

The Environment: From Local to Global

An Interview with Ms Barbut, Chair of the GEF, an International Fund

Tokyo, Mainichi Shimbun, 24 Sept 2007 (Interviewer: Daisuke Yamada)

Ms Monique Barbut, CEO and Chair of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), an international fund established by the World Bank and others to resolve global environmental issues, such as climate change and biodiversity conservation, visited Japan for the first time since she took over the position (see photo). In an exclusive interview with the Mainichi Newspaper, Ms. Barbut enthusiastically stated, “The least developed countries with the least amount of greenhouse gas emissions are the most vulnerable when it comes to global warming. My job is to see to it that these countries receive extensive funding for measures towards global warming”.

“The Least Developed Countries needs the most support for climate change adaptation”

Q: How should the debate on emissions reduction be pursued after 2013, which is not determined by the Kyoto Protocol Treaty?

A: The participation of all developed nations and developing countries that are responsible for large emissions is vital. I think that Cool Earth 50 (Japan’s proposal for nations to cut global emissions in half by 2050) is a good compromise proposal while negotiation with some countries remain a challenge. Flexibility should be maintained while trying to pursue numerical targets.

There are generally two groups of developing countries. Developed countries must agree to provide funds, taking note of the fact that although emission reduction must be reached in developing countries with large emissions, it should not be at the expense of economic and social development. In contrast, the more numerous countries with low-level emissions face a greater risk of climate change. It is essential that damages caused by global warming are reduced through adaptation measures. There is a limit to government funding, including ODA to support such initiatives, and there is a need to establish a new financial mechanism.

Why aren’t the natural resources and environment of a developing country valued as that country’s assets? I became involved in environmental issues because of these questions.

Q: China has recently begun to emphasize forestry policies.

A: Clearing forests for cultivation and other forms of land use that increase greenhouse gas emissions are becoming a serious problem in many countries. This was not fully envisioned in the Kyoto Protocol Treaty. As forests decrease, emissions increase, and under the discussion on the post-Kyoto Protocol framework, the role of forestry and agriculture should become more of a focus. We have also recently started a new strategic program on sustainable forest management, and we plan to implement it in critical places such as the Amazon, Congo, and Borneo. We expect the program will have impact also on biodiversity and other focal areas, and we have prepared a budget of \$50 million.

Q: What is the purpose of your visit to Japan this time?

A: Japan is one of the foremost contributors of GEF. I had meetings with each of the concerned ministry and parliamentarians, and they appreciated our reform. The GEF is the financial mechanism for the implementation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change which is the main convention of the Kyoto Protocol, and as of June this year, we have started to evaluate impact on global warming in all our projects.

About the GEF: The GEF was established in 1991, and involves 177 member countries. It is the world's largest environmental fund, which provided \$7.3 billion in grants and leveraged \$28 billion in co-financing since its establishment. It has supported about 2,000 projects in about 160 countries, including such projects as pollution control for international rivers. It has also provided small grants to more than 7,000 non-governmental organizations.

About the CEO (Photo Caption):

Native of Paris. Prior to GEF, she was employed at French economic development bank, la Caisse Centrale de Cooperation Economique; appointed as Executive Director for all Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean activities at the Agence Francaise de Developpement Group, and was Director of the Division of Technology Industry and Economics, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Appointed as CEO and Chair of the GEF since August 2006.