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Japan's Recent Activities on Facilitation of Public Acceptance of Nanotechnology

Japan's Third Science and Technology Basic Plan for fiscal year 2006 to 2010 stipulates guiding principles that include following two points: science and technology that is supported by society and the general public and which rewards them with its fruits, and nurturing human resources and a competitive environment.

The Basic Plan also stipulates prioritized basis R&D to use limited resources effectively, and the field of nanotechnology and materials is seen as an area in which R&D should be promoted with particular prioritization.

Furthermore, the Basic Plan narrows down the focus of budget allocation by stipulating the Strategic Prioritized Science and Technology Area for the next five years.

Under the supervision of Council for Science and Technology Policy (CSTP) of Cabinet Office, which drew up the Basic Plan, a new strategic approach has been started that aims to closely coordinate among ministries for deliberating the practical measures, implementing them, and sharing information to promote the prioritized R&D strategy effectively and achieve ultimate goal which is to reward society.

The following seven ministries and a agency are participated in the Coordination Framework: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Japan, the Ministry of Agriculture, forestry and Fisheries of Japan, and Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

This Framework enables to maintain and strengthen consistent R&D that covers from laboratory to market, and to avoid unnecessary overlapping in implementation of measures among ministries by information sharing.

Currently establishment of new working group for facilitation of responsible R&D and public acceptance of nanotechnology in the Framework is considered. Research on societal implication of nanotechnology will be reflected in policy planning for nanotechnology R&D, when the working group is officially incorporated into the Framework.

One of the Basic Plan's guiding principles is responding to general public better. MEXT has started to fund training courses to foster science communicators who are able to connect science and technology to society.

R&D side has started to respond the government move. A research has already been launched in National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), which is conducted on biological effect of nanoparticles and directed by Dr. Junko Nakanishi of Research Center for Chemical Risk Management, and it is funded by New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization.

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