

Key Points of Outlook for 2010

Issues relating to Climate Change Negotiation in 2010

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Toward the 15th Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen last December, one focus of attention had been whether major greenhouse gas emitting countries such as the United States and China would agree on any effective framework for GHG emission reductions. Finally, however, the COP15 participants only agreed to “take note” of a nonbinding political document known as the “Copenhagen Accord”. The United States had sent submission with GHG emission reduction target as urged in the “Copenhagen Accord”, but has lagged behind in pushing domestic climate change legislation. China announced a target for reducing GHG emissions per GDP unit just before the COP15 and took part in negotiations on the political agreement, and China also sent submission with their action plan for curbing GHG emission. Various results of future emission reduction negotiations can be predicted. Undoubtedly, however, the United States and China will have great influences on the negotiations. Among the 26 major countries that took part in working out the political document, many have noted that COP15 participants made some compromise while failing to adopt an official agreement. They attribute the result to limits accompanying any U.N.-sponsored conference. In this sense, U.S.-China bilateral talks or meetings of major GHG emitters including the Group of 20 members could grow more important.

At the COP15, Japan offered a far costlier GHG emission reduction target than other major countries and proposed the so-called “Hatoyama Initiative” calling for a substantial expansion in Japan’s support for developing countries. As U.S. and Chinese stances and the future treatment of the political agreement remain uncertain, Japan may have difficulties in conducting international negotiations. Japan has demanded major countries’ participation in GHG emission reductions and their fair emission reduction targets as preconditions for its acceptance of a framework agreement on such reductions. In the game of Climate Change negotiation where the United States and China are emerging as key players, Japan will have to develop a strategy on how to lead the negotiations toward realizing the preconditions. From such perspective, Japan may be expected to enhance bargaining with various countries through such forums as the MEF (Major Economies Forum), the APP (Asia-Pacific Partnership), this year’s Japan-chaired APEC (Asia-pacific Economic Cooperation forum) conferences, Japan-China talks, Japan-U.S. meetings and Japan-Asia gatherings.

Under such situation, it is important for the government to gain the people's sufficient understanding on its policy in going ahead with domestic policy discussions. While any international framework has remained uncertain, the government has offered such domestic policy measures as a carbon tax, an emissions trading system and higher renewable energy introduction targets to achieve its target of cutting emissions in 2020 by 25% from the 1990 level. But it has not provided any specific explanations or economic/social visions about the consistency between the international agreement precondition and country-by-country emission reduction targets, the distribution of domestic measures and external activities, and the feasibility and impacts of these measures. Therefore, it may be important for the government to consider desirable efforts while proposing its assessments and ideas about these matters and asking the people whether these proposals would work.

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