

Report on the International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability 2020

-Social Inclusion in the Global Era-Sustainable Post-COVID-19 Society-

1. Introduction

The International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability 2020 was held on September 3-4, 2020 (2 days) under the theme of “Social Inclusion in the Global Era-Sustainable Post-COVID-19 Society-.” It was organized by the Science Council of Japan (SCJ) and co-organized by the Japan Sociological Society with endorsements from the International Science Council (ISC), the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), and the International Sociological Association (ISA). The SCJ has held the International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability annually since 2003.

With the mobility of people and goods that is a given in the global era being greatly restricted due to COVID-19, the issues of sustainability and inclusion on a global scale have become more important than ever. This Conference discussed how to make our future sustainable and inclusive, including issues surrounding the transformative change for CO2 mitigation in the “New Normal” post COVID-19.

The Conference consisted of two sessions, the sub-themes of which were "Issues in Asia and the Role of Japan" and "Global Challenge and the Role of Academics." Scholars from Japan and abroad with a wide range of academic backgrounds, from social science fields such as social policy, sociology, and political science to natural science and environmental science, made their short presentations on the role of academics, and discussions followed. There were about 250 people in the audience on the first day and about 130 on the second day, of which about 40 were from abroad.

2. Opening Remarks

The opening remarks were given by President YAMAGIWA Juichi of the SCJ. Referring to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and UN Member States' pledges to ensure "no one will be left behind" and "endeavor to reach the furthest behind the first," he stressed that it was extremely valuable to discuss social inclusion at this Conference, which is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and expressed his hope that academia's recognitions and opinions could provide people with insights to think about the future of the post-COVID-19 world and to prepare themselves.

3. Explanation of the conference theme

In her explanation of the conference theme, Professor SHIRAHASE Sawako, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, the University of Tokyo who led the planning of this conference explained that the concept of "inclusion" is the key in thinking about a sustainable and developing future. "Being inclusive" means that the elements that make up society are not consistent. To get to the next common ground going beyond the hierarchical nature inherent in diversity, we would need a comprehensive concept of values and philosophies that cross asymmetric and inconsistent elements of society.

She further mentioned that it is important to share common understanding as global citizens to put together a common goal from the heterogeneity of various aspects, and urged discussion on how to shape a sustainable and inclusive future, noting that COVID-19 ironically made us reaffirm how important "inclusion" was in the "new normal" toward the post COVID-19 society.

4. Summary of the Sessions

Day 1 (September 3, 2020)

Sub-theme: Issues in Asia and the Role of Japan

Professor Emeritus OSAWA Mari of the University of Tokyo delivered a short presentation under the title of "Challenges of Global Inclusion for Amid-COVID-19 Societies, Focusing on Poverty and Gender Equality." She pointed out that no less than economic, social, and environmental shocks, natural disasters are not egalitarian in terms of gender, class, and other social attributes, and that social capital has a positive correlation with disaster resilience, and social trust has a negative correlation with poverty rate.

Dr. Leena Srivastava, Deputy Director General of Science of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) delivered a short presentation under the title of "Bouncing Forward Equitably: Insights from IIASA / ISC Post COVID- Initiative." She noted that COVID-19 exposed the weakness in preparedness of systemic crises and in security nets for a range of vulnerable populations, and, at the same time, it revealed several opportunities too, such as the transformation of education, the scope for entrepreneurship in restructuring economies, and the reductions in unsustainable demand for mobility and consumption. She urged the need to bring resilience center stage and make sustainable choices for inclusive re-development.

Professor USUI Emiko, Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, delivered a short presentation under the title of "Career Development of Female Physicians in Japan" and discussed the issue of gender differences among physicians in obtaining broad certification. She emphasized the needs for (1) enabling female physicians to remain in male-dominated specialties and (2) encouraging female physicians in all specialties to obtain subspecialty certificates for the career advancement of female physicians in Japan.

