

**GPPN Student Conference**  
**Turning crisis into opportunity:**  
**What policies do we need for sustainable development today?**

Yukiko Oomagari  
Graduate School of Public Policy  
International Public Policy major (second year)  
Participants from GraSPP: Yukiko Oomagari, Naohiro Yoshida,  
Kayo Matsushita, Takushi Sasada, Yumeto Ito, Sawako Inada,  
Taisuke Yoshida, Mitsuru Yoshida, Ina Kunikawa, Vandy Leng,  
Yutaka Ueno, Takashi Yoshida, Shohei Kawase

"It would be great if one day my fellow University of Tokyo classmates could actively participate in this conference". That was my impression after being one of a few University of Tokyo (henceforth UT) students that participated in the Global Public Policy Network (GPPN) student conference held at Sciences Po, Paris, in 2008. The next GPPN conference held in 2009 at the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy (LKY), Singapore, went even further beyond my expectations. My fellow Graduate School of Public Policy (GraSPP) classmates and I learned invaluable lessons from our fellow public policy students from around the world. For our part, we were also able to make a significant contribution; helping to further expand the already diverse Global Public Policy Network.

Our learning experience began with speeches from prominent public policy leaders such as the Dean of LKY, Professor Kishore Mahbubani, who gave a speech entitled "breaking out from the narrow bound". Professor Mahbubani focused on the transformation of global system dominated by a few actors to a system where all governments, acting not by themselves, could take the helm together to create global solutions; urging us to break free from the mould and think outside the box. The secretary-general of ASEAN Dr. Surin Pitsuwan gave a speech about leadership, old institutions, reforming those old institutions, and global citizenship, placing the onus of structural reform on new leadership. A new leadership that will rely not on the traditional 'elite' but, on the "passionate intensity" of students and future leaders like us.

By a happy coincidence an APEC conference was also being held in Singapore. Consequently, we were lucky to have the Governors of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) Mr. Luis Alberto Moreno and the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Mr. Haruhiko Kuroda give us insights focusing on how best to make opportunities out of a crisis. A video conference was also conducted with students from Paris, New York, and London entitled 'the economic crisis: opportunities for developing countries' in which Dr. Charles Adams of LKY (previously of the IMF and ADB) and GraSPP's Professor Shinichi Nakabayashi debated points concerning how emerging countries can turn the crisis to their advantage. An address was also given on the final day by Singapore's Minister of Environment and Water Resources, Mr. Tan Yong Soon, concerning Singaporean environmental policy. I asked Mr. Tan which countries are considered 'advanced countries' when it comes to who shall bear the responsibility for CO2 emissions, an issue where the Japanese and Singaporean governments differ. It was a rare experience to ask a member of the Singaporean government about the issue directly.

The core of the conference was, however, the student presentations and question and answer sessions. It was an inordinately stimulating experience to share our knowledge and experience with some of the world's leading young students. I first participated in the working group for Aid Governance. Two groups of classmates from UT made presentations along with students from other universities. A good exchange of views and opinions was had. From this moment I felt that we were actively contributing to the conference experience. After the four presentations, other students made presentations on various topics in the context of the working group's larger framework, that of the conference. It was fascinating to exchange ideas with students from such varying backgrounds. For instance, when discussing British ODA, which the London School of Economics (LSE) students specialised in, Shohei Kawase provided insightful comments from the viewpoint of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Sawako Inada made a presentation on China's African ODA policy, igniting discussion with the Chinese students. Another student from Sciences Po who presented on the African Development Bank contributed to the discussion from the viewpoint of that bank. Such interactive and interdisciplinary discussions were to be the order of the day for all of the working groups throughout the duration of the conference.

Next, I too became a presenter with Yutaka Ueno and Shinya Kotera in the Millennium Development Goal working group. Many curious hands were raised in regards to our presentation and it was both challenging and interesting to answer them. I was able to experience first hand the difficulty of having to know one's subject inside and out and answering questions to the satisfaction of the question givers and the audience. It was, however, unfortunate that we could only provide answers restricted our presentations to the students from Columbia University's Earth Institute in regards to whether genetically modified goods were used in Japanese agriculture. That we had a chance to exchange our views and questions about the issue later was a perfect example of the conference's networking opportunities. We were, however, able to answer questions regarding subsidies to the agricultural sector in advanced economies, making good time as well.

