

Preface

We are currently facing a range of environmental issues, including global warming, the build-up of hazardous substances and diminishing wetlands and natural forests. The 3R concept is one of the key means for reducing the burden human activities place on the environment. 3R is closely related to waste management, but policies based on the 3R principles have had beneficial effects in other areas. Applying 3R can reduce the amount of resources and energy extracted and used. 3R also plays an important role in the management of hazardous substances. Reducing the amount of waste using 3R can reduce the area needed for landfill, which helps preserve wetlands and other ecosystems.

Japan has put a lot of effort into 3R in the field of waste management since the 1970s, especially in terms of recycling. Until the 1960s, recycling was market driven. Policy makers realized the need for a recycling policy, when the volume of waste increased rapidly along with the prices of resources in the early 1970s. Since the 1990s, as waste became an important social concern, the concept of 3R has been increasingly emphasized. In 2000, Japan enacted the Fundamental Law for Establishing a Sound Material-Cycle Society and other related acts and the year 2000 is referred to as “the first year of the sound material-cycle society.” Establishing a “sound material-cycle society” is implicitly regarded as part of sustainable development.

Efforts to establish a sound material-cycle society should not be limited to Japan as environmental problems and the depletion of resources are global issues. In 2004, Japan’s then Prime Minister Koizumi proposed the “3R Initiative” at that year’s G8 summit. The initiative was officially launched at the Ministerial Conference on the 3R Initiative in April 2005 in Tokyo, where the Japanese government announced “Japan’s Action Plan for a World-Wide Sound Material-Cycle Society through the 3R initiative (Japan’s Action Plan to Promote Global Zero-Waste Societies).” The action plan includes activities for “Cooperation with developing countries for promoting zero-waste society” and “Promotion of international cooperation for realizing world-wide zero-waste societies.”

Japan’s Ministry of Environment produced two English-language reports about Japan’s experiences with 3R which were provided to governmental officials and experts in other countries. International cooperation programs in the field of 3R have also been started.

Although recent efforts by Japan regarding 3R have been shared with the international community, not everything will be applicable to other countries. It is therefore important to review the Japanese experiences from the view points of priority and applicability in developing countries, which this report sets out to do. It provides an examination of Japan’s experiences with 3R, with a special focus on recycling, in order to clarify how developing countries can benefit from them. However, the success or failure

of a policy largely depends on the social and economic circumstances in the country in which it is implemented. Some 3R policies cannot be implemented unless specific societal conditions are already in place. This report tries to point out such conditions.

In the process of preparing this report, we had many interviews with bureaucrats, experts and businessmen. On behalf of our project members, I would like to thank numerous persons who have given us kindest support and advice on our research project. In addition, I would like to express my thanks to Takahashi Industrial and Economic Research Foundation, which financially supported the international workshop held in December 2007. At the workshop, we presented the draft of our papers and discussed the major lessons shown in this report.

We hope that this report and the reviews of the Japanese experiences contained within will contribute to the global establishment of sound material-cycle societies.

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