

News

Pubic Seminar: *Roles of Science and Policy in the Pandemic Society*

Introduction:

On 5 November, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), the Secretariat of JPPF, held a public seminar entitled “Roles of Science and Policy in the Pandemic Society”. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spread in no time from Wuhan, China, to the rest of the world has totally changed every facet globally. The rapid spread of infection has once again made people aware of the depth and magnitude of global interdependence, and at the same time, clearly proved that every society would be affected by a regional incident that could be originated anywhere in the world. Because COVID-19 was an unknown virus, predictions by experts were not always valid, and each different view brought confusions to the society.

It was under such circumstances that a variety of responses from country to country were seen, including those who ignored scientific methods and those who created significant economic damages to respond to overprotective theories. The world has yet to overcome this infection, but it is facing the real challenge in shaping social policy, which is to consider the proper relation between science and policy. This public seminar provided an opportunity to examine the balance of science and policy, an imminent discussion posed in the wake of the COVID-19 disaster, and to consider conditions required for appropriate policy formation.

Opening Address:



Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, Chair of APDA and former Prime Minister of Japan, expressed his gratitude to Philip Morris Japan for sponsoring the seminar and emphasized the critical importance of properly reviewing the relation between science and policy to respond to the challenging issues that arose with the COVID-19 disaster.

He then introduced Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and former President of the Science Council of Japan, and explained about a report that was published by an independent committee established to investigate the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident under the leadership of Dr. Kurokawa who was responsible for ensuring objectivity of the report as Chair of the committee. The report had great significance in coping with the accident, for its reliability verified from a scientific point of view. Hon. Fukuda also introduced Mr. Koji Tsuruoka, former Japanese Ambassador to the United Kingdom, who witnessed the response to COVID-19 in the U.K., the country with its own political system, and that Ambassador Tsuruoka would share an analysis on the proper interaction between the public and the government in the COVID-19 disaster. His remark was closed with his gratitude to the most qualified lecturers for the public seminar’s theme and his expectation for the contribution of the seminar to betterment of future policy formulation.

Lecture by Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

“Relation between science and policy”

Technology companies represented by GAFAM lead today’s global economy but just have grown rapidly in the past 30 years. Japan has been left behind, and the situation has reached a state of great concern. One of the reasons for this is that fewer students from Japan study in different cultures at universities of Europe and the U.S., which results in fewer people from Japan be involved in leading inventions and discoveries made in Europe and in the U.S., isolating Japan from the global trend of evolution. The gap has widened in the last 30 years of globalization, and in the field of science, Japan has not been listed in the top 10 countries in terms of the number of cited literatures. This phenomenon is evidenced by the alarming fact that the number of Japanese obtaining doctorates in the U.S. continues to decline, in contrast to the numbers of Chinese and Indians that continue to increase. Japan is losing its competitive edge in the field of science. Having said that globalization is inevitable in modern society, the relation between science and policy can be considered from the following perspectives:



- Reminded reality of confronting globalization
- Fact that information cannot be hidden and is seen by the world
- Scientists presenting data and options versus policymakers and politicians making decisions
- Significance of bigdata, open systems, and innovation
- Importance of an independent review system



While there could be different positions even within the world of science, what is important is to examine every proposition both comprehensively and objectively to prepare for the next hypothesis.

Lecture by Ambassador Koji Tsuruoka, former Ambassador of Japan to the United Kingdom

"The UK's COVID-19 Countermeasures: Relationship between the Public and the Government"

1. COVID-19 in the UK

Initially the spread of infection was slower than the European continent, but as of early November, the death toll has become the highest in Europe. In terms of the number of confirmed cases, it is the fourth largest in Europe after Russia, Spain and France. Prince Charles and Prime Minister Johnson got positive on 25 March and 27 March, respectively, and the prime minister moved to the intensive care unit on 6 April, which temporarily brought the country in a tense situation. On 5 April, the Queen delivered a special address, the fifth time in her reign, to inspire the people. In the beginning, the British government was cautious about restricting the public movement, but with rapid increase in the number of cases, it implemented the so-called lockdown on 23 March. The regulations were gradually eased after May, but in response to the resurgence, the government tightened regulations by region from September, followed by another nationwide lockdown from 5 November.



2. Policymaking made on advice backed by scientific data

In the event of an emergency, the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR), which is chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of relevant ministers, leads coordination between ministries and makes policy decisions. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), which is responsible for providing scientific advice to COBR, holds meetings prior to the COBR meetings, and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance attends the COBR meetings to provide the latest scientific data as the representative of SAGE. Additionally, Prime Minister's press conferences are attended by Chief Scientific Advisor Vallance and Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser for Department of Health and Social Care Chris Whitty as necessary. Having received scientific advice from SAGE, the government is supposed to make decisions by considering other factors of economy and society, and its decision is not bound by the advice. With regards to the relation between science and policy, ultimately the government is responsible in the British system.

