

Recent JEF Activity

A Small Organization Committed to Promoting Global Peace & Prosperity — JEF's Recent Accomplishments

Introduction

The Japan Economic Foundation, publisher of *Japan SPOTLIGHT*, is greatly interested in hearing a wide range of opinions about our activities and impact in order to reflect as many views as possible in our future work programs. By publishing an activity report and a self-assessment of our performance at the end of every fiscal year in the digital issue of *Japan SPOTLIGHT*, we hope to attract our readers' views and suggestions. This article in the March/April 2013 issue is our first attempt at such an annual review.

For this year, we asked one of our colleagues, Asuka Niwa, to present her opinions and assessment of our activities during FY 2011. Her assessment is acute and candid and deserves much attention, we believe, as most of her points are shared by the JEF management team. We are more than happy to introduce her views and hope they will prompt an exchange of opinions on our activities.

Positive Assessments

My name is Asuka Niwa, and I have been working for JEF for almost eight years as a research assistant, mainly helping to organize our international forums. These forums are a venue for a number of international political and economic experts and leading thinkers to exchange views on a wide range of issues. As they are generally held in English, anybody speaking English can participate from all over the world.

In FY 2011, we organized three international forums in Asia, the United States and Europe in cooperation with friendly institutes in each area, as usual. The year 2011 was one of great tragedy — the year of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear power crisis following it, which seriously affected not only Japan but also much of the world in terms of macroeconomics and energy policy.

We highlighted in each forum the policy issues related to this unfortunate incident as well as trade policy issues, in particular those relevant to FTAs in which our foundation has a significant strength.

The 2011 Asia-Pacific Forum was held on Oct. 12 and 13, 2011 in Taipei in collaboration with the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research (TIER). The outcome of this forum, in my view, could be summed up in the following two points. One is that we highlighted



Taiwan as an economy working as a catalyst to encourage the conclusion of an Asia-wide regional FTA. In particular, we noted the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between China and Taiwan (ECFA) as one of the important vehicles for promoting an APEC-wide FTA, as well as the other recently developed FTAs either concluded or under negotiation such as the one between South Korea and the European Union and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. Based upon this observation, we are currently working on achieving further involvement by Taiwan in Asian regional FTAs such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

The other point is that we recognized the possible contribution of FTAs to alleviating the difficulties caused by the disruption of supply chains at times of great disaster, as was the case on March 11 in Japan, by facilitating the diversification of supply sources of materials and parts. Such a benefit for risk management in responding to unexpected disasters will be further discussed in an APEC-wide context. As such, our forum was successful in providing negotiators with new focal points for achieving regional FTAs.

The 2011 Japan-US forum was held on Nov. 16, 2011 in Chicago in cooperation with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The principal subject of the discussion was how to restore the stagnant global economy after financial crises — in the case of Japan in particular since the disaster in 2011 — to a sustainable growth pattern. It was noted that since the interdependence of national economies has significantly increased today, global governance to achieve sustainable growth by coordinating macro-policies among the major nations would be crucial to the prosperity of the world. The G20 is effectively working as the dominant global governance force. However, its effectiveness has recently been viewed with a certain skepticism, and this meeting raised the question of the relevance of current global governance for the first time and was successful in starting an informal discussion among participants about a desirable format for global governance. One newly proposed format was a G10, selected on the basis of GDP and population, which was presented at this forum



for the first time for discussion.

The 2011 Japan-Europe forum was held on Feb. 16, 2012 in Berlin, co-hosted by the German Council on Foreign Relations. This forum was successful in encouraging an exploratory exercise for starting negotiations on a Japan-EU FTA. I believe it was instrumental in convincing German diplomats and industry people attending the meeting of the merits of such an FTA and contributed to the commencement of negotiations towards it last November.

In addition, discussions on the future energy policies of Germany and Japan, in particular the future of nuclear power in both countries, were useful in clarifying the notable differences between the two nations' basic strategies. It was confirmed at this forum that, in the wake of the nuclear disaster in Japan, how to improve the safety of nuclear power stations and how to ensure energy supply would have to be a common agenda not only for Japan but also for the rest of the world.



Suggestions for Further Improvement

I learned a great deal from the projects mentioned above. Although when I joined JEF I was more interested in using my English language ability than in the substance of my work, I am now much more interested in the substance of a wide range of international political and economic issues, and realize that English language skills will not be of much use without any knowledge of particular topics. In this regard, it would be good news if JEF could involve more young students in our projects from next year, which would further enhance the value of our activities by helping to educate these students.

It may be that the impact of our activities can only be assessed over the long term. For example, our 10 years of activities highlighting the importance of FTAs in terms of the economy and geopolitics are certainly considered to have contributed greatly to more active engagement by the Japanese government in FTAs today, through dissemination of our reports on forums among relevant government officials.

However, I think we would need more active dissemination and PR activities to inform as many people as possible of the utility of our projects in order to assess their more immediate or short-term impact.

For example, we should streamline the important outcomes of our activities on our website, while making our best efforts to improve its readability.

We should also have many more occasions to publicize the merits of our activities to universities and think tanks by arranging lectures or presentations for students or young researchers there.

It is important to promote our activities among not only Japanese government officials but also the general public. The benefit to them would be enormous in the light of my personal experience, and then with a better understanding of international policies we would have more fruitful public debates and in the end be more successful in improving the quality of our democracy.

I am one of the general public and know well how an increase in ordinary people's knowledge would improve the quality of politics. I am very proud of working for this through the Japan Economic Foundation, and will try to continue my work as actively as possible by fully utilizing my own capabilities.



Besides these key activities, JEF, which has been serving as the secretariat for the Japan Chapter of the Club of Rome since 2010, organized two roundtable meetings of its steering committee in FY 2011. One of them showcased a speech by Dr. Ian Johnson, secretary general of the Club of Rome, who was invited to Japan under our sponsorship program. It was successful in triggering a debate in Japan on pursuing a conceptual framework to achieve sustainability of global growth, employment and environment.

Research on specific key topics for use as materials for discussion at our forums is a very important task for us, and in FY 2011 we selected two particular research issues. One was the future of Japan's foreign policy against the backdrop of a new stage of globalization, envisaging a transition from a G7 leadership to a BRIC-led one. This contributed to our proposal on new global governance.

The other was how Japanese agricultural policy can become consistent with trade liberalization. The outcome of this research was published on our website and became a theoretical basis for our discussions on the TPP and other regional FTAs in our forums.

Japan SPOTLIGHT, our bimonthly English magazine which was digitalized in May 2011, has become since then more like a venue for international discussions than a vehicle to promote Japan. But I believe providing such a venue in e-book form in English is a very effective way to achieve the purpose of promoting Japan, since it is Japan that is providing the materials for policy discussions.