

**THE JAPANESE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT AT A GLOBAL LEVEL**

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**Overview**

After the end of the Second World War Japan was not only a defeated country but also a country that experienced the unimaginable shock of the atomic bombs. Despite all that, Japan succeeded to become the second economic power in the world and many people spoke about “The Japanese Miracle”. The miracle was even greater due to the fact that the country does not have many natural resources and therefore the Japanese development relied on Japanese human resources development.

The post war Japanese development has been impressive but not perfect in the sense that it generated, as well as in other countries, various forms of environment pollution. Japan is aware of this situation and this is why Japan supports a global approach to reducing pollution and designing a sustainable development strategy.

The Japanese specific related to a concept of sustainable development is that development is related to human development and the idea of sustainability is related to a global approach. Development with less pollution is a problem for all countries and all people of the world, not only for developed countries.

In this context Japan was to share its experience in development as well as in avoiding future mistakes. Based on this Japan has taken steps in drawing up and concluding the Kyoto Protocol and in leading efforts against global warming.

The sustainable development at a global level is seen by Japan as being:

- diverse in its solutions (each country may have problems and solutions that are different from others);
- related to good governance aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting liberalization and development of trade and investment;
- based on programs that are owned by the respective countries;
- supported by the experience of developed countries but without understanding by this a substitution of the efforts of the respective countries.

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## Japanese view on relation between development and environment

### Nature In The Shinto Tradition

In order to understand the position of Japanese people vis-à-vis nature and environment it is necessary to understand Shinto. Shinto is Japan's oldest and native tradition which expresses the basic spirituality of the Japanese people. Shinto reflects the respect for nature and its powers, the respect for ancestors as well as the sense of dependence of people upon nature seen in the flow of the seasons and the cycles of agricultural activity.

In Japan the traditional community life was centered around the local shrine (called **jinja** ) which can be translated as “The place of **kami**”. The Japanese concept of **Kami** is often translated by Westerners as 'God' but this translation is not quite correct.

Anyway, for Japanese “**kami**” means any object, place, person or even creature who inspires a sense of wonder and respect. Therefore the concept of **Kami** can include trees, waterfalls, animals, the sun, moon, oceans or mountains. According to Japanese approach people can perceive the divine through these particular manifestations. In consequence, a shrine is a place where **kami** are celebrated in festivals and where the people symbolically make their offerings, report on their activities and seek the purification which will free their enterprises from misfortune and distress, thus enabling them to fulfill their human potential. As result, shrines are places and not buildings, such as churches or temples.

Due to this holistic content of **Kami** the idea of an opposition or confrontation between man and nature was absent from Japanese thought. In Japanese understanding, man and **Kami** (which includes nature) were seen as a continuum, as manifestations of the same Universe which are in a relationship of mutual dependence.

If this is the Japanese philosophy on man and nature and universe one could expect a type of society completely integrated with nature. But modern Japan do have problems with pollution. The question may be: Was Shinto forgotten ? The answer is a clear “No”.

But one has to remember that Japan has very few resources among them being also land. With a population of 128 million people, Japan is located on a land space representing about 25 % of the size of California. Development after the Second World War could not have been possible without an impact on environment.

But in the last decades the Shinto approach is coming back helping people understand their origins and their need to seek harmony with all that is around. The modern Japanese concept of development means that the people and society are in a state of creative equilibrium with the universe. In Shinto to speak of nature means to speak of harmony, well-being and peace. To achieve these means to respect and achieve “The way of Kami” (**kannagara** ).

### **Sustainable development and positive attitude**

In order to understand the positive attitude of the Japanese concept of sustainable development it is important to understand two other aspects: Shinto and renewal and Shinto and human nature.

#### **Shinto and renewal.**

Rebuilding and renewal are basic parts of Japanese culture. The centuries of Japanese life with Shinto rituals at the heart of the community have determined a way of thinking that helped the Japanese people face man-made or natural catastrophes with determination and the belief that it is in human power to successfully rebuild homes, cities, societies.

