

# Role of NGOs for Biodiversity Convention

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## Convention on Biodiversity & NGOs

We greeted the advent of the 21st century without resolving the problem of rapid depletion of “nature” resulting from population pressure and economic activities, including indiscriminate hunting, that deprived plants and animals of their habitats. Biodiversity is a new concept that defines “nature” as the source of a variety of blessings bestowed on humans by disintegrating it into manageable unit elements. It is a comprehensive idea that goes beyond ecology to include society, culture, politics and the economy. It could be called a key word for consideration of the foundation of our livelihood.

A major challenge facing conservation of biodiversity is the shortage of “involvement” and “funding.” Based on such a sense of crisis, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came into being to put the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development into practice. The declaration urges each signatory to open Earth to civil society, women, young people and the poor and to solve global problems in the 21st century in a fair and equitable manner with citizen participation. For this reason, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been important participants in the CBD even though the convention was an accord concluded among countries. The “CBD Alliance” is in existence as a global NGO network working as a coordinator. In Japan, the Japan Civil Network for the Convention on Biological Diversity (JCN-CBD) has been formed and has provided functions similar to those of the CBD Alliance.

## Three Roles for NGOs

NGOs can contribute to the convention in terms of three roles.

The first is practicing and setting examples. NGO members take on the role of speaking about the biodiversity convention based on their own experience and dealing with the matters they are talking about from the standpoint of ordinary citizens and regarding them as something relevant to themselves. Internationally, high hopes are pinned on Japan because it is particularly blessed with an environment that could produce advanced examples as it is an industrially developed nation situated in a “hot spot” for biodiversity. Kabukuri-numa (pond) and surrounding paddies (laden with water in winter) in northern Japan have been registered in their entirety with the Ramsar Convention. Furthermore, the case of rice harvested there gaining a quick rise in brand name value was among prominent examples introduced while the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP10) was underway in Nagoya in October. Quite a few other examples were announced from the viewpoint of people at “interaction fairs” held on the sidelines of COP10.

The second is lobbying activities based on practical experience. NGOs may have wisdom collected at the scene of action concerning specialized individual themes. They can add new viewpoints to the formation of agreements transcending the opinions of government delegations that

conduct negotiations in accordance with national interests. For example, after making efforts to conserve nature for a long time, NGOs are well aware of the fact that they cannot convey the importance of nature to others in one day. The JCN-CBD has proposed through the Japanese government that the United Nations adopt a “UN Decade of Biodiversity” as a means of seeking in earnest to recognize the importance of biodiversity over a period of 10 years (2011-2020). The proposal is likely to be reflected in a resolution and approved at the world body in the future.

The third is a matter of sending information out by NGOs themselves at conference halls. They can work on delegates not to forget to see the big picture without falling into negotiations focused on national interests. They can do so by questioning the propriety of delegates in their behavior from various standpoints, including those based on justice, expertise, effectiveness and reality, thus reminding them of future visions. For instance, with respect to a resolution on the program of work on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA), the JCN-CBD said as one of NGO speakers that the substance of the declaration should further get to the nub of the issue under discussion and succeeded in having its remarks reflected in the resolution.

## Mechanism to Get Money & Human Power

At least in the field of biodiversity, the days of NGOs asking people to join their activities as volunteers are over as they are required to be equipped with knowledge necessary to assume the role of consultants or advisers and come to grips with the transformation of society and work actively for it. I would like to touch upon two important points that will contribute to their efforts.

### (1) Urban Dwellers Must Be Thinking Citizens

Urban residents account for 80% of the population of Japan now but, surprisingly, they may find it difficult to think of their links with more than 100 living creatures in the surroundings of their homes. Also, our readers probably have difficulties “recalling” them. This reminds us of the fact that we do not pay any attention in our daily lives to nature even though it is around us. We do not initiate any action to preserve biodiversity in our urban lives. If we cannot instantly remember biodiversity, we will not suffer pains when we lose living things.

It is particularly indispensable for each of us to create a cue to consider biodiversity and take action to be a “responsible citizen.” It will become important to work out some contrivance designed to arouse the local community’s interest in biodiversity by, for instance, creating markers to make visible the invisible value of a local treasure.



## (2) Ensuring Biodiversity by Green Purchase

Citizens are the ultimate consequence of finalizing demand and making decisions concerning biodiversity. We exercise our rights through various channels, including voting, purchases and tax payments, in order to realize small reforms in our society. It is unexpectedly vital to check friendliness to biodiversity in our daily purchases or in paying for services. About half of urban residents believed they could do something to contribute to biodiversity in purchasing behavior, according to a survey conducted on the Internet (Chart). This was a possible indication that innovators and early adopters of green purchases have come to constitute a considerable segment of the consumer market, exceeding the critical mass of 16.5%. It has become a challenge to determine what sort of information drives people to resort to such a kind of purchasing behavior. In Japan, for example, more than 80% of those surveyed believe they are unable to go shopping for biodiversity-friendly goods at present due to a lack of related information, demonstrating their desire for more information.

