

Preface

The international community has already accepted the concept of “sustainable development” or “environmentally sound development” as a key for economic development toward the twenty-first century. On June 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro, and some 10,000 official delegates from 150 countries and around 20,000 concerned citizens and activists participated in the conference or a parallel Global Forum. Among the achievements of this Earth Summit, mention should be made of the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, which sets out specific action plans, and the Statement on Forest Principles, as well as the commencement of signing of the Global Warming Convention (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) and the Biodiversity Convention. Above all, the conference was significant as a forum where nations agreed on the need to maintain the global environment for their common future. The Earth Summit, however, is just a start point for the international community to work together against environmental disruption and natural resource depletion. The time has come to tackle the issue of development and environment in earnest and in detail.

The major failure of the advanced countries, especially Japan, in the field of environmental management is closely related to their development strategy. For instance, throughout Japan’s “catching up” process, overriding priority was placed on industrialization and export promotion, and the environmental fallout was largely ignored as an insignificant side effect. The governments of the industrialized countries never acted until they faced severe environmental hazards and environmental problems became a political issue. This often resulted in tragedies, Minamata disease being one of the most serious. Once such disasters occur, the cost of compensation for the damage is very high and complete recovery is almost impossible. The irreversibility of the problem should be seriously considered.

Unfortunately, the traditional approach to development still seems to be popular. Asian Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs), especially Korea and Taiwan, have already followed in Japan’s footsteps, furthermore China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) appear to be heading in the same direction. The economies of the East Asian countries (Asian NIEs, China and the ASEAN countries) have maintained an outstanding growth performance in the recent past and are reputed as the “growth center” of the world economy. These countries, however, are encountering severe environmental disruption and natural resource depletion as a result of their economic success. Special attention, therefore, should be paid not just to the benefits of economic growth but also to the costs. Environmental damage will be one of the most important.

To alleviate poverty and to improve the living standards of the people, East Asian countries still need to attain substantial economic growth. We should recognize that poverty itself is one of the main causes of environmental degradation in developing countries and that these countries eagerly seek industrialization to solve this kind of unique problem. As mentioned above, however, industrialization in turn causes another type of environmental problem. This is the dilemma that faces many developing countries today.

Recognizing this problem, the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) set up a three-year research project titled “Development and the Environment in Asian Countries” to

examine their industrialization and related environmental disruptions in the fiscal year 1991. The primary objectives of the project are to evaluate the impact of industrialization on the environment in Asian countries and to analyze the socioeconomic and political background of their environmental issues. Among the countries or regions targeted were China, Korea and Taiwan in East Asia and the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in Southeast Asia. Before concluding the project, the IDE held an international workshop on "Development and the Environment: the Experiences of Japan and Industrializing Asia" from December 16-22, 1993. The main objective of the workshop was to scrutinize findings and propositions developed in the project.

The workshop consisted of two major parts: a study tour (December 17-19) and a conference (December 20-21). The study tour was conducted in the Kansai area (in the mid-western part of Honshu island) and participants visited a manufacturing factory, a local government office and a research institute. They also had a discussion meeting with members of environmental non governmental organizations. The field trip provided the participants with a good opportunity to understand the Japanese experience of tackling pollution. The conference was held at the IDE, Tokyo. A total of 43 leading scholars and specialists from 10 countries and areas participated in the conference, engaging in lively debate on the issues of development and the environment. This book contains the papers presented at the conference.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all of those who have participated in the workshop, as well as those who have helped to organize this large international gathering. Finally, we would like to add that responsibility for views or opinions expressed in this volume rests entirely with the individual contributors and that their opinions do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the IDE.

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