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# sustainable japan

## Azabudai Hills, Tokyo's green new downtown 'village'

### Unraveling Japanese companies

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High-rises with offices, restaurants and luxurious residences surrounded by green walkways have for decades increasingly transformed the landscape in central Tokyo districts like Roppongi, Akasaka and Toranomon.

The latest such complex by the developer Mori Building Co. is Azabudai Hills, an 81,000-square-meter development centering on a 330-meter main tower, along with two residential towers and commercial and cultural complexes, including a gallery, the fruit of almost 35 years of planning.

What Mori Building emphasizes about the luxury plaza is the greenery covering 24,000 square meters, or about a third of the "modern urban village," said Hiroo Mori, director and executive vice president of the company.

Increasing green space outside and saving energy inside reduces carbon emissions and helps to mitigate the urban heat island effect. The company has planted gardens and put greenery on rooftops and walls, and in addition is generating wind, solar and geothermal power for workers and residents. "If done right, (urban) rede-

velopment projects contribute to conserving the environment," Mori said in a recent interview, part of a monthly series by Naonori Kimura, a partner for the consulting firm Industrial Growth Platform Inc.

Urban afforestation is one of Mori Building's three missions of "safety and security," "environment and greenery" and "culture and art." It calls the concept underlying its urban planning "Vertical Garden City," and under that has integrated plots of land, built high-rises that link underground and created green open spaces outdoors.

Under the first mission, "safety and security," Mori Building's Roppongi Hills complex has a power plant using city gas so that workers and residents can keep getting power even in the event of an outage due to an earthquake, typhoon or other natural disaster. And if that plant stops working, an oil-powered emergency generator will work for at least 72 hours, Mori said. The company also has prepared about 270,000 emergency rations for its various complexes, including 100,000 for Roppongi Hills, and other necessities such as water, blankets and medicine.

As for "culture and art," Mori said, "I feel it is more and more important to make towns and cities culturally rich in urban development" — things like the Mori Art Museum and the cinema complex in Roppongi Hills, as well as classical concerts at Suntory Hall in Ark Hills.



"I feel it is more and more important to make towns and cities culturally rich in urban development," said Mori. HIROMICHI MATONO

"Economic efficiency had always been the center of development projects in general. But that is not the only important factor. What makes them attractive is exciting townscapes and greenery, and that is also true of office buildings," he said.

There is another element to Mori Building's complexes: as innovation hubs. For example, Azabudai Hills launched Tokyo Venture Capital Hub, attracting 70 venture capital firms into offices, co-working areas, lounges and meeting rooms in order to spark interaction among them. At Toranomon Hills, the developer set up an incubation center to support new business inside top-tier companies. It also lured CIC Tokyo, an Asian branch of the world's largest startup community, Mori Building says it aims to promote communication among those hubs to create an innovation

ecosystem. What matters to the company in urban development is that its projects benefit not only their residents and workers but also the public. They also must be fair to all stakeholders, including hundreds of small landowners.

"We have to create something beneficial to the outside world," Mori said. "Redevelopment projects should be in the public interest." In its projects, the company lays out roads and sidewalks and other infrastructure to connect to neighboring areas and improve convenience for all.

Tremendous efforts are made to reach agreements with landowners. In the case of Azabudai Hills, 90% of landowners involved, which was about 300, agreed to the project. It took 35 years to open the site after the Azabudai project kicked off,

during which time the developer held many big and small meetings with the landowners, Mori said.

But the Azabudai Hills project is not alone in this. The first huge redevelopment project for Mori Building was Ark Hills, a 56,000-square-meter project in the Akasaka district that kicked off in 1967. Partly due to a lack of previous similar large projects, the plan drew public criticism about urbanization, and it took 19 years to reach an agreement with the landowners. As a result, only a small number of landowners came back to live in the residential tower after it was completed.

