Introduction to the Proceedings of the Symposium, “Sustainable Development and Anthropology”

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Global environmental problems such as global warming, tropical deforestation, and biodiversity have commanded a disproportionate share of public attention. As represented by the reports of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, sustainable development has become a “golden rule” in discussing global environmental issues, particularly those in developing countries. Nonetheless, there are many questions in approaching this rule. A simple question is whether “development” and “sustainability” can realistically be simultaneously achieved or maintained.

Anthropologists, both biological and cultural, who have conducted field investigations in developing societies have accumulated a variety of information and data, most of which seem to have focused on vulnerable situations in terms of sustainable development. The major reasons for this come from the fact that the decision-makers in development planning for developing countries have largely avoided close examination of the real situation of the people’s biological or ecological adaptive mechanisms and cultural heritages. It is thus meaningful for anthropologists to share their knowledge and ideas concerning sustainable development and to contribute to possible solutions of difficult problems in developing countries.

Keeping these notions in mind, we organized a symposium, “Sustainable development and anthropology,” at the 48th Joint Meeting of the Anthropological Society of Nippon and the Japanese Society of Ethnology, held in Kagoshima on October 8–9, 1994. The principal purposes of the symposium were to comparatively examine different aspects of people’s ways of living under modernization and to seek more appropriate paths to sustainable development through discussion.

For this symposium, four themes most crucial in considering the establishment of sustainable development were selected: (1) relationship between population and food production, (2) institutional resource management, (3) recognition and/or reaction of local peoples to development, and (4) health issues in the process of development. Each of the four speakers has carried out long-term field investigations on his topic, and was able to point out the essential problems, taking into account

other topics related to sustainable development. All the speakers specialized in the South Pacific region, and thus the interrelatedness of the four themes was apparent at the symposium. However, our aim was to clarify the issues not only for this region but also for developing societies worldwide.

The four symposium papers, as revised after discussion, are assembled in this volume. As the organizers of the symposium and thus the invited editors, we are very grateful to the Editorial Board of this journal for the opportunity to publish them.

In the first paper, Ohtsuka uses his own findings from several Papua New Guinea communities to pose questions about the reliability and applicability of the original concept of carrying capacity in considering the relationship between a population which has been and will be rapidly increasing and the productivity of agricultural crops which have been used not only for subsistence food but also cash earnings. His discussion proposes some alternative ways to solve the problems.

In comparison with land resources, marine resources have been utilized with much more complicated management systems and are of great interest in the current and future human-resource systems. The second paper, by Akimichi, focuses on the ownership of these resources and the associated conflicts and their solutions based on his findings in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, taking into account the roles of individuals, descent groups, and local institutions.

Community-based discussion for development planning is the subject of the third paper, by Kurita, who worked among the Fasu-speaking people in Papua New Guinea. This local group had long survived fairly independent of the outer world, but recently have been faced with a large-scale oil-well drilling project which was undertaken in their land. Following a review of the ecological and sociological situation of the Papua New Guinea communities, Kurita emphasizes the significance of the local people's ecologically and culturally-bound ideas on development, based on his observations among the Fasu.

The final paper, by Inaoka, discusses the changing health status of human populations in the South Pacific countries in the modernizing process. As he emphasizes, health issues have seldom been treated in relation to sustainable development but should be considered a basic component in it. Based on an inter-nation comparison of mortality patterns and health status and his own findings in several populations, the Manus people in Papua New Guinea in particular, he discusses the causal relationship between modernization and health.