

The 39th UNU Global Seminar Student Report by Kohichi Sado

1. Introduction

Kohichi Sado studied international economics with a focus on global trade at Chiba University, Japan. In 2017 he participated in the 33rd UNU Shonan Session on the theme of human security and issues facing refugees and immigrants.

His long-term career goal is effective policymaking and efficient public service delivery thorough both qualitative and quantitative methods to help alleviate poverty around the world. Prior to his study-leave for MSc in Economic Policy for International Development at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, he decided to broaden his perspective through an in-depth study of food security issues and enroll in the 39th UNU Global Seminar.

2. Keynote Speech Summary (Day 1; Professor Nobuyuki Yagi)

The keynote speech by Prof. Nobuyuki Yagi focused on globally important agricultural heritage systems (GIAHS) in Japan, particularly cormorant fishing in Nagara River in Gifu Prefecture and an integrated farming system in the Mikata District of Hyogo Prefecture.

Prof. Yagi is a member of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) advisory group, and his presentation featured GIAHS sites, which generally have higher rates of self-sufficiency. For instance, the data from Hyogo Prefectural Government and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan (MAFF) showed that the rate of small-scale cattle farmers who own five or fewer cattle in Mikata was 85%. The rate was larger than the national average by more than 30%.

Another point that impressed me was the citation from *The Tyranny of Merit*, a book written by Prof. Michael Sandel: “The more we think of ourselves as self-made and self-sufficient, the harder it is to learn gratitude and humility”. Furthermore, during the Q&A session, the lecturer added that if we felt that the human beings were just one part of the ecosystem, then their activities would naturally be the leading edge to sustainability.

In conclusion, Prof. Yagi stated that it was vital to balance both the agricultural product-oriented approach of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the results-oriented approach of FAO. He added that, under severe agricultural business competition, the former approach would exacerbate land abandonment and depopulation in rural areas, thus becoming a threat to small-scale farmers. The lecturer finished his presentation by emphasizing the importance of promoting sustainable agricultural livelihoods through both approaches, which helped me realize that it is crucial to consider food's origins beyond its commercial value.

3. Group Presentation Summary

Our group discussed agricultural recovery in the Tohoku Region after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Considering the negative impacts of industrial agriculture, our group focused on three elements that might hinder agricultural recovery: social, environmental and economic bottlenecks.

Our group concluded that in order for the Tohoku Region to be prosperous again, (i) the young generation should engage in agriculture; (ii) traditional methods of agricultural recovery should be promoted; and (iii) there should be an emphasis on agricultural education and training.

Our group found it challenging to finalize the presentation content within the time limit of about three hours. Despite the difficulties, each team member was able to share their ideas to improve the agricultural situation in the Tohoku Region, which is still struggling to recover from the widespread destruction. Preparing and delivering the presentation was a valuable experience.

4. Overall Feedback

Before the seminar, I had no knowledge of GIAHS sites nor unmanned robot agriculture, as I was not engaged in the fields of ecosystem diversity and food security. Although we had some time management issues, the seminar has helped me advance my thinking about agriculture and ecosystems through intensive discussions with other students.

In relation to my daily life, I was quite impressed with the words of Dr. Yasushi

Yokota, the Executive Vice President of Hokkaido University. He suggested that we visit the domestically produced food section at supermarkets after looking at what I bought at a nearby supermarket, which I shared during the Q&A session. Even though some imported items are more affordable, paying attention to the origin of the food we consume helps to promote sustainable local agriculture.

Overall, the 39th UNU Global Seminar was a great opportunity for me to not only develop my knowledge on food security, but also enhance my group communication and presentation skills while learning a new topic. Last but not least, I am grateful for the opportunity to interact with the lecturers, the secretariat staff and fellow participants.