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sustainable japan

Sustainability consultant helps companies and groups big and small

Tove Kinooka connects workers' sustainability dots

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Years in Japan: 26

Leaders & Readers

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 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Growing up in a farming community surrounded by nature in Scotland was Tove Kinooka's introduction to the importance of sustainability. "I was always interested in plants and animals and the nature around me," the bicultural sustainability integration consultant said. Now based in Tokyo, she has been able to carry forward her passion for nature and sustainability after co-founding the management consultancy Global Perspectives K.K. in 2015, as well as its sustainability arm, Enteleco.

As a director of both, Kinooka, her business partner and her team now work with major global corporations, small and medium-size enterprises, nonprofit organizations, embassies, chambers of commerce and social venture organizations to accelerate their actions toward sustainable growth. She took time out from her busy schedule to sit down with The Japan Times' Readers & Leaders section to discuss the valuable work she is doing, how she helps her clients and what inspires her in her work.

A new journey in Japan

"Well, I was young and looking for a new challenge when I saw an advertisement in

the newspaper to teach English in Japan on a one-year contract," she related about her improbable start. "I knew absolutely nothing about Japan. