

# sustainable japan

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## NTT tool Sugatami reflects cities' extensive possibilities

### Sustainable Japan Network

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With the use of digital technology to solve rural social problems now promoted as a national policy, some places have begun trying to use data to analyze their current situation, identify problems and find solutions.

The Sustainable Smart City Partner Program (SSPP) run by NTT Corp., a leading telecommunications company, offers just the right set of tools for this purpose: Sugatami. Named from the term for a full-length mirror, it reflects a community's functions and residents' satisfaction. The SSPP is a co-creation platform aimed at supporting regional development.

In a recent interview with The Japan Times, officials from two cities shared their experiences of using Sugatami in involving citizens in community development, along with Wakana Matsumura, director of the Alliance Department of NTT's Research and Development Market Strategy Division, and Kenta Motoki, manager of the department. "Evidence-based policymaking for community

development is what the central government is promoting among all municipalities across the nation. Many of the local governments will do better if they collaborate with third parties on this. As a company that specializes in data, we are delighted to be part of such collaborations," Motoki said.

One of the two cities is Yamanashi, which became a member of the SSPP in 2020. In line with the national government's vision for a Digital Garden City Nation, announced in December 2022, city officials have been discussing how to effectively use digital technologies for local development. They decided to start by meeting with members of the public to discuss what the city needed to do to improve the happiness and well-being of citizens.

To prepare for the meeting, Sugatami was used to visualize the city's characteristics, scoring 18 functions — including the economy, education, health, welfare and transportation — based on over 100 indicators as well as surveys of residents. Mayor Haruo Takagi also participated in the March 2023 meeting.

"In the meeting, we presented a comparison between a breakdown of the city's budget for the fiscal year of 2022 and the results we got from Sugatami," said Yuki Amemiya, the city's official in charge of planning policies. "The comparison revealed some unexpected facts. For example, citizens' satisfaction concerning some areas such as child rearing and education had not improved despite the city's financial commitment to those areas." On the other hand, many people seemed to be highly satisfied with the blessings of the natural environment and the quality of the drinking water, which each require less effort to maintain.

"Some participating citizens analyzed that the stagnation in satisfaction might be because they were taking the current state of education for granted. Many par-



Kohei Sugimoto, the official in charge of promoting administrative and financial reforms in the Tokushima Prefecture town of Kitajima. NTT

ticipants commented that they wanted to cooperate with the local government to solve problems that are difficult for the city to deal with by itself, such as the issue of depopulation, instead of relying entirely on the city to solve everything," Amemiya said. "We aim to hold more meetings of the same kind with different groups such as residents of depopulated areas of the city or children and youths."

Amemiya noted that there had been previous opportunities for the government to hold meetings to explain something to citizens or hear their requests, but this was the first time it had held one to engage in a deep discussion with townspeople. He believes this kind of analysis and discussion will enable the most efficient and effective use of the city's limited budget. Sugatami was also used in a workshop for city officials last year, and Amemiya aims to use it in training new staff members.

Another place that uses Sugatami is the town of Kitajima in Tokushima Prefecture.

"Kitajima is the smallest municipality in the prefecture in terms of area," said Kohei Sugimoto, the official in charge of promoting administrative and financial reforms, but "the population is a little more than 23,000 and has been increasing slightly. The population density is the highest in the entire Shikoku region. The sense of crisis over depopulation is not high, at least for now." But he also noted that neither is there much of a sense of satisfaction or recognition of the town's strengths. This is why Sugatami has been exploring what challenges it faces and how to solve them in sustainable ways for residents' well-being.

"I happened to read an NTT press release about Sugatami. I approached the company and started exchanging ideas, and deepened our understanding of our own town by using Sugatami in mapping out our municipal comprehensive strategy," Sugimoto said. The central government draws up a comprehensive strategy every five years, and each municipal government localizes it. "The usual way to do

this had been to refer to statistics, surveys of citizens and discussions among outside experts," he said.

What Sugatami added to the conventional methods was integrated multifaceted analysis of which town functions were superior and how satisfactory each one was. "For example, we found out that the townspeople were not very satisfied with education, although this was one of the areas in which the town had invested the most effort and money," he said, pointing out that this kind of discovery had helped the town change its approaches toward various functions and how it redistributes resources.

"Citizens have different forms of happiness and desires, which may conflict with or complement each other. Not everything can be satisfied by the local government, because there are some things that citizens need to do themselves. Staying out of their way and supporting their achieving whatever they want is an important attitude that the local government should have,

which will eventually lead to fulfilling residents' hopes," Sugimoto said.

