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Real climate crises? – this summer's abnormal weather in Japan

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These days, and especially after 2010, tragic climate disasters hit various parts of Japan every summer. Torrential rainfalls of July 2017 in Fukuoka and Ohita left 40 deaths and 2 still missing as of June 2018. In 2016, the Typhoon No. 10 (Lionrock) attacked Iwate, killing 9 people in an elderly group house. The intense rainfalls this July widely in western Japan was the worst case and at least 230 deaths and missing were counted

These climate disasters extensively ruined social infrastructures (roads, rails, electricity, water, individual houses and public buildings) and also seriously damaged agricultural crops by mud and debris flowed into cultivated areas. This is quite an impact on national economy, not only in a single year but will negatively affect our life in the years to come.

The climate disaster this year was not limited to rainfalls. Later in July, Kumagaya City of Saitama Prefecture recorded a historic high of 41.1 degree on 23 July, and several other cities also experienced severe heat of more than 40 degrees in July and August. Naturally, the number of deaths due to heatstroke increased and also crops were damaged by these heat waves.

Japanese media precisely reported these climate-related damages, but they rarely referred to global warming, the actual cause of these damages. The way they reported them almost implied that these torrential rainfalls and severe heat waves were just one of those natural phenomena which do not allow human interventions. Now it is clear that atmospheric warming raises the temperature of seawater and increases the amount of evaporation from sea, and when a huge amount of evaporated seawater hits a high mountain range or a weather front, it will come down as heavy rainfalls. For nearly 20 years, however, Japanese media hesitated to clearly link these extreme weather to the anthropogenic global warming, but on 25 July, when the WMO reported this year's extremely high temperature and heavy flooding in Japan as an impact of climate change, it was quickly followed by major newspapers. They finally started to write the extreme weather in relation to global warming !

So far, climate-related disasters have been considered as "natural" disasters and therefore we kind of having given up going further into it. Although we felt sorry for those who were suffered from deadly serious disasters, we even did not think that we ourselves may be suffered from similar disasters sometime in the future. Now, after experiencing those terrible disasters in the past few years, we should fully recognize that torrential rainfalls and heat waves are not issue of someone else' but they are our issue happening at our own feet. It is time we

give our full attention to those climate disasters and squarely face them for the future generation.

If we think honestly and see things as they are, it is not difficult to understand that those climate disasters are anthropogenic disasters. Once we recognize that they were human-made disaster caused by years of human-centered economic activities, then governments/policy makers can do something to control the issue. The measures may include putting a stop to construction of new coal-fired power plants, or substantial investment for the promotion of domestic renewable energy. We can and should make an appeal to political parties/politicians/policy makers through various channels. To make a change, it is important to take one step forward and do something ourselves !

Of course, Japan is not solely responsible for the global warming, but all those developed countries including Japan are to be blamed for the issue. Simply, the global warming was resulted from years of our emphasis on growth and efficiency more than on safety and sustainability.

Then, what type of economy we should create in the future? The answer is "Green Economy" with lower rate of growth but will be safe and sustainable. Specifically, creating a new decarbonized society is an urgent issue for the benefit of future generations.

It is clear that Prime Minister Abe and his Cabinet put most emphasis on economy, but even in this cabinet, the Ministry of Environment is still responsible for environmental safety of current and future Japanese nationals.

By the way, the Abe's Cabinet excessively emphasizes short-term economy, but Prime Minister Abe himself may not be solely responsible for it. Rather, he is doing what people want him to do. The public-opinion polls in the past decades showed that economic recovery was their biggest expectation to the government.

Under the framework policy of prioritizing short-term economic recovery, the Ministry of Environment is making a difficult effort to realize the carbon-pricing system (Carbon Tax and Emissions Trading.). Even if difficult, however, the Ministry should fulfill its mission of protecting the life/livelihood and environment of Japanese nationals. If they stop working for the protection of the environment, we should say that the environmental policy was yielded to the economic policy.

If they surrender today and give attention to short-term economic concerns, how can they be accountable to the public and take responsibility when the global warming really fails our country in the near future? All officials of the Ministry of Environment are requested to fully

aware the heavy responsibility they hold to the public. They should not forget even a day the mission of the ministry and for whom they are implementing environmental policies.