

## **KAZE, August 2020**

### **Can we build up resilient localities?**

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As we pointed out earlier, climate change and COVID-19 derived from the common cause, namely, globalization and land development as the result of the excessive desire of humans. The Japanese government seems to put economic activities above human life and therefore is slow to take effective measures. They take quick-fix approaches, but no real “policies” against climate disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. Without sound precautionary principles, our precious tax money is wasted for short-sighted economy-first countermeasures decided in an underhanded way. Growing frustration due to the lack of meaningful policies!

Our ultimate desire is to lead a safe/secure and enriched life. It is unchanging even in the era of uncertainty, and therefore should be a basis of all policies. However, the current government does not at all pay attention to the actual lives of people. In the meantime, sensible businessmen and researchers are preparing to face the time of transition. We, too, have been calling for the need to sincerely face the changing society, and I consider if we could change our current ways of doing things in the following direction.

- From expansion/development/competition to a sustainable/harmonious/co-existing and ethical economy

Despite the second rise of the infection numbers, most countries all over the world including Japan are trying hard to boost the economy. I was taught that the economy is meant to govern a nation and provide relief to people, therefore I believed in the goodness of the economy. However, the current economy causing various disasters, appear quite foreign to me. To co-exist/harmonize/comply with such disasters as climate crises and pandemics, we need to change the expansion/development-oriented economy of today. Then in which direction should we go?

For example, we, the Japanese, have an ethical concept of commerce, that is, “business for the benefits of the seller, the buyer and the local community.” This concept came from the merchants of the mid-Edo period (1603-1868). Later, Eichi Shibusawa, a well-known businessman in the Meiji era, advocated the spirit of ethical business, to warn against moneymaking-oriented capitalism. To survive in the island country of limited resources, merchants/businessmen learned to value the idea of harmony/co-existence, rather than competition. These ethical business spirits remain in the words of today’s Japanese business founders of

smaller companies. Now, with the limited space/resources of our planet Earth, these ethical concepts of old Japanese merchants will help lead today's businesses toward a real SDGs-compliant economy. They will bring about an ethical economy, namely, the economy for quality life, not for expansion.

To improve unemployment and disparities, the two most serious results of economic deterioration, business companies, firstly, should abandon the idea of manpower expenses as a cost. The labor charges should be considered as a basis to support the society and lives of people. Also, we should make domestic such basic industries as medicine, welfare, food, education, and disaster prevention. We should stop forest exploitation and other unnecessary development (like Linear Chuo Shinkansen of JR Tokai), and avoid contracting new infectious diseases or causing mudslides. Learning from what we experienced now, can't we establish a new way of doing business and build up a new system to support it?

➤ Building up proactive policies based on precautionary principles

Threatened by repeated climate disasters and possible combats with unknown viruses, our life in the future may not be so stable and safe. For the benefit of future generations, what we need now is future-oriented strategic policies, not just irresponsible short-sighted measures.

As you know, *the precautionary principle* states that "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation" (Principle 15, The Rio Declaration, 1992). This principle has been recognized as a major pillar of Japan's environmental policies since Basic Environmental Plan II was established in 2000. However, it is difficult to say the Government of Japan has followed the principle in environmental policymaking. The carbon tax, for example, has not been introduced despite its potential efficiency as mitigation. Also, Japan has not made it clear how to break away with the use of coal. In short, the Japanese government has been overwhelmed with short-sighted economy-first policies and has not paid the necessary attention to taking precautionary measures. As a result, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the reduction of the number of public health centers in the past few decades caused serious delay in responding to the disease in the initial phase.

Initial negligence of the extensive PCR test indicates that our government focuses on immediate supportive measures rather than taking preventive measures. It is a pity that the government does not look ahead and does not clearly illustrate what we have to achieve to make our life sustainable.

As science develops and a digital revolution progresses, effective use of scientific knowledge and data analysis could allow us to foresee potential disasters more precisely. The governments, both national and local, should inform people of

what they found out in an easy-to-understand manner. I sincerely hope that the governments call upon collaboration with all localities concerned (citizens, NPOs, researchers, and businesses) and review the existing policies and plans from the viewpoints of climate risks as well as infection risks. Such a proactive attitude is something that is woefully short of in this country.