

Keynote Speech

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Decentralized society and localization

—The SDGs and designing a society with population decline

Local governments must play a major role in implementing the SDGs. Local actions are what lead to national and global movements. However, since the SDGs do not directly address the issues of an aging society and population decline, we must adapt the SDGs to suit the current situation of Japan.

Considering such situations as government debt and social isolation, our research group conducted an AI experiment to see whether Japan can sustain itself in 2050 or not. The results showed that the sustainability of Japan depends on whether we decide to continue concentrating the population in urban areas or take action to decentralize into other regions. The analysis also indicated that themes linked to the SDGs such as renewable energy, strengthened local communities, and the regional circular economy will be key to building a sustainable future. Today, we are seeing more SDGs-related projects throughout Japan, such as the creation of a transit mall in front of Himeji Station and revitalization of the local community with small hydropower plants in Itoshiro, Gifu.

The phrase “Think globally, act locally” illustrates the direction that we should take to achieve the SDGs. Japan is a historically decentralized nation with rich regional cultures. The country could inspire the world by creating a sustainable welfare society where harmony between the environment, welfare, and economy is achieved from local communities with no one left behind.



The city center of Erlangen, Germany (population: 100,000)

(Excerpt and summary of keynote speech)

Panel Discussion

◀Moderator▶ **Nobutaka Murao** Professor of Kwansei Gakuin University (former newscaster)



Case report



■ **Misako Izu** Mayor of Munakata City, Fukuoka Prefecture

Global environmental problems such as marine debris are threatening the local fishery industry. With fishery workers, students, and companies, the city works on environmental preservation activities such as making bamboo fish reefs with children to solve the issue of loss of seaweed beds and resulting loss of fish habitats by utilizing bamboo from local forests. Munakata City continues to foster a community where people of all generations can collectively work towards the realization of its slogan, “Save the Sea.”



■ **Masato Nobutoki** Director of Yokohama SDGs Design Center

The center was established to become the hub and mediator between citizens, business owners, financial institutions, schools, and local organizations. The center has created the Yokohama Wood Straw Project, products of which were used in the G20 Summit, and conducts demonstration tests with on-demand buses.



■ **Risa Tanaka** President of the Graduate School of Project Design

The school conducts research and provides education on the development of new projects, business succession, and regional revitalization. It is striving to bridge the business and educational sectors through the school’s publication editors helping children to interview companies that are working on SDGs-related projects.



■ **Atsushi Koresawa** Director of UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

As a part of the NY-based UN institutions with the mission to create sustainable urban cities, the office focuses on issues in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific. By collaborating with Japanese local governments, universities, and corporations, the office works on improving the waste management facilities of developing nations using the “Fukuoka method,” hosts international conferences, and works on human resource development.



■ **Shuichi Abe** Governor of Nagano Prefecture

As exemplified in the comprehensive plan, all of Nagano’s policies reflect its pursuit of the SDGs. Nagano became the first prefecture to issue a climate emergency declaration. Nagano promotes the well-being of both the planet and people through projects such as Shinshu Healthy and Green Housing. As a countermeasure against the concentration of population in Tokyo, Nagano has initiated projects such as Shinshu Resort Telework and outdoor childcare Shinshu Yamahoiku.

Panel Discussion

Murao How can citizens work together?

Tanaka: With each individual and organization having unique characteristics, we must first outline the ideal utilizing our attractions and resources. We then should create a story that is easy to empathize with so that our vision and goal can be shared with society. It’s important to sincerely strive to make the best of each person’s strengths to work collectively in the most effective way.

Murao How can we work collectively with stakeholders coming from various backgrounds?

Nobutoki When working collectively with people with different goals and values, it is important to take action together one by one, with each of us playing our role. We hope to think together with all stakeholders to create business opportunities with the changes brought about by this pandemic.

Murao From a global perspective, what do you think about the actions taken by Japan’s local governments?

Koresawa Japan is working on incredibly diverse SDGs-related projects which should be recognized internationally, but there is definitely a recognition gap. When I am asked to give advice on the SDGs, I always say, ‘If you take action to solve a problem in your community, that will lead you closer to the SDGs.’ Just start with a small action, it is as simple as that.

Murao When we have many ideas but limited financial resources, where can we get funding?

Izu As a collaborative project with Koikeya Inc., Munakata City has launched potato chips made with ingredients sourced in Munakata. A part of the sales is donated to support our marine preservation work. It is important to encourage investment from the private sector rather than working only within the limited budget of a local government.

Murao I believe that shopping is voting. I love the idea that buying something ethical can contribute to building a sustainable society while solving financial issues.

Murao What is the most important thing that a local government should work on to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs?

Abe We have ‘learning’ and ‘the autonomy’ as the main pillars of Nagano’s comprehensive plan. We recognize the importance of supporting citizen-led initiatives by creating an environment where each one of our citizens can learn about the SDGs and act based on the knowledge gained.

Murao This discussion has made me realize once again that each community cannot achieve the goal of building a sustainable society without local governments, companies, NGOs, and citizens working collectively, all with a sense of ownership.

(Summary of discussion)

