further reiterate the need for various forms of education as a vehicle of raising awareness and exchanging ideas on the need to create harmony between economic development and environmental preservation.

Recommendations:

We have identified four basic principles that all actors should embrace:

- Promotion and use of green purchasing and responsible consumption
- Information sharing on good practices
- Creation of real participatory processes
- Better education to raise awareness and increase knowledge

Five key players have important roles in creating harmony between the preservation of nature and economic development, namely businesses (private sector), government, individuals, civil society and the global community.

Businesses should:

- Implement 'green' purchasing, 'green' labeling and 'green' partnerships. In addition, businesses should produce and promote the purchasing of 'green' products, placing labels as indicators of environmentally friendly products and/or manufacturing companies.
- Use strict reporting mechanisms, such as international standards of reporting, and integrate environmental issues in business tenders and company bidding.
- Work together with academia to develop methods of clean production technologies.

Governments should:

- Form strong partnerships, on a national, regional and international level, to adopt economic incentives that facilitate an eco-friendly market.
- Use fines collected for violations of environmental legislation for environment-related activities.
- Take initiative, in the spirit of the precautionary principle, to carry out research in collaboration with other stakeholders, concerning possible future environmental problems that may be detrimental and take the necessary preventative steps.

Individuals should:

- Recognize that each person has a role to play by practicing environmentally responsible consumption and behavior, with the help of other actors.

Civil society should:

- Create platforms that are conducive to communication and sharing of knowledge, through collaboration, partnership and coalitions between NGOs, government and the private sector.
- Advocate for the inclusion of environmental health impacts in Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Impact Assessments.
- Call for health professionals to be trained on environmental issues.
- Establish independent bodies to monitor the implementation of environmental laws by governments.
- Promote the establishment of individual network initiatives to facilitate the sharing of information.

The global community should:

- Explicitly address environmental issues in international trade agreements.
- Facilitate the transfer of rights to appropriate technologies, and the transfer of knowledge, from industrialized countries to developing countries.
- Establish data bases and monitoring mechanisms to track violations of international environmental treaties.
- Increase support for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), recognizing that it has the potential to provide leadership on pressing and persistent environmental issues.
- Strengthen ties between environmental and other agencies, both locally and internationally. Provide financial and technical support to these agencies, especially in developing countries, to enable them to cope with environmental problems that affect the livelihoods of impoverished communities.

Sub-theme 3: Shift from a Mass Production, Consumption and Disposal Society to a Sound Material-cycle Society

Our planet has limited resources. Given this reality, the present practice of mass production and consumption is unsustainable and inadequate. The 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle) has been proposed as a crucial means to achieve a sound material-cycle society, in which production and use of natural resources are more aligned with nature's cycles.

However, huge disparities exist among high-income and low-income countries as well as within each country with respect to the distribution of responsibilities, access to resources and the decision-making process. Furthermore, there are insufficient linkages between environmental and economic policies and practices. As, most often, economic policies have the leading role, production systems and consumption patterns are not supporting eco-friendly products and processes.

Recommendations:

In order to change the present situation, we propose a rule-based approach in combination with a responsibility approach. A sound material-cycle society has to maintain balance between economic development and environmental preservation. Therefore, the following recommendations have to be seen as connected to those brought forward in previous sections of this proposal.

Rule-based Approach

The establishment of a sound material-cycle society as a common goal at the global level and avoidance of conflicting actions require a coordinated institutional approach. The latter demands a set of procedures, regulations and frameworks able to adequately reflect society's aims and needs now and in the future. The success of this approach depends on the awareness and commitment of decision-makers at the local, national and international levels.

We therefore recommend that the international community should:

- Not only enforce, but also expand the existing regulatory framework to suit the 3R model. In a globalized world, material flows and product usage are increasingly integrated across borders. This requires the coordination of the 3R framework at the international level. The regulatory framework for 3R should also emphasize its “Reduce” and “Reuse” components, which are often neglected.
- Allocate more resources for applied environmental research, and promote the application of results, within an appropriate regulatory framework to achieve this.
- Create or improve international technical standards to certify eco-friendly products and processes. In this regard, the focus should not only be on product specifications, but on the entire life cycle of products and services.
- Integrate the principles of a sound material-cycle society into international trade laws and agreements.
- Use appropriate financial tools such as subsidies or eco-money in order to encourage consumption of eco-friendly products. Conversely, additional taxes to reduce consumption and deter the production of non-eco-friendly products should be used in tandem with efforts to eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies.
- Detach environmental policies from other narrowly defined economic and political motivations in order to ensure their credibility. Environmental policies should not be misused as protectionist measures or to impose sanctions for political purposes.

Responsibility Approach

Shifting from a mass consumption to a sound material-cycle society requires more than a rule-based approach. It should be implemented by the motivation of society to preserve the environment. This requires passion, enthusiasm, consciousness and awareness of environmental issues. If we share all these qualities we will be in a more responsible society. We hold joint responsibility for mass consumption and production issues that have an environmental impact. Responsibility is also a key element in achieving the 3R perspective and a sound material-cycle society.

Therefore, we propose that the international community should:

- Enlighten corporate managers and employees about the financial benefits of creating and producing eco-friendly products.
- Increase transparency concerning whether production processes and raw materials that are used are resource efficient and utilize best technologies.
- Promote sharing of good practices and 3R technologies, adapting them to the circumstances of each country.
- Include personal and social responsibility as well as the environmental impacts of mass production and consumption as cross-cutting themes in education.
- Promote public participation and transparency in decision-making procedures related to the establishment of a material-cycle society.
- Introduce programs to increase the environmental awareness of social, cultural and religious leaders in order to make use of the values that encourage people to adopt a more eco-friendly attitude.

Conclusion

The ideas and principles contained in this proposal represent the collective vision of the participants of the Global Youth Exchange Program 2006. We believe that the recommendations constitute a framework for moving beyond the current status quo to create true harmony between environment and economic development.

The effective and efficient realization of the ideas, principles and recommendations in this proposal requires a strong commitment to various forms of education, so as to raise awareness and increase knowledge about our environment.

Transcending differences in culture, language and religion, GYE 2006 manifested the optimism and dynamism of its participants. We take this spirit of hope and action with us as we strive to make a significant contribution in our respective countries and to the global community.