The opening of Azabudai Hills and the new Toranomon Hills Station Tower have boosted the company's earnings. It announced on May 21 that its group net profit for the business year that ended in March rose 34% from a year earlier to ¥58.9 billion (\$365 billion), with its operating profit up 23% at ¥78.1 billion.

Mori Building's history started when Taikichi Mori founded Mori Fudosan, its predecessor, in 1955. His son Minoru Mori became president of Mori Building and was the father-in-law of Hiroo Mori. Within two years after its founding, the company constructed two buildings in the Nishi-Shimbashi district. This was followed by a series of office buildings in the Shimbashi and Toranomon areas. In 1978, Taikichi Mori launched LaForet Harajuku with retail shops and an event space, which became a mecca for fashionistas and artists, leading to the debut of Omotesando Hills in 2006.

"The 21st century will become an era of cities," Mori said. "With people increasingly living in urban areas, it is necessary to think seriously about how to address social issues facing us through city management." Those issues include energy, decarbonization, aging and food loss, he added.

"We want to continue to put forward model cases for the future era of urbanization," Mori said.

NAONORI KIMURA  
INDUSTRIAL GROWTH PLATFORM  
INC. (IGPI) PARTNER



Azabudai Hills, a major project by Mori Building Co., opened last year in central Tokyo after kicking off in 1989 with the establishment of a community development council.

For Mori Building, all its urban-type large projects started with Ark Hills, Japan's first large-scale private-sector redevelopment project. Following that, the company completed several other big redevelopment projects, notably in the Tokyo districts of Roppongi, Toranomon and Azabudai. All spanned a lengthy time frame of 20 to 30 years and involved steady efforts in community development based on building strong, trusting relationships with hundreds of landowners.

In this era of rapid change, it is impossible to predict trends and technological developments decades into the future. As such, it is important to have an underlying philosophy and vision, Executive Vice President Hiroo Mori says emphatically. The three pillars of Mori Building — "safety and security," "greenery and the environment" and "culture and the arts" — and its concept of "Vertical Garden City" are more than just words. Each project embodies them. Tokyo, a world-class metropolis, needs to confront the risks of rapid aging and major earthquakes. As a pioneer in urban development, Mori Building will continue to create best practices that will not only help create a resilient Tokyo, but also build a better future by addressing the global challenge of balancing urbanization and sustainability.



Hiroo Mori, director and executive vice president of the developer Mori Building Co. HIROMICHI MATONO

### Times Gallery



The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan celebrates its 75th anniversary and Independence Day at Tokyo American Club on July 2. LIFE14



Ambassador Shorna-Kay Richards stands with members of the Tokyo American Club at the club's black-tie gala event "Embassy Nights: One Love," showcasing Jamaica. EMBASSY OF JAMAICA



"Harmony in Diversity: Pathway to Cultural Exchange with the World," an exhibition of Indonesian artworks, is on display at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum until Sept. 29. EMBASSY OF INDONESIA



Indian Ambassador Sibi George meets Digital Minister Taro Kono to discuss India-Japan digital cooperation. EMBASSY OF INDIA



Cuban government officials and state and private entrepreneurs pose after completing the JICA program "Advisory Services for the Promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Cuba." EMBASSY OF CUBA



More than 200 businesspeople participate in the Summer Cocktail, a networking event organized by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Japan in collaboration with 14 other chambers. SPOCJ



A joint symposium is held by the embassies of Kosovo, Rwanda and East Timor on "Reconstruction and Social Recovery in Post-Conflict Countries" on July 5. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO



To celebrate the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, charge d'affaires a.i., Shafraz Rasheed, delivers a lecture on "Maldives Foreign Policy and Opportunities for Women in Diplomacy in the Maldives." EMBASSY OF MALDIVES

## WELgee event aims to bridge business and refugees

### Media partner

KAORI SHOJI  
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Japan is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, with an orderly and stable society, but its track record for accepting refugees remains dismal. A day before World Refugee Day this year, the nonprofit corporation WELgee held an event in Tokyo's Mita area to advance change on this front.