Following those presentations, Professor SHIRAHASE started off the discussion with a question "how do we make inclusion possible in the face of differences in international and regional levels and the degree of gaps?" Research Professor MACHIMURA Takashi, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Hitotsubashi University, identified the elements that form "being inclusion" from the three panelists' statements and expressed his view that the process of inclusion needs time and space, and the role of humanities and social sciences is to explore a place for the inclusion process; public, private, or in between. In response to questions from the audience, there were discussions that prosperity should be considered in

multi-dimensions just as poverty was, that scientists should strengthen their collaboration, understand gaps between science and policy and gaps between science and society, and build public trust in science and scientists, and that the current incentive mechanism of inclusion needs to be reviewed to give opportunities and options to vulnerable people.

Day 2 (September 4, 2010)

Sub-theme: Global Challenge and the Role of Academics

The second day opened with a short presentation delivered by Professor Daya Reddy, President of the ISC, under the title of "Global Challenge and the Role of Academics." He stated that the COVID-19 increased social exclusion, but it also enabled acts of solidarity or compassion at the individual, community and political levels, close cooperation amongst scientific fields and choice of actions in relation to our values. He also stated that science should build trust from the public and from policymakers by informing them of the science and also of the uncertainties and errors.

Professor Elisa Reis, Vice-President of the ISC delivered a short presentation under the title of "Science and the Dramatic Need for a Reframed Development Pattern." She mentioned that while COVID-19 set in motion a systemic crisis (health, economy, politics, psychology, culture), it was a window of opportunity to invest on solidarity (fiscal reform, health policy, urban transformation, community organization), and that we should reaffirm the value of science to ground a sustainable development pattern, and foster social cohesion and resilience amid mounting risks.

Professor Martin Kohli, Professor Emeritus, European University Institute/ Distinguished Bremen Professor, Bremen International Global School of Social Sciences, addressed in his short presentation under the title "Generational Cleavages as a Challenge to Social Inclusion in a Globalized World ", how we could achieve “social inclusion” beyond generational cleavages where population aging increased the weight of the redistribution from the active to the retired population. He mentioned that policies of social inclusion should target children/adolescents, and that investment in education was supported by both active and retired generations.

From the discussion session, Professor TAKEUCHI Kazuhiko, Vice-President of the SCJ,

joined and made a short presentation on "Responding, Recovering, and Redesigning in the Face of COVID-19." He stated that the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to science in effectively communicating and working with social and policy stakeholders, and therefore it was necessary to revisit the science-policy-society interface toward inclusive transformation through the "three Rs": Response (emergency response), Recovery (environmental response through socio-economic policy) and Redesign (social reform).

One of a dozen questions raised in the discussion was "how to educate the general public and foster a scientifically literate population?" There were opinions that scientists should aim for consensus on the differences in their views, but in the end they should convey different views as they are, that the education from early childhood and the communication strategy were essential to increase tolerance for fake news etc., and that education for the elderly was necessary to resolve digital disparity. Successful results of the joint work through citizen science were brought up as well.

Regarding the question on how we should think about the concept of trust, which is important to unite people, under the COVID-19 crisis, there was an opinion that people learned sympathy and unity from COVID-19 and both citizens and politicians should think about the values that underpin our actions; we should then set these values as a basis for thinking about the kind of society to which we aspire. Referring to the fact that the unusual high temperatures of this summer under the COVID-19 crisis had increased awareness of climate change issues, there was an opinion that scientists were obliged not only to rigorously explore science but also to give easy-to-understand explanations about the results of exploring, and thus the roles of science communication and science communicators would become even more important.

The last question was "what is most important for New Normal after COVID-19?" There was a lively discussion such as the roles of occupation vs education, resilience, solidarity, sympathy. It was pointed out that COVID-19 is considered an opportunity to create a resilient and sustainable society, and it is important to plan cities with a reduction of the vulnerability of people and health risks in mind.

5. Closing Note

The Conference was postponed due to COVID-19 and held virtually after redesigning its theme and format. Under the circumstances, where the mobility of people and goods was restricted by COVID-19, it brought significance that we were able to discuss the issues of sustainability and inclusion and the necessary efforts for the future from Japanese, Asian, and global perspectives. We hope that the discussions and exchanges of opinions here would be an opportunity for participants and academia, including the SCJ, to reconsider inclusion and sustainability, and to gain a new understanding of them.