

International Symposium on Sustainability Science
“Towards a Mature and Sustainable Society”

7 January 2013
United Nations University
Tokyo, Japan

The symposium brought together academicians with representatives of industry and business to explore the value of and means to expand cooperative efforts to advance progress for sustainability. For while some steps have been taken in recent years to improve the quality of life for many of the world's poor, humanity has failed to make significant progress toward safeguarding the world's natural ecosystems or otherwise ensure its own long-term viability. (Dasgupta and Duraipappah, 2012) As its title implies, the intent of the symposium was to explore through presentations and panel discussions insights into the ways in which collaborations between industry and academia could contribute to progress towards a “mature and sustainable society”. By “mature” is meant a society that has moved beyond thinking about what it can do to advance sustainable development to taking the necessary steps – action – to achieve sustainability. Barriers to making such progress are not insignificant. Among those identified during the symposium are:

- Our present economic paradigm focused on material wealth as the key ingredient for well-being and development ignores social and ecological factors that may be the most essential constituents of well-being
- Traditional indicators to assess progress of nations today (GDP and the Human Development Index, HDI) do not take account of the state of the natural environment, or indicate whether levels of well-being are sustainable
- The knowledge explosion of recent decades has not led to improvements in global well-being in part because it remains fragmented/unstructured
- Incentives to meet global ecological and social challenges through the development and application of innovative policies, technologies and practices are weak or lacking
- While sustainability issues require long-term solutions, both industry and government operate on the basis of short-term rewards

In order to overcome these barriers, the symposium produced the following action points. The time has come for universities to:

- Replace common measures of progress (GDP and HDI) with the more robust means (such as IWI) that include natural capital and human health and that take account of inevitable trade-offs and substitutions
- Support a radical shift in defining progress and growth from quantitative to qualitative measures
- Recognize that change in attitudes and practice in all sectors is necessary and take steps to manage such change on individual and institutional levels

- Promote, support and sustain long-term industry/university collaborations
 - Encourage industry to be involved in curriculum development
 - Conduct joint research, especially long-term research, which is more beneficial to industry as well as to society in the long-run.
- Expand communication and outreach on sustainability science to promote understanding of its holistic approach in industry, government, and the public
 - Hold more joint conferences
 - Publicize results of collaborations
 - Promote community awareness of sustainability science
- Engage with industry, government leaders and local communities to create networks for the development and promotion of sustainable societies (e.g. “Platinum Society Network in Japan)