

Japan Renewable Energy Foundation Symposium
On the Occasion of Dr. David Suzuki's Visit to Japan
Keys to Establishing a Sustainable Energy Society
—Reconsidering with Dr. Suzuki How to Deal with Energy—
Executive Report

Saturday, December 8, 2012

Japan Renewable Energy Foundation held a symposium titled “Keys to Establishing a Sustainable Energy Society” on December 8, 2012. Approximately 180 people participated in the event, which took place at United Nations University U Thant Hall in Tokyo. The outline of the discussion is as follows:

Opening Remarks

Tomas Kåberger, JREF Executive Board Chair, began by expressing his delight that Dr. David Suzuki joined the Board of JREF and took on the task to help JREF develop the Japanese energy system into a more sustainable form. He stated that the size and technological capacity of the human species have resulted in significant environmental consequences. At the same time, however, companies and countries have proven that human species have the ability to meet these challenges. Germany, for example, has increased its reliance on renewable energy from less than 5% at the turn of the century to more than 25% in the first six months of 2012. Sweden has increased renewable energy sources from 39% to 49% in seven years, and China in 2012 was able to produce more electricity from wind than from nuclear power. He said while it has been proven that there are available working solutions, it still remains to be proven that these opportunities are utilized at the scale that can meet global challenges.

Keynote Speech

David Suzuki, JREF Board member, said what humans do in the next few years will determine the survival of the human species. Sir Martin Rees, astronomer royal in the UK, has said that the chances that human beings will survive to the end of the century are 50:50. Suzuki explained that the human species have expanded to become the most numerous mammal on the planet. This has meant humans have a big ecological footprint and have become a force of nature that is altering the chemical, physical, and biological properties of the planet. He questioned why Japan is not leading the world in calling to protect the oceans on which so much of Japan is based. Suzuki said international agreements such as the ones on biodiversity and climate are bound to fail because of the way humans see the world and their relationship with the environment. He said that the environmental movement which took off in the 1960s has, despite its earlier successes, failed to shift this paradigm. Humans still see the world as they are in charge and everything is

there for them to use as they want. He said governments, corporations, and the remaining stakeholders must start by acknowledging that we live in a world dominated by the laws of nature and that having clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy, and biodiversity are our most important priorities.

Naoki Ishikawa, photographer, described his travels and the people he has met, through his photographs. He shared insight on the different perceptions of nature between indigenous people and non-indigenous people. He said the Sherpa people in Nepal consider the mountain to be very sacred, whereas others, including Japanese people and Europeans, refer to mountain climbing and reaching the summit as conquering the mountain. Through his photographs of the Arctic, Ishikawa showed how global warming has led to rising sea levels. He said while the very cause of global warming is advanced industrial countries, the brunt is borne by those living near the sea. He also said although people who live close to nature tend to be seen as backward by not adopting modern technologies, they do so out of choice. He said in Polynesia, he has learned to navigate by relying on the stars, the wind, the undulations of the waves, and the sun. He said he feels that the people of the Pacific Islands are artists. As with people elsewhere, they acquire skills to live with nature.

Takejiro Sueyoshi, JREF Executive Board Vice-Chair, raised several issues for discussion. The first issue was how global actors can have a shared sense of crisis. Citing a World Bank report (2012), *Turn Down the Heat*, he said that stakeholders must recognize temperatures are increasing. He also gave the example of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 as one of the effects of global warming. Referring to a report of Munich Re (2012), Sueyoshi said global warming causes natural disasters, which in turn increases insurance payments. The second issue he raised was how to deal with the problem through an all-out effort. As reflected in the Natural Capital Declaration, an outcome of Rio+20, he said natural capital, i.e., the source of wealth and economic growth, should be protected. Sueyoshi also urged Japan to recognize the need to reflect natural capital gains and losses into corporate accounting. Thirdly, Sueyoshi raised the issue of how to prevent Japan from being left out. Already Japan is far behind other countries in overall renewable energy generation capacity. He said efforts need to be made to regain Japan's position as a leader in this field. Fourthly, he raised the issue of how to realize ethical choices. He recalled that Germany last year decided to stop nuclear power generation. The question of why nuclear power generation should be pursued when there are other safer energy options is an ethical question that Japanese people need to review.

Panel Discussion

Mika Ohbayashi, JREF Director, moderated the panel discussion. On the issue of how after 3.11, discussion has focused on energy over climate change, Kåberger agreed that there has been a tendency in Japan since Fukushima to propose a false dichotomy that the choice is either dangerous nuclear power or fossil fuels. He recalled that Germany has demonstrated that significant reductions in nuclear power use may be achieved in

parallel with reductions in fossil fuel use by sufficiently investing in renewable energy.

Suzuki reiterated that international agreements are doomed to fail as we try to make nature fit into our agenda, when we have to fit our institutions and priorities into the limits defined by nature. Kåberger concurred on this view. He said it is encouraging that some companies have made carbon neutral investments and have proven that they are not necessarily in conflict with economic interests. Sueyoshi said that the failure of international agreements in macro terms in and of itself is not a grave concern. This is because at the country, industry, and company level, many and some impressive strategies have been implemented.

Suzuki said he believes the heart of the issue is the economic system. Contrary to belief, the economy does not need to grow forever to achieve prosperity. He said Japan is the example that people can have the things that they need without a growing economy. It is important for companies to measure the environmental load, Sueyoshi said. Kåberger added that there are good and then bad calculations, an example of the latter being the claims that nuclear power is cheap because the cost of nuclear waste management and accidents is disregarded. Ishikawa noted that the people he has met have no choice but to live day to day. They take what they have and make do by making use of their wisdom.

Ohbayashi pointed out that some have said renewable energy can be destructive to the environment. Kåberger responded by giving the example of wind power plants in Denmark, where it is now compulsory to offer local people ownership to power plants. This is a good way to make the investments fair while people also make a profit, he said. Regarding the potential of using Japanese hot springs as a source of geothermal energy, he said in Iceland, a geothermal power plant is one of the most visited tourist attractions. He said it is fully possible to combine geothermal energy use and tourism as long as the local people are able to benefit.

Each panelist then moved onto discussing the steps that Japanese people can take. Suzuki listed several examples in Canada, underscoring that it is important for people across the world to be involved politically. Ishikawa shared his view on the importance of respecting nature, not out of obligation but from the bottom of one's heart. Kåberger emphasized the importance of trying to be a pioneer to show others what they can do. Sueyoshi said that from the experience of 3.11, Japan can provide an energy model for the world.

The panel discussion was brought to a close with each panelist offering a message to future generations and the role of seniors. Suzuki urged parents to be active politically to ensure politicians pay attention to the implications for their children. He also called on elders to pass on their lessons to encourage the young generation to take action. Ishikawa agreed that people must translate thoughts into action. Kåberger said if people spoke from the heart and dared to speak, many people would come to an agreement more than it is

believed. The message to young people, Sueyoshi said, was that the future is in their hands. To elders, he urged them to try to do their best regardless of their stage in life. Suzuki reminded the panel that significant U.S. investment in science half a century ago, against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's successes in outer space, resulted in the U.S. becoming the only country to land on the moon and winning the most Nobel Prizes in science. Unexpected things will happen if there is commitment. Ohbayashi reiterated that individuals have to take ownership of the problem, make choices, and take action.