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CHALLENGES FOR JAPAN'S SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY IN THE 2008 G8 SUMMIT

Kiyoshi Kurokawa

The G8 Summit, being a forum for the world's major industrialized nations, bears a major responsibility in addressing current and future issues facing the global community. The recognition that continued economic growth under the traditional paradigm would be untenable dates back to the early 1970s when the Club of Rome drew considerable public attention with its report titled *Limits to Growth*. This led to a landmark report on sustainable development published in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report.

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However, the world had to wait until the end of the Cold War before placing environmental issues at the top of the political agenda. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro adopted the Agenda 21 Program for Global Action, and this initiative was strengthened ten years later at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (Rio+10) that took place in Johannesburg. Since then, the role of scientists as well as other stakeholders, such as women and young people, has been increasing in significance in shaping global political agendas and actions. In this regard, the InterAcademy Council (IAC), an advisory body set up in 2000 by science academies around the world, has been playing an instrumental role alongside the International Council for Science (ICSU) in developing and delivering policy recommendations from scientific standpoints.

A steady stream of policy recommendations by the global scientific community led to the proactive involvement of scientists in the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles hosted by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, where an association of the science councils and academies from the G8 countries delivered a joint statement on two key themes: climate change and Africa. This has now become an established practice at G8 summit meetings. Scientists from the G8 countries did the same at last year's summit in St Petersburg, and this year the heads of the G8 science councils/academies were joined by representatives of scientists from Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa when they handed a joint statement to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the summit's host, at her office. The Science Council of Japan, which represents the Japanese scientific community, has been playing a leading role in this endeavor since 2005.

Japan hosts the G8 summit next year, which will also see the 4th meeting of TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development), a global framework to promote development in Africa initiated by Japan. Since its creation in 1993, TICAD has held a meeting every five years. The Japanese government has been a major aid provider to African nations, but the private sector, including scientists and nongovernmental organizations, is also increasingly involved in

assistance for international development.

A good example of collaboration between the government and the Japanese private sector is found in the UN Millennium Villages Program in Africa. As part of the UN Millennium Development Project, directed by Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, this community-based program aims to fight extreme poverty by empowering local people in several targeted African villages. The Japanese government contributed initial funds for eight villages in 2005, while Sumitomo Chemical, Japan's leading chemical maker, provided tens of thousands of mosquito-preventive bed nets that it had developed. The bed net, reputed to be the world's most effective anti-malaria tool now available, is a truly innovative product. Its effect is guaranteed to last for an amazing period of five years. The company has factories for the production of this anti-malaria net in Tanzania, Vietnam and China, thus helping create new jobs in these countries as well. It is also said that the work ethic at these factories is very high because the workers are proud of their work that benefits the children and the poor in Africa.

If these remarkable contributions made by the government, the scientific community and the private sector of Japan in Africa and other developing areas are not well known, the fault lies with their poor public relations strategy. Public relations and accountability efforts by the Japanese government and the scientific community are very weak, if even existent. Amazingly, such is also the situation in the Japanese private sector at a time when the world is said to have become increasingly "flat." The result is that the Japanese public at large is not well informed of what they should rightfully be very proud. The Japanese media, which operates under the cozy, rather self-serving press club system, should also be held responsible for this.

Scientists have tended to stay in their own realm of interest and not paid much attention to their responsibility to society. Even though a large portion of their academic research funds are provided from the government budget, scientists have not behaved as recipients of public money. Scientists and the scientific community

must act as socially responsible partners, both individually and collectively through universities, research institutions, academic organizations, science academies and council bodies. They must also make public outreach efforts. Only through such activities can a shift in public perception about science be achieved from the conventional “science for science’s sake” to “science for society,” “science for policy,” “science for development,” etc. – notions reflecting the social responsibility of scientists and the scientific community toward the public and the rest of the world.

Next year’s G8 Summit will provide a major test for both the government and the scientific community of Japan to exercise leadership in this challenging, globalizing world. It will also be a good opportunity for Japan to show more clearly its firm commitment to the development of Africa. Some plans are already under way in this regard. The Japanese government has set up the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize, in memory of the pioneering Japanese bacteriologist who devoted himself to self-sacrificing research in Africa, to honor medical researchers and healthcare experts who make outstanding contributions to fighting disease in Africa. Japan plans to present the first award when it hosts the 4th TICAD next year. 

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, MD, is Science Advisor to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and a former president of the Science Council of Japan.