The town plans to use Sugatami in workshops for citizens to show them the rich store of data available about the town in order to help them understand where they stand in relation to the development of their community and recognize its ambitions as their own.

Sugimoto also touched on the importance of communicating with people and organizations outside the town to gain fresh perspectives and opinions, and said the SSPP serves as an ideal platform for such interactions. Indeed, that is exactly what the SSPP is intended for. "Various stakeholders — including member municipalities, companies, advisers and people who are interested in community development — connect with each other and act voluntarily to share wisdom and solve problems. This is how we want the SSPP to work," Matsumura from NTT said.

She added that NTT has also been offering its staff opportunities for equipping themselves with the right qualities for engaging in community development. "To be recognized as a reliable partner in community development, we need to have more human resources with an ability to build consensus among diverse stakeholders with entangled interests," she said. She added that NTT hopes that this training program can be extended outside the company to help connect people from all walks of life and enable them to learn from each other in the future.

SSPP  
Sustainable Smart City  
Partner Program

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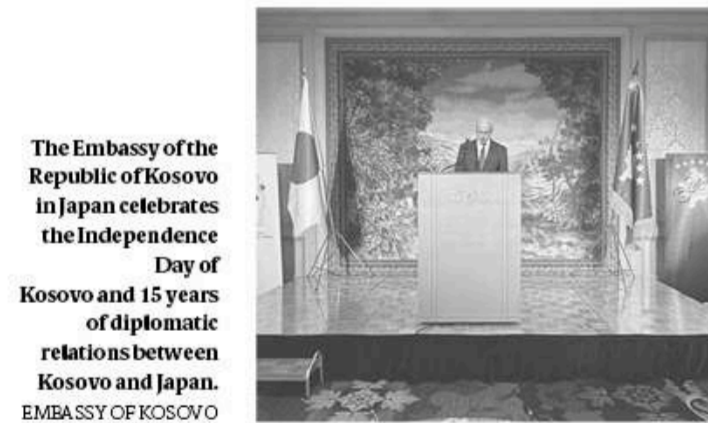


Talking with citizens helped the city of Yamanashi understand its current situation and the challenges it faces. NTT

### Times Gallery



The Liszt Institute Hungarian Cultural Center opens its highly anticipated Hungarian gourmet exhibition, which will be viewable until May 10th. THE LISZT INSTITUTE HUNGARIAN CULTURAL CENTER



The Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Japan celebrates the Independence Day of Kosovo and 15 years of diplomatic relations between Kosovo and Japan. EMBASSY OF KOSOVO



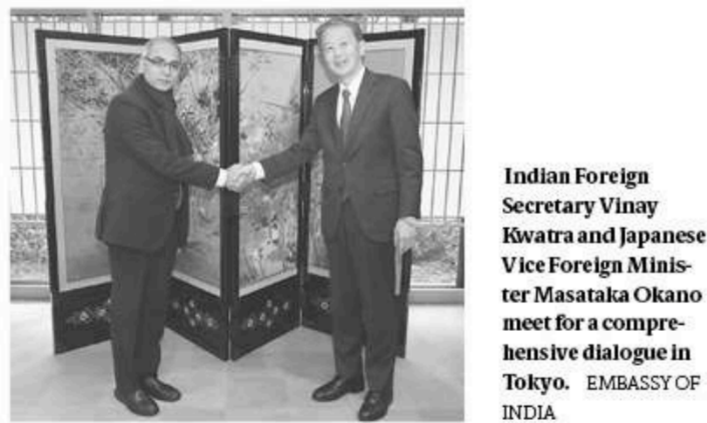
The principal officer at the U.S. Consulate in Nagoya, Matthew Cenzer (second from right), participates in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions' new laboratory in Japan. ANDYBOONE



The ambassador of Brazil, Octavio Henrique Cortes, is received by Minister of Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa on Jan. 25 for the signing of a treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL



Bolivian and Japanese artists, together with diplomatic representatives and national and local authorities, celebrate 110 years of friendship and cooperation between Bolivia and Japan in the Chiba Prefecture city of Tako. EMBASSY OF BOLIVIA



Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Masataka Okano meet for a comprehensive dialogue in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF INDIA



Princess Takamado, Ambassador Heri Akhmadi and his wife, Nuning Akhmadi, plant a cherry blossom at the Indonesian ambassador's residence as a symbol of 65 years of friendship between Indonesia and Japan on Feb. 1. EMBASSY OF INDONESIA



From left: ACCJ President Victor Osumi; Raymond F. Greene, the U.S. Embassy's deputy chief of mission; Jun Sawada, the chairman of the Japan-U.S. Business Council and vice chair of Keidanren; and Laura Younger, the ACCJ executive director. ACCJ

## Tokyo Global Dialogue to search for paths to international stability

### Media partner

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The fifth Tokyo Global Dialogue, organized by the Japan Institute of International Affairs, will be held at the Okura Tokyo hotel in Tokyo's Minato Ward and online on Feb. 28 and 29, involving dozens of domestic and international experts on international security and cooperation.