#### **Shinto and human nature.**

Shinto implies the view that human nature is essentially good. One illustration used by a 19th century Shinto leader was that of a mirror. Human nature should shine like a mirror. But if it becomes covered with dust, it ceases to sparkle. Once the dust is removed, it begins to shine again. Dust can continue to collect and so it must be removed from time to time.

The same can be conceived at a larger scale, for the whole economy and society. The message is that things can be cleaned and brought back to their shinny state. This ideal of purification, the ritual of **misogi**, is the specific heart of the Shinto tradition and can be found at the center of the Japanese concept of sustainable development.

### **The Japanese conceptual framework for global sustainable development**

The Shinto spiritual concept is applied by Japanese people to today's world and it supports an original approach to sustainable development at a global level.

Japan considers that in order to achieve sustainable development at a global level simultaneous achievement of development and environmental protection is indispensable. Therefore all governments, organizations and stakeholders should share their understanding, strategies, responsibility, experiences, and information related to these two objectives (development and environment protection).

At a global level this goal can not be designed separately from existing plans. The countries should to pursue concrete actions in order to implement the existing agreements towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Japan considers that sustainable development can be achieved only by involving both developed and developing countries.

In order to achieve a global sustainable development Japan proposed a number of concrete measures in order to assist the efforts of developing countries, while expanding partnership with all other participants in the international community.

## **Main areas of intervention envisaged**

### **People and Hope (Human Resources Development)**

In order to achieve sustainable development it is necessary that the people of the world are motivated with hope to make full use of their ability under good governance. To that end, human resources development (in the fields of education, health and gender) is an area of the greatest importance: investing in people and sharing knowledge and technology are the keys to sustainable development. The main components of this human development area are the following:

#### **a) Investing in People: "Human resources development is the basis of nation building"**

The investment in people means investment in education and health:

**Education.** The Japanese plan has in view a number of concrete actions, such as:

- A Program called "The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development";
- Technical assistance of about \$2 billion over a five year period for education in low income countries. This assistance may include initiatives like "Basic Education for Growth Initiative (BEGIN)" (assistance for girl's education, for teacher training, and for science and mathematics education, etc.)

**Health.** This area aims to further support efforts to combat infectious and parasitic diseases with the target of allocating a total of \$3 billion over a five-year period beginning in 2000 (Okinawa Infectious Diseases Initiative).

#### **b) Knowledge**

Knowledge is seen as central to achieving sustainable development. The main components could be:

- Share Japan's experiences on pollution and its recovery as well as its successful experience of cooperation with other Asian countries, with Africa and other regions of the world;
- Promote the Initiative for Development in East Asia (IDEA) and share East Asia's successful experience of development with other countries and regions.

#### **c) Science & Technology**

In close relation with dissemination of existing knowledge, science and technology allow for finding future solutions to existing problems. Main actions would be:

- Promote Global Environment Monitoring through the Integrated Global Observing Strategy (IGOS) Partnership and Global Mapping;
- Implement environmental science & technology cooperation.

## **The relation Ownership and Solidarity - Development**

In order to achieve sustainable development at a global level it is necessary to achieve a vast mobilization of various resources (Solidarity). This is essential for developing countries in order to promote sustainable development and poverty reduction through self-driven economic growth (Ownership). The concept is that external aid should complement not replace domestic efforts.

The domestic efforts should concentrate on:

**a) Trade & Foreign Investment:** Promote trade and private investment to realize sustainable development. As an example how Japan is market for developing countries one can mention that Japan's imports from developing countries amount to about \$150 billion per year. Measures to be taken:

- Expand support for trade-related technical assistance and capacity building by JICA and other bodies;
- Work towards the objective of duty-free and quota-free market access for all least developed countries' products.
- Make efforts toward establishing multilateral investment rules. Establishing multilateral investment rules is crucial for creating an international environment in which investment in developing countries can increase. Japan will take a leading role in establishing such rules;
- Encourage African countries to participate in multilateral trading systems (WTO). Welcome the announcement of the intention of African countries to promote the regional integration through the African Union (AU), support such integration by such means as capacity building support, and encourage Africa's further participation in multilateral trading systems (WTO).