Praise was the name of the day after the student presentations with comments like "that was a refined and interesting presentation". Such comments made all of our efforts worthwhile. I later discovered that a student from The University of Geneva had had experience in dealing with issues related to my field of study, that of immigrants and human rights. Lively conversation was indeed had. Solidarity between presenters only strengthened as the conference wore on, leading, I am sure, to more permanent friendships. I was certainly more tired than I thought I would be after my presentation but, that tiredness was soon dispelled upon thinking about the contribution that we had made.

The last two working groups that I participated in were 'Energy' and 'Sustainable Cities'. The reason I joined the former group was because I wanted to hear the completed (final) presentations of Taisuke Yoshida and Mitsuru Yoshida, both of whom I had rehearsed with before the conference and to hear the reactions of other students to their presentations. The other students took more of an interest than I anticipated, asking poignant questions such as "are the dangers of nuclear facilities not [fully] considered?" Positing the same question in everyone's mind, "how can we create and implement effective policy?" In the end, using the two Yoshida's presentations as a starting point, we put our minds together to come up with topics to be studied in the future. On one occasion, Takashi Yoshida replied to a question by a German student studying at LKY concerning the datafication of social costs. Even if a solution for something could not be provided in the working group, the process of students from diverse backgrounds being stimulated by presentations from top students and putting their heads together and attempting to reach a

common solution was well worth it. I had seen both Yoshida's presentations many times before but, their improvement as seen at the GPPN conference was truly remarkable. It may even be said that their confident presentations provided the impetus for such lively debates as described above.

In the Sustainable Cities working group, students from Columbia University with experience in city planning in New York emphasised the point that "[public] policy works to change people's behaviour. We just need to implement it!" They reiterated the possible effects that public policy can have on society and with indelible motivation said that we all (students) have an ideal to change the status quo. This proved to be a turning point in the discussion.

The conference also provided me with the opportunity to talk with all of the students whose presentations I found to be particularly interesting and also to exchange views and compliments with them. There were also some times when students would stay back after the working groups had disbanded to continue their discussions with some students agreeing with some of my views and yet others who bowled me over with their feedback. I also felt proud when other students commented on the high level of presentations from the UT students.

After the working groups had finished I was also able to go over the groups proceedings with each groups' moderators and scribes. Two of which were UT students: Kayo Matsushita and John Mannion on exchange from LKY. It was a time to think about what policies could be discerned from the multitude of views expressed by the background diverse participants on the common theme of 'turning crisis into opportunity'.

The closing remarks from one of the organisers Martin, a German student from LKY, struck a chord with me. He said that the conference three things. One, the challenges we face are complex and interrelated. This is why cross-sector analysis is needed. Secondly, that the field of public policy is important because we can get benefits from other disciplines. And thirdly, that looking for solutions together means a lot. I particularly want to emphasize point three. It is something that I realised from participating in the GPPN student conference. Repeating Martin's words in my mind I felt deep down that "a *process* of identifying problems, coming up with solutions together, and building public policies with people from

different backgrounds...[is] important". Lastly, Dr. Eduraeo Araral from LKY pressed upon us this: "in this conference, you must have learned how difficult it is to make collective decisions. But we can come up with effective decisions if we have people who really want to make change". It was the moment when all of us, committed as we are to public policy, were able to overcome national boundaries and become one.

The conference not only provided for a face to face environment with which students could collaborate with each other but also a place where a student network could flourish. My depleted business card stocks bore testament to this fact. I have many fond memories with the new friends that I made. Students from America, Europe, Myanmar, China, Nepal, India, and Rwanda, to name just a few, all specialising in public policy all of whom I will have the pleasure of continued contact for years to come. The commitment of the event organisers moved me as well. Especially Azul, who had been in diligent contact with me months before the conference began to advise me in various matters. I cannot thank the organisers enough for taking time out of their busy end of semester schedules to hold the event. I also realised how much more preparation would be required were the event to be held at UT. Cultivating motivated students and preparing a GraSPP capable of hosting the GPPN student conference should be one of GraSPP's long term goals.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Tokyo for giving me such an invaluable opportunity. I especially would like to thank Ms. Ogawa and Ms. Nachi for providing administrative assistance and, last but not least, Professor Shinichi Nakabayashi for his continued encouragement and support.