JIIA President Kenichiro Sasae, who has held a number of diplomatic positions, including vice minister for foreign affairs and ambassador to the United States, said in a recent interview with The Japan Times that the world is experiencing progressive destabilization. "In the upcoming event, we will discuss how to build stable international security and cooperation in the midst of turbulent times," he said.

The dialogue was launched in 2019 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the JIIA, a private, nonpartisan policy think tank specializing in foreign affairs and security issues. As is customary, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is expected to deliver opening remarks and Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa will present a keynote address at the initial session on Feb. 28.

Sasae noted the importance of sharing Japan's views with the rest of the world. "Japan has achieved postwar development and come to play an international role. But is its ability to convey its message sufficient, and are Japan's ideas and policies understood by the world? This is why it is so important to facilitate an international dialogue in Japan and share its outcome with the global community." The theme of this year's dialogue is "A World in Turmoil: How Can We Rebuild International Security and Cooperation?"



Sasae moderated last year's dialogue. JIIA

The first session will be a roundtable about the JIIA's Strategic Annual Report 2023, from which the theme is taken, featuring scholars and experts from seven countries, including former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, now the vice chairman of the strategic communications consultancy Kream; Justin Bassi, the executive director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute; and Daniela Schwarzer, a member of the executive board of the Bertelsmann Stiftung foundation.

In order to discuss the topics from various perspectives, speakers with diverse backgrounds will come together on the second day, including the president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, John J. Hamre, from the United States; the president of the Institute for National Security Strategy, Han Sukhee, from South Korea; and Peking University professor Jia Qingguo, from China.

There will be six sessions featuring major issues and conflicts that are shaking international affairs, including the "three fronts" of the war in Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East and U.S.-China competition. The ongoing turmoil is also causing a potential slowdown in concerted efforts toward achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goals. "The war in Ukraine is not a problem of Europe alone," Sasae warned. He said that never since World War II has there been such a drastic invasion even though national conflicts of interest have been emerging as disparities grow amid economic globalization following the Cold War. "But then such a superpower, Russia, invaded another country head-on, disregarding international law. This is an immense problem. International law will lose its meaning if changing a status quo by force — that is, to dominate another country's territory — is allowed," Sasae said.

Sasae forecast that the competitive relationship of the United States and China is likely to continue for the medium and long terms, though a dialogue between the two countries has started.

He said the war between Hamas and Israel signifies a worsening situation in the Middle East. "Japan, which has maintained relatively good relations with the [Persian] Gulf states, should provide indirect, political support aimed at successful negotiations for the release of the hostages and a temporary ceasefire," he said.

He stressed that Japan should apply its



JIIA President Kenichiro Sasae. COSUPI

characteristics to contribute to global peace and security. "But to be persuasive enough, we need to have diplomatic power that is supported by economic power," he said. To demonstrate economic power, he said, Japan should make the kinds of efforts that other "normal" countries do, including military assistance as well as the provision of economic support, which Japan has already been doing extensively. He said a balance of military capabilities is necessary for disarmament efforts. "If there is too big of a gap between the military power of one country and another, it is difficult to negotiate arms control," he said. "Each country should make efforts to enhance deterrence by keeping the military power gap small."

In the sessions, speakers will discuss how the world should respond to these pressing issues, and the role of Japan in doing so. "The world is becoming increasingly multipolar, making it impossible to simply categorize nations as advanced countries or developing ones," Sasae said. "Various approaches need to be taken to match the circumstances of each country in terms of policies." He expressed his hope that the discussions at the Tokyo Global Dialogue will serve as an opportunity for viewers to think about many problems that have no simple solutions.

Aiming to highlight issues related to a sustainable society, The Japan Times gave its support to this event by becoming a media sponsor.

You can register to attend the fifth Tokyo Global Dialogue here: <https://www.jiia.or.jp/TGD/tgd/en/>

