

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Policy Implications

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Conclusions and Policy Implications

Stable supply of energy is an important factor for the sustainable development of a nation. Securing it should consider various aspects, including energy efficiency, environmental protection, energy security, and safety. As made clear in this study, nuclear power should be regarded as one of the most reliable options for future energy mix, taking into account all of these factors.

It should be noted that in East Asian countries where energy demand will grow rapidly in the future, and where oil and natural gas resources are relatively scarce, energy security will emerge as an especially important issue, resulting in the necessity of continuous use of coal. Taking into consideration both global and regional environmental issues, the wide diffusion of CCTs would be indispensable at the same time.

One of the most important issues for both nuclear and coal power is the perception gap between policymakers and the public. First, in contrast to the policymakers who make decisions considering the interests of the whole nation, the public usually makes decisions taking into account their own interests. For example, global warming is considered an important issue by most people as it would cause various types of damage to anyone anywhere in the world. On the contrary, one usually does not care for the future of the coal industry of one's own country, unless one is a direct stakeholder.

Second, in many cases, relevant information is not fully transmitted to the public in a proper manner. Even if a piece of information is correct as a piece, it cannot be regarded as a proper one if it is fragmented, and decisions based on it cannot be optimal from the viewpoint of the whole nation. For these reasons, there is usually a wide gap between the policymakers and the public, which the government must make maximum efforts to connect.

In this regard, the most crucial factor for obtaining public acceptance is to transmit proper information to the public. The 'information' here includes not only the scientific knowledge on the risk and safety of nuclear or coal-fired power generation, but also the reason why they are regarded as necessary as well as their disadvantages. For this purpose, the government must make policymaking as transparent as possible, paving the way for open and free discussions. As the media plays the crucial role for public understanding, it is always required of the media to make fair and unbiased reports. At the same time, the government must always be conscious of how media reports the policies.

It must also be noted that the transmission of the information must not be a unilateral relationship such as 'DEAD' (Decide, Educate, Announce and Defend). European examples suggest that the dialogues should be designed to allow the opinions of the public truly incorporated with the decision of the government, reflecting many layers of dialogue between the policymakers and the public. In order to achieve this as well as raise the public trust in the government, consideration by the government and the experts in understanding the public would be indispensable.

Another crucial factor is to understand what the public needs. In order for a proposal to be accepted, it must provide the recipient with considerable benefits. In this regard, the policymaker must clearly present to the public the economic and social benefits of the policy, both local and nationwide, as well as its disadvantages.

The government must also continue the policy without frequent changes. From the viewpoint of the power industry and investors, the continuity of policies is as important as the power development need for long-term investments. At the same time, it is also important from the public's viewpoint as the public would not trust the government if it doesn't have a clear perspective of future energy policies.

This study referred to the examples of public dialogues in Europe and sought their implications on East Asian countries. Here, the situations are different between nuclear and coal power. The distrust in nuclear has been caused by the Chernobyl accident in the case of Europe decades ago, and by the Fukushima accident in the case of Asia now. Both cases, however, share the same concern over the safety of operating nuclear power plants and radioactivity.

In the case of coal, the main concern in Europe is focused on global warming issues, in contrast to Asia, especially Thailand, where the concern is on regional air pollution. The efforts in Europe to obtain public acceptance for nuclear would be a good reference not only for nuclear, but also for coal power, in East Asia. At the same time, the issues which do not seem to be relevant in Europe anymore, such as the necessity of coal from the viewpoint of energy security and the crucial role of CCTs for the continuous use of coal, should be taken as one of the most relevant issues in East Asia. As such, discussions taking into account specific situations would be necessary when considering energy issues in East Asia.