

# sustainable japan

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## Sustainability needs not uniformity but coherence

### Roundtable

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Growing up in an "informal settlement" in Indonesia, an urban village community that formed organically with unplanned spatial layouts and self-help housing, Mahesti Okitasari, now a research associate at the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, based in Tokyo, had a daily curbside view on collective development and how effective communities can be.

Now holding a Ph.D. in urban planning from the University of Tokyo (her dissertation was on decentralized systems, collaborative metropolitan governance and public infrastructure provision), Okitasari is drawing on her youthful experiences as well as her research to find ways to effectively implement and finance the U.N.'s sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Able to take a bird's-eye view of urban development, as she puts it, Okitasari is conducting research into the many opportunities for more efficient implementation of the goals. Okitasari believes that while local communities wait for the government to bring about change, they can also be "nudged" by organizations using her unit's research to more effectively do what they have already been doing: getting on with the job of implementing effective change themselves.

Okitasari took time out from her busy

schedule to sit down with Ross Rowbury for The Japan Times Sustainability Roundtable's 23rd iteration to explain how achieving the SDGs and making the world more sustainable can be done at a local level. Rowbury began by asking which areas Okitasari was looking into in terms of her research into sustainability.

### It's all about context

"It's quite broad," Okitasari began. "My unit at the institution is focusing on the translation of the global agenda, including the sustainable development goals, and the national commitments on climate action which are part of the Paris Agreement, and how they are being translated into domestic policy and project implementation, and how to strengthen the policymaking process to make sure it reaches the most needed people while fulfilling the targets."

Okitasari explained that the institute looks at everything from biodiversity to governance for sustainable development, research into education, and water-specific issues. She further explained that there is no uniform method for applying these goals: "There is no one-size-fits-all, I'm afraid — the focus is on context, everything is about context." The institute primarily takes a broad look at situations in an effort to compare similar cases in different regions and then communicate to policymakers what has worked well in different contexts so they can apply that to emulate the success stories as well as avoid the failures.

**Mahesti Okitasari is a research associate at the UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability. She joined the institute in 2014 as a postdoctoral research fellow.**  
YUICHI TAIYA



Mahesti Okitasari YUICHI TAIYA

"We want to be able to go to policymakers and say this is what's happening in different development settings," she observed. Taking a broad area such as the Asia and the Pacific as an example, she explained that there are so many settings with unique development needs, whether small islands, rapidly developing cities, least developed countries or developed countries such as Japan. Each will need to have the SDGs applied in its own context to match its unique circumstances. "Even within countries we have different scales and different needs," she explained. "Just

look at Indonesia. If we looked into the data it would just be a developing country, but within the data we have different cities, different regions, with different scales and different needs."

### Settlement kid, urban planner

Okitasari grew up in Surabaya on Java in what urban planners refer to as an informal settlement, a community with little planning or design. Okitasari said such communities have a long history in the development of cities across Indonesia. "I really like how that kind of community

works — it really stays with me," she said. As an undergraduate she studied architecture, then was introduced to urban planning through her studies, and the subject became her passion. Taking an internship and then working as a project researcher in a lab focusing on housing and human settlements, she decided to pursue a post-graduate degree in urban planning. She soon realized how broad the study area was, reaching out not just into housing and urban planning, but also into the multifaceted subjects of governance, policymaking, economics and ultimately sustainability.

Okitasari soon found the importance of empowering informal settlements of the type she grew up in, because in developing countries, waiting on governments to provide housing often takes too long. Ensuring these communities are more habitable and sustainable, often through simple methods such as just providing safe water and sanitation, is the key to providing safer sustainable housing, and can sometimes easily satisfy a number of the SDGs at once. Okitasari explained that while a community may develop organically, participatory planning with development organizations can make that development more meaningful. She gave examples of the creative linkages that governments are implementing between different SDGs, such as providing affordable housing with safe waste management and water supply (achieving SDG 6), which in turn contributes to better health outcomes (goal 3), and meanwhile bringing women into the process to help achieve gender equality (goal 5). This is why ensuring the quality of budgeting can be a way to ensure impactful projects.

### Challenges of implementation

Okitasari considers the lack of coherence among the important actors in the development space to be one of the biggest obstacles to achieving a more sustainable world. "If policy is not coherent between



Prior to UNU, she gained research and consulting experience in disaster management, regional planning and housing policies. YUICHI TAIYA

national and local governments, across local governments and across sectors," or is not coherent with science, "then there are total contradictions," she explained. "We don't need similar policies, but within local governments, we need coherence."

A further impediment is the lack of capacity to implement these goals. Okitasari is, however, happy to note that a new postgraduate degree specializing in the Paris Agreement will be offered at UNU from autumn 2023, with the objective of increasing policymakers' capacities through training experts on implementing the climate pact.

For the future, Okitasari hopes to be able to work more closely with the local communities she has been trying to help. "I'd like to have projects where I work directly with the people — now I have the science and the policies, but to link them directly with the people and not just have it end up in a paper," she explained. "It's an immense task."