### “Rio+20”: Toward Realization of “Eco-Wealth Society”

Under the new COP10 strategic target, it was recommended that the value of related services sustained by the ecological system, including biodiversity itself, should be incorporated into the accounting system as an indicator of abundance. In other words, biodiversity is regarded as wealth indispensable for people to live healthy and enriched lives, and the target seeks to redefine national wealth as “eco-wealth” that constitutes a more highly precise indicator of affluence.

COP11 will be held two years from now to be timed with a “Rio+20” meeting that will mark the 20th anniversary of the Rio Declaration. In the future, it will become necessary to confirm progress in the challenge for a virtuous cycle of environmental conservation and economic growth. Against that background, it is believed that NGOs will find it necessary to actively make proposals for the formation of a socioeconomic framework as seen in the following recommendations (excerpts from a position paper prepared by a working group on the Economies of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, or TEEB).

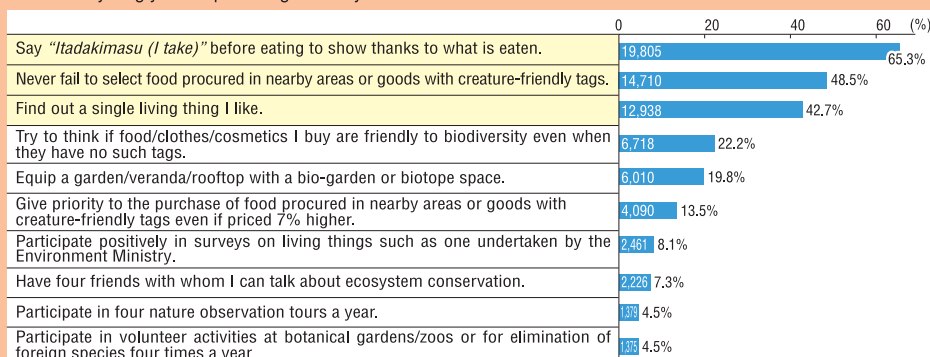
#### • Investment Promotion in Competitive Environment

Biodiversity should come to be managed in a way regional medical care is run with its public and private nature ensured. Conversely, the investment environment for biodiversity should be improved so that it will not only receive accelerated public investment in ecological services and the foundation of biodiversity but also private-sector investment and steady long-term funding from citizens. At the same time, as a means of providing new business opportunities associated

## Internet survey on biodiversity behavior

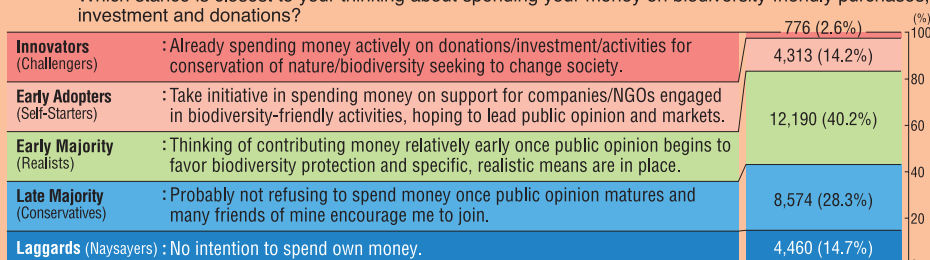
### 1-1: My promise for biodiversity

Question: Please pick “your target(s)” you can promise to achieve to leave nature and living things to the future generation from among the choices below (you may select two or more answers). Please also choose anything you are practicing currently and can continue to do so.



### 1-2: Biodiversity-friendly purchase of goods

Question: Which stance is closest to your thinking about spending your money on biodiversity-friendly purchases, investment and donations?



Note: Internet survey of 30,313 Japanese nationals, taken July 7-8, 2009  
Source: NPO “Earthday Everyday”

with biodiversity, a conservation industry should be cultivated early and private-sector demand promoted in accordance with improvement in a competitive environment.

#### • Fostering Corporate Human Resources for Biodiversity Marketing

Corporations should come up with aggressive proposals linked to biodiversity by making visible the load of goods and services on biodiversity on a per-unit basis, lowering the degree of reliance on it and placing new goods and services capable of linking to an ecosystem in the mainstay of corporate strategy for the new phase of competition. For this reason, it is important to guarantee freedom of the creation of a new biodiversity industry (by establishing free zones), make visible any regulations over biodiversity-friendly products and support campaigns for the purchase of such goods. First of all, companies must begin with picking out those who understand relations between biodiversity and business well and train them.

#### • Promotion of Professionalism in Biodiversity

Expert ideas and experience of NGOs are useful in handing down rich biodiversity and ecological services to the next generation. However, there are limitations to what volunteers can do. Therefore, NGOs must secure some people as professionals to protect biodiversity and serve as bearers of ecological services and support their career paths.

And then, of course, NGOs are called upon not to merely remain making proposals but to take action by building up their capacity suitable for taking on a concrete role for the realization of the biodiversity target. **JS**

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