### **b) Energy**

As energy is vital for development global measures are necessary to promote efficient and environment-friendly use of limited energy resources, which forms the very basis of economic activities. Actions to be taken:

- Propose and promote the Energy Literacy Initiative

### **c) Agriculture and Food**

Sustainable development is related also to eliminating poverty and food problems. Japan can contribute to improving food security through Green Technology Innovation. Actions may include:

- Promote the development and dissemination of NERICA (New Rice for Africa);
- Extend a grant aid of about \$30 million to tackle the food crisis in the southern Africa;

#### **d) Development Assistance**

Over the past ten years, Japan, as the largest donor country, has provided approximately \$120 billion - one fifth of the total ODA contributions of all DAC countries. Japan has extended \$4.8 billion - one fourth of the G8 contributions to the enhanced HIPC initiative. Japan continues to play a positive role as a leading donor, while ensuring effective and efficient implementation of ODA.

#### **e) Africa**

Japan considers that there will be no stability and prosperity in the world in the 21st century, unless the problems of Africa are resolved. Actions include:

- Japan supports NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) as a clear indication of Africa's Ownership.
- Steadily implement "Solidarity between Japan and Africa - Concrete Actions" - and endeavor to follow up the "G8 Africa Action Plan";
- Further strengthen support for Africa through TICAD III.

### **Challenges for Sustainable development in 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The 21st century may be a very difficult time unless the issues of global environmental degradation and global warming, which are serious threats to the continued existence of humankind, are tackled now.

Japan has in view a number of initiatives:

**a) Environment-related Assistance for Developing Countries:** In addressing environmental issues, further enhance environmental cooperation, including capacity building in the field of environment. This will include:

- to establish and announce "Environmental Conservation Initiative for Sustainable Development (EcoISD)";
- to implement environment-related human resources development for 5,000 persons during a the five-year period.

**b) Climate Change:** For effective action against global warming, it is important to seek a set of common rules for the future by which all countries, including developing countries, will abide. Japan can:

- Take a leading role for the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol (Japan became a party to the Kyoto Protocol on 4 June 2002.);
- Aid capacity building in human resources and sharing of information to promote Clean Development Mechanism (CDM);

**c) Forest:** Promote sustainable forest management, including tackling illegal logging, in recognition of the many benefits of forests (e.g. preservation of ecology, prevention of global warming, conservation of water, provision of forest products). Concrete actions may include:

- Propose and promote Asia Forest Partnership (AFP);
- Cooperate on forest conservation and other activities in the Congo Basin area;

**d) Biodiversity:** Contribute to full enjoyment of gifts from natural environment through protection of living organisms in danger of extinction as well as conservation of "hotspots" in various regions. Concrete actions:

- Intensify the initiative towards conservation of "hotspots";
- Work towards early ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

**e) Water:** Progressively work on the issue of water resources from various viewpoints such as drinking water, public health, agriculture, economic activities, natural environment protection and disaster prevention. Concrete actions:

- Assist in creating safe and stable water supply and development of hygienic facilities. Japan which has provided safe and stable supply of drinking water and access to hygienic sewage for more than 40 million people in the past five years, continues such efforts. Moreover, promote model projects exploiting water resources, including ground water supplies, and promote the transfer of technology to neighboring countries.
- Strengthen co-operation with NGOs and Women. Support the capacity building for appropriate water resource management (management in cooperation with NGOs, establishment of the management systems by local people, promotion of technical cooperation taking women's role into considerations, etc.);

**f) Environment-related Treaties:** Japan has in view to:

- Take a leading role for the early entry into force of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants;
- Work toward early ratification of the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade.

As can be seen from above, Japan considers that sustainable development at a global level can be achieved by a combination of a more nature oriented way of thinking and a number of concrete initiatives to be taken by both developed and developing countries. In both aspects the experience of Japan can be of great assistance to all countries, including Romania.