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**A case story from Minamata  
GNH practice as human security and sustainable development**

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Thank you for chairperson for your kind introduction. A main objective of this session is to think over possible linkage for global and local actions on GNH. Here I would like to share my perspective toward this by drawing an example from Japan – Minamata.

I was born in Japan in 1962 and received education from the primary school to the university in Japan. History classes taught me over the rapid economic growth and transformation after the World War II as one of the best case in the modern world. In 1955, the per capita GDP for Japan was about half a million yen and it reached above 4million yen in 2005. School enrolment rates for high school and university have risen and life expectancy at birth has become one of the longest in this world. Japanese seem enjoy and to be satisfied toward their lives. In textbooks over Japan, many have pointed out how miraculous the Japanese economic development has been for more than forty years by referring the successful companies such as Toyota, Sony, Panasonic, and so on. However, this industrialization has paid huge costs for the society.

In 1956, a strange disease was found in Minamata-city located in the west coast of the southern part of the Kyushu-island (Map) where some people became seriously illness. The cause was organic mercury which had been accumulated in fishes and shellfishes

caught in the Minamata Bay where one big chemical company, Chisso, which had produced acetaldehyde for economic development, discharged the industrialized waste for many years. Those who constantly ate fishes caught in the bay became victims for the polluted fish.

After this problem was identified as the Minamata disease, local people were hard hit by the disease, which caused stigma from outside the city and internal conflicts among the local people. Partly because the company that caused the disease had hired many local people as factory workers, close to 20% at the its peak, and local retail sales depended on the company as well. Those who worked for the company did not want to lose their jobs, thus, the incidents for the disease were reported less than the real cases.

There arose conflicts between victims and the Chisso over the recognition of their responsibility and compensation issues.

In addition, this has created un-evidenced stigma among the Japanese people against Minamatans, with the mystified as Minamata-disease was believed as its local infectious disease. Thus, those who were in a train in the line passing through the Minamata city, passengers closed their windows once the train entered the city. On the other hand, those who were born in Minamata originally, they tended not to identify themselves as people from Minamata, in fear of the people's reaction to the city and them. Some people had faced with discrimination over the marriage.

Minamata-city is not a unique special case in Japan and in the world. Industrialization started in Meiji era more than hundred years ago in Japan. Industrialization with mass production created enormous social costs – polluted water, soil erosion with fertilizers and pesticides, polluted fishery products. And most importantly the central government led the ordinary people into the World War II to secure the resources for industrial-based economic development.

My intention today is not to speak out Minamata's misery; rather, I would like to share you a story over the recent change—good change which might buttress the pursuit of happiness among local people in Minamata-city.

In 1994, Yoshii Masazumi became the Mayor of Minamata-city and he delivered a speech at the memorial ceremony for the victims of the Minamata disease, which was attended by the Environment Agency director-general and the Kumamoto Prefecture governor immediately after he became the Mayor. His speech was different from those by predecessors. His message was contrition and apology, and he stated that the city's past actions on Minamata disease had been mistaken and proposed a solution for dialogue as Japanese people did in the old days to solve a problem at the community level. This made a huge impact over the course of the Minamata disease issues. After this speech, various victims groups, which were split against each other over the certified status on the disease and compensation issues, agreed on the dialogue for seeking a solution for the victims. Citizen groups supporting the existence of the Chisso Company in Minamata even supported for the urgent need of solution to the problem of the victims redress. In 1995 a political solution was reached on redress for Minamata disease victims.

What Minamata-city and people Minamata have been doing since then is to restore good social relationships, which is identified as one of the core elements of happiness. For this purpose, two things they initiated, which I think, useful to share with you for our discussion over global and local linkage and a method for transformation applicable for the area in the middle of or in the post-industrialization.

*Vision setting—determination to be a model environmental city*

First one is the Minamata-city's strategy to become a leading city on environment since the city had been labeled as environment with full of pollution-based risk. The city formulated the development

plan with the citizen's participation and it came up with the environment model city idea. Concrete actions included the sorting of the waste for more than twenty categories by local residents, the voluntary formulation of women's group working on waste reduction, active participation of the local junior high school students in the waste reduction activities through education and waste sorting work in the streets. The Minamata city government created "Environment Meister" which certifies local people who are selected by the level of significance of their work for environment preservation and healthy food and goods production. For example, one of the criteria is those who have practiced and accomplished nature-friendly organic farming for more than five years. Before certified as meister, some people were ridiculed by others as a freak. However, after the certified, people looked at them differently and rather sought for advice for organic farming.

*Step to link people inside and outside the community – strengthen human bondage and ecological lifestyles*

The second method used in Minamata in its community reconstruction is Jimotogaku or Neighborhood Study. This concept and method is developed by Yoshimoto Tetsuro, who was one of the key figures in the paradigm shift in the Minamata city as he was a planning section chief under Yoshii who delivered the important speech. In fact, Yoshimoto is the writer for the speech. This neighborhood study method is a set of simple tools to learn about their land and people, which Yoshimoto believes that local people think more why their houses were built on the land (normally far from the edge of the river) why trees were planted in one dimension of the house (to prevent strong windows, etc.) if they are given opportunities to think them carefully. In Minamata, one community in the mountain side where they suffer constant decline in the young generation for cities was consulted by the city office if they could receive visitors who come to Minamata to learn about the Minamata disease – this is the start of the Living Museum of Rural Community in Minamata. They accepted with less enthusiasm. But, when the visitors, including high school students from big cities,

started to come and even sometime did home stay, these outsiders asked the local people many questions on houses, trees, water use, vegetables, rice, cattle, and even cats and dogs. The visitors praised and envied the way of the life the rural community lives. Local people were shocked to learn that people from the advanced cities which they always thought the advanced and ideal living condition admired the tiny village life. They started questioning themselves how ignorant they are about many issues in their own village. Local people who became local tour guides started asking themselves with why questions about their village and their own lives. They started their own search for what their community is about, how valuable their village is in their well-beings, what needs to be done to shape economic life fitting well with the natural environment, and thinking more on social relationships and relationships with local environment. They started so-called Jimotogaku with social and environmental mapping, researching history, tradition, culture, and local customs, production and consumption process in the village, organized community discussion forums over the local people's concerns and needs. In 2005, this community has received an award from the Ministry of Agriculture as a thriving rural model place. In Minamata city, there are four communities in the implementation of this Jimotogaku. In Japan, this movement is gradually spreading.

In my view, this story from Minamata is so critical for us to find a realistic action to change our development direction from short-sighted and confrontational nature of the capitalist economic system to sustainable and secured human livelihood economic system and practice.

New and creative indicators to capture and measure growth from the holistic sustainable points of view at the different levels have been nicely developed. I believe that now it is time for us to search for existing wisdom from the local and community levels, search for a sprout of ideas and actions for the transformation to regain social ties, and search for generating and sharing such knowledge through

the globe. It may be critical to advocate these individuals, groups, communities, private companies, and governments as GNH masters, GNH fellows, GNH best practice, GNH companies, and so on. Both the indicators and actions do need to go together to change the world upside down in the near future.

Thank you for your attention.