Roundtable is a monthly series of English-language events organized by The Japan Times Cube. For more information visit <https://sustainable.japantimes.com/roundtable>



## Kamakura Kitajima

### Forging a new culinary tradition in Kamakura



TAKEO TERAO  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Kamakura Kitajima occupies a renovated old house in a neighborhood dotted with historic temples. The *sukiya* teahouse-style interior features a counter facing earthen walls decorated with flowers grown in the front garden by owner Yasunori Kitajima.

Kitajima sharpened his skills as a chef during 16 years at the prestigious Japanese restaurant group Wakuden, absorbing the Japanese aesthetic in Kyoto.

"When I opened a restaurant in Kamakura, I didn't intend to make Kyoto-style food. If I'm not serving food that can only be made in Kamakura, it's meaningless," he said.

He began by searching for the very best ingredients. Not limiting himself to local sources, he reached out to producers and suppliers with top-notch reputations in other prefectures as well. Among them was Hiroki Hasegawa, a seafood broker in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, with a national reputation. "The fish Mr. Hasegawa selects is on a different level than fish from the store. Since he was also in the same prefecture as me, I decided to put his fish at center stage," Kitajima said.



Hasegawa's base is a fish market that sells live seafood in Yokosuka's Nagai port on Sagami Bay. There, fish are killed by severing their spinal cords so as not to subject them to stress. This results in a clear, unclouded flavor, the flavor of the fish itself. With Hasegawa as a powerful ally, Kitajima launched Kamakura Kitajima in May 2021.

He found that the same types of fish he had used in Kyoto tasted completely different in Kamakura. "Take hamo (pike conger). Unlike hamo from Awaji, which is preferred in the Kansai region, hamo caught here feed on squid, giving it a different flavor," he said. The *akahata* (blacktip grouper) served as sashimi is speared, Kitajima explained. "The fish that swim out in the struggle for existence swim upward in search of food. Good hata are found in water less than 20 meters deep. They taste best when they are speared with a single thrust through the head."

The charcoal-grilled *kue* (longtooth grouper) is also speared. Cooked with carefully modulated moisture and heat atop a lacquerware hibachi carved in the Kamakura-bori style, the fish has a tender texture and a surprising depth of flavor.

Although Kitajima's affection for local fish has grown steadily stronger, he does not



**Address**  
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<https://www.kamakura-kitajima.jp>

serve Kamakura's famous *shirasu* (whitebait). "Shirasu are what small fish feed on — the raw materials that make up the fish in the sea," he said. "Given that fish stocks have been falling recently, I don't want to use shirasu."

The *omakase* set menu, the only option available, starts at ¥22,000 (\$170), with prices dependent on the cost of seafood.

TAKASHI MATSUO  
MAYOR OF KAMAKURA

We would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Kamakura Kitajima for being selected as one of The Japan Times' Destination Restaurants 2022.

Kitajima offers dishes that can only be enjoyed in Kamakura, using seafood from Sagami Bay and pesticide-free vegetables. We hope that at Kitajima you will enjoy Japanese cuisine unique to Kamakura while experiencing the richness of nature as well as the temples and shrines of the ancient capital of Kamakura. We are looking forward to your visit to Kamakura.

### Times Gallery



Cuban Ambassador Miguel A. Ramirez participates in the ceremony for the 77th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With his presence in Nagasaki, Cuba reiterated its commitment to nuclear disarmament. EMBASSY OF CUBA



Mexican Ambassador Melba Pria receives Toru Matsui, executive director of Mitsui & Co. Ltd., at the Embassy of Mexico to talk about progress and new business opportunities in Mexico. EMBASSY OF MEXICO



Jamaican Ambassador Shorna-Kay Richards stands with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shunsuke Takei at The Okura Tokyo hotel on the occasion of Jamaica's 60th Anniversary of Independence Reception, where he delivered congratulatory remarks on behalf of the government of Japan. EMBASSY OF JAMAICA



On Sept. 9, the annual ACCJ Chubu Charity Golf Tournament took place. Proceeds went to the Chubu Children's Fund, which empowers, educates and inspires children residing in foster homes. CHUBU WALKATHON



Jarman International's Austin Auger (third from left), Paul Walsh (fourth from left) and Emi Onishi (sixth from left) with Shizuoka representatives at their seminar on "Nurturing Globally Minded Personnel" for Shizuoka Prefecture. JARMAN INTERNATIONAL



Serbian Ambassador Aleksandra Kovac with Steinway Artist Aisa Ijiri and Steinway & Sons Japan President Yuriko Akiyama at a concert marking 140 years of friendship between Serbia and Japan on Aug. 22. EMBASSY OF SERBIA



Strong ties between Slovenia and Japan were confirmed at a meeting of Tina Vodnik, charge d'affaires a.i., with Ichiro Aisawa, chairman of the Japan-Slovenia Parliamentary Friendship Association. With them is Matjaz Florjanc Lukan, secretary at the Embassy of Slovenia. EMBASSY OF SLOVENIA



The bicentennial of Brazil's independence was celebrated in Tokyo with a concert in Meguro Persimmon Hall, performed by the Villa Lobos-Association of Japan, on Sept. 6. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL/BRUNA LUISE

Destination Restaurants 2022 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