The June 19 event by WELgee, which takes its name from "welcome" and "refugee," aimed to bridge the gap between the business sector and refugee issues in Japan, explained spokesperson Fuyuka Kato. "Seeing the plight of refugees is to know that these people are both witnesses and victims of conflict, persecution, discrimination and more. By coming in contact with them we can become closer to the pressing concerns and problems surrounding human rights issues today."

WELgee helps and supports refugees by providing opportunities for the betterment of their lives. To that end, the event hosted an "ideathon" with about 30 companies looking to link humanitarian aid with solid business projects. At the end of the event, one of the 11 refugees in attendance, referred to here as Mr. N, picked up the microphone to say, "We've been discussing how we can implement human rights ideas into the business sector and link that to the corporations' desire to do something good for the world." At WELgee, people like Mr. N, whose career has been supported by the group, are called "internationals" in order to add a new facet to understanding who these foreigners are.

OWLS Consulting Group Principal Ayumi Yamori said she has seen many Japanese corporations seriously grappling with human rights issues in recent years. "Right now, however, companies tend to keep to a passive stance. We need to shift the argument from 'Let's not invade a person's human rights' to 'How can we make this person's life better? Companies need to be more positive and proactive. Respecting human rights is a given, and we need to move further. Specifically, we need a social structure where refugees can gain employment as well as social support. In other words, we need corporations that will step up to hire them.'"



"Ideathon" participants and WELgee staff members pose for photos. WELGEE

At the event's news conference, WELgee founder Sayaka Kankolongo Watanabe explained: "There are over 120 million refugees in the world today. That's equivalent to the populace of Japan. Everyone assumes it's hard to get refugee status here — and true, the window remains narrow. But at WELgee, we want to go beyond the problem of refugee status to designing a new life for 'internationals' in Japan." She went on to emphasize a need for a new perspective. "How can we make sure refugees can not only survive here, but thrive as well? The answer lies in the business sector. We need to connect profit-making to human rights more."

Ayako Nara, managing director at Accenture, is responsible for corporate citizenship, overseeing how employees interact with society and contribute to its betterment. Noting that the consulting company's Japan branch has been collaborating with WELgee for seven years, she explained: "We at Accenture hold workshops with 'internationals' on an in-house basis to spread awareness and promote the need for human aid as a corporation, as one of the pressing concerns vis-a-vis the 'internationals' coming to Japan is the generally low level of awareness among Japanese nationals. First and foremost, we try to create opportunities to get to know the background and circumstances of the 'internationals,' and the issues they are surrounded with."

Yamori added that in Japan, discussions of diversity and human resources tend to focus on gender inequality. "But diversity is not just about gender. Issues like nationality, culture and familial back-



The press conference of the event at Accenture Innovation Hub Tokyo in Mita Ward. WELGEE

ground should enter the discussion. These are crucial topics when trying to create a more inclusive society."

Also attending the event were heads of companies working closely with WELgee to support refugees: Deloitte Tohmatsu Venture Support President Yuma Saito, Persol Global Workforce CEO Morihiro Tada and City Computer President Masatomo Kawahara.

Noting that many refugees are skilled and highly educated, Saito said, "Matching their skill with the business sector's needs is something we need to work further on." Tada stressed, "Work is at the core of anyone's life," but language, cultural differences and working conditions all become barriers for refugees to work in Japan, making company support and understanding essential.

Kawahara said, "I believe refugees can be regarded in the same way as other foreigners working in Japan. Regardless of corporate size, companies can employ foreigners and refugees in Japan."

WELgee representative Watanabe summed up: "There are now over 3 million foreigners living and working in Japan. Though it's only natural to see some amount of friction between the foreign community and the Japanese, we should also be searching for realistic ways to support these people. It's up to our society as a whole to lay down some systemic rules and guidelines without relying completely on a single sector."

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