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For better understanding people's understandings of climate change issues and motivation for taking actions: Japanese case

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We sought how people perceive and understand the climate change issues and what the motivation for taking actions are. We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative survey results in Japan: one is a series of nation-wide public opinion surveys; the other is another series of focus group interviews in Tokyo metropolitan area. It investigated people's understanding of climate change and their motivation to support and implement climate change preventive actions.

Our a series of focus group interviews (FGIs) were as follows: a) February, 2006 (six groups of male and female, 20 to 60 years old,), b) June 2006 (four groups of university male and female students, and a group of students who are active members of environmental group activities), c) February 2007 (six groups of male and female, 20 to 60 years old, used DVD movies), d) November 2007 (four groups of male and female who are about ten years after graduating universities, using DVD movies), e) February 2008 (twelve groups of male and female, 20 to 65 years old, used DVD movies and two types of lectures).

What we found from those FGIs are: 1) Many people misunderstood main causes and effects of climate change issues, and mixed up with the depletion of Ozone layer, and other air pollution issues. 2) Mass media is an effective information source for recognizing climate change issues and governmental policies, international events and related actions, but "internet" is the two-edged blade. People who often checked internet tended to see climate change issues as "still on the way to reach a settlement among scientists", as they could find many "skeptisims" on the internet.

We carried out nation-wide public opinion surveys in 2006, 2007 and 2008 to investigate 1) The status of people's information gathering about the environmental issues, and people's understanding and perception on climate change risks 2) the effects of social capital on the actions for reducing environmental impacts from everyday lives. Those results are:

- 1) People's climate change risk perception is categorized into three groups: disasters, bio-diversity loss, and threatening to people's everyday lives
- 2) Almost of all people felt "world climate is changing", but they know governmental campaign for tackling climate change. People could not feel the "reality" of Climate Change and feelings got people distracted to take actions.
- 3) Social capital has significant effects on people's actions, especially "organizational membership". Also, we confirmed the results from FGIs: people's misunderstanding climate change issues: both causes and effects.

Our last FIG, which was carried out February 2008, was planned to improve people's perceptions and understanding of Climate Change issues and, by giving two lectures, one is about "current status of climate change issues", such as information from IPCC fourth reports, and currently proposed reduction targets, and another is "what we can do for preventing climate change", such as technologies that can be introduced at homes, we tried to give keys for people to take actions. The result was "successful." Our participants asked a variety of questions, and they asked us to do this lecture in their communities, schools or their workplace.

People's perception on the climate change issues are affected by existing knowledge of air-related environmental issues, such as air pollution and depletion of ozone layer. Those misunderstandings are very popular in whole population of Japanese public, according to our research results. Although people are realizing "world's climate is changing", they have no clue or can't have appropriate clue for taking actions against it. People are "exposed" those information from TV programs, TV commercials, or newspaper articles, newspaper advertisements by government or private companies, but people just "see" them, but not "look" at hem or "examine" them carefully. Or even they misunderstood them. Giving lecture and exchanging questions, answers and opinion with instructors are very much effective for better understanding, as participants had to listen, watch and even think carefully for questioning something after lectures.