Panel Discussion

Mr. Ryoji Noritake, CEO and Board Member of Health and Global Policy Institution, facilitated the panel discussion.



Remarks by Dr. Mitsunobu Kano, Professor of the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems, Okayama University



When providing scientific advices, scientists need to take diverse social contexts into account. It would be desirable to present multiple options with different background to contribute to policy decisions rather than strongly pushing for a single assertion that he or she believes. One of the lessons learned from the recent infection is the need of establishing a mechanism that appropriately utilize scientific knowledge into policies. Understanding of the relation between science and policy is necessary for the concerned parties, and how to develop such understanding is an issue. We need the right people who can bridge different specialized fields. It is for this purpose that our graduate school was established to integrate knowledge of diverse areas.

Remarks by Hon. Keizo Takemi, Member of the House of Councilors, Executive Director of JPPF and Member of the Board of Directors of APDA

Politicians should have a basic attitude to respect academic knowledge. An interdisciplinary approach is always required for each policy purpose, which is the political science that connects both sides. In particular, we need to explore a field such as "infectious disease economics" that pursues achieving both prevention of infection and activation of the economy. The final policy decision requires an art from a political standpoint to integrate them all.



Remarks by Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Member of the House of Representatives, Secretary General of JPPF



In the wake of the COVID-19, a number of experts appeared in the media and put forward their own theories by suggesting scientific data. People were confused about whom to listen to or to rely on. International organizations should have provided accurate information and evaluations, but WHO's credibility was deteriorated at an early stage of the pandemic. No country leader was willing to call on the international community to deal with the simmering issue, which spurred the confusion. Finally, an international system for the joint purchase of vaccines "COVAX facility" has started. Now it will be imperative to rebuild trust of international organizations such as WHO and regain the principle of international cooperation to deal with the COVID-19 in the future.

As a facilitator, Mr. Noritake summarized the discussion by saying, “Scientific thinking is an approach that examines various possibilities. In order to make a certain scientific finding absolute, strict verification is required, and under normal circumstances, it is necessary to evaluate multiple possibilities in parallel. In this sense, for the society, introducing a perspective of reducing negative effects, such as harm reduction, can contribute to the formulation of appropriate policy, in addition to the general concept of promoting health. It is important not to exclude but to appropriately use scientific knowledge”.

Closing Address

Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Secretary General and Executive Director of APDA, expressed his gratitude to the lecturers, panelists, facilitator and participants, and extended his appreciation for Philip Morris Japan and its three-year support of the public seminar based on APDA’s founding philosophy of promoting sustainable development based on scientific knowledge. He added, “Nowadays, various ‘movements’ are closely associated with social policy, and I am deeply concerned that the distinction between values and science, which should have been a prerequisite for policymaking, has been forgotten. As there are both pros and cons for everything, policies must be implemented by first clarifying the problem in a scientific way, which humankind has developed as wisdom, and then revisiting which policy is necessary to improve society, rather than bringing in the discussion of values from the beginning”. The seminar was closed with Dr. Kusumoto’s hopeful comment that this opportunity would contribute to improvement of literacy about science and policy and further deepening discussions by holding another seminar in the future.



Established in 1974, JFPF is the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development.

In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various challenges, JFPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentarian caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan’s diplomacy in the international community.

In the future issues of JFPF Newsletter, we will carry “JFPF Column” on activities and initiatives related to population and development undertaken by JFPF members

JFPF Column:

- Hon. Shintaro Ito, Member of the House of Representatives
- Hon. Yoshinori Suematsu, Member of the House of Representatives
- Hon. Kaname Tajima, Member of the House of Representatives

JFPF Column



Hon. Shintaro Ito

Member of the House of Representatives

Many industries are in dire straits due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly hard hit is the world of art and culture. Several thousand performances were cancelled, income stopped coming in, and artists as well as arts and cultural organizations are struggling to continue their activities.

From a pressing sense of crisis about the prospect of extinguishing the light of arts and culture in Japan, I repeatedly requested for assistance for arts and cultural activities, prepared an urgent call for action, talked with related ministers and other persons concerned, and secured a budget for the Agency for Cultural Affairs to implement measures for assistance.

I had thought that the assistance should be in the form of grants, but it took the form of subsidies. With the application process being cumbersome and not

adapted to the actual circumstances, it has not reached the people who need it. I hope to improve the way the assistance is provided so that it can be put to effective use. I also hope to create a system through which the government can protect arts and culture.

Japan has fostered cultural diversity with the spirit of “harmony” and renewed itself by melding new cultures with a foundation that Japan originally had. This can be seen in the convergence of Shinto and Buddhism, the acceptance of Confucianism and Taoism, and the introduction of the civil law from France and Germany after the Meiji Restoration and the common law after World War II. Japan has overcome difficulties through this “wisdom”.

Particularly because we face a difficult situation under the pandemic, we should think about the future of our society and change existing norms that we took for granted.

For example, for many years I have proposed promoting digitization in education, but little progress was made. Some of the important aspects of face-to-face classes should obviously be retained, but I think by strengthening our ability to use digital technology and leveraging its

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advantages, we can change our education for the better, including by way of offering instructions in multiple languages and providing a better learning environment for students with visual or hearing impairment.

As for our working styles, the post-war industrial policy promoted efficiency by concentrating resources in urban areas. The pandemic has prompted diversification in our lifestyles. Remote work has enabled workers to move to rural

areas where it is less demanding to raise children. There are also options for people to become loosely associated with other local communities, or to go on a “workation”.

We should overcome the pandemic through such new paradigm shifts, and, moreover, address the issue of regional regeneration and put a stop to population and fertility decline.

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Hon. Yoshinori Suematsu

Member of the House of Representatives

I am extremely concerned about the widening economic gap under the COVID-19 pandemic. I have proposed raising the minimum wage. The minimum wage of 1,300 yen an hour is one of the key policies of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan.

The national average minimum wage this year is 902 yen an hour, which is the lowest among G7 countries. I am proposing to raise this to 1,500 yen in five years. But because we cannot burden small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the government, while supporting the SMEs, should bear the full burden of raising the minimum wage uniformly across the country, and thereby increase productivity and consumption, revive the economy through income growth, reduce economic inequality, and invigorate rural communities.

Similarly, I am proposing child allowance of 50,000 yen per month until age 15 as a bold policy initiative to stop a decline in fertility. The current level of 10,000 yen cannot put a stop to the declining trend of the birth rate. The population decreased more than 500,000 over the

previous year for the first time. I think the government needs to declare a “childcare state of emergency”, secure the necessary budget, and create a significant new momentum.

In addition, medical institutions are increasingly having difficulty getting by as a result of additional burdens for preventing hospital-acquired infections and patients choosing not to visit hospitals for fear of infection during this pandemic.

I serve as the Vice-Chair of the nonpartisan “Parliamentary Caucus for Supporting Hospitals Fighting Coronavirus”, which aims to assist such medical institutions in difficulty, and we presented our recommendations to the government.

Lastly, I would like to touch on the issue of population. It has been pointed out that even though Japan is contributing financially, it has very little international presence in this area. Last year, I participated in the Arab and Asian Parliamentarians’ Meeting on Population and Development, which was organized by APDA in Morocco. In this field, I think it is important that we deepen discussions in Japan while considering the interest of our country and of the international community, set out a future plan based on a Japan model, and play a leadership role in the world.

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**Hon. Kaname
Tajima**

Member of the
House of
Representatives

Japan is an advanced country in terms of the size of its economy, but is lagging behind other countries in terms of issues of children. Its data related to child poverty, poverty of single-mother households, and child abuse are worst among advanced economies. It is at the bottom in child happiness ranking. Japan is no longer a good country for children. This is because politicians have not prioritized children or child rearing.

“Placing children at the center” is part of my political philosophy. I have a strong desire to see all children, regardless of the environment into which they are born, live happily and without any loss of lives. And I hope to make politics in this country one that truly befits that of an advanced country.

There are some 46,000 children in Japan who cannot live with the parents who gave them birth, and most of those children are living in institutions. While it is a common perception around the world that it is best for children to live in a home environment, Japan’s ratio of children living with foster parents, for example, is exceptionally low.

In my desire to make Japan a country that gives top priority to children, I worked on a system for special adoption and had a private members’ bill for “promotion of a system for special adoption” passed in the Diet in 2016. Although this may be a small step, we continue to work on these issues through partnership between the public and private sectors.

Lowering the recidivism rate is also important in making Japan a better country. Japan can be confident about its public safety relative to other countries, but its recidivism rate is just as high as in other countries. Prompted by my visit to prisons in the United States as a member of the Committee on Judicial Affairs, I launched a nonpartisan parliamentary caucus for preventing recidivism and had a private members’ bill passed in the Diet.

I also think that there is a lack of support for victims, and this support obviously needs to be strengthened. In addition, it is important that we reinforce criminal penalties and measures for preventing recidivism with more focus on educational and welfare aspects, so that fewer people become victims of crimes.

Although we have many challenges, I hope to change the status quo, including the lack of political will to give priority to children, and make Japan a country in which people can be hopeful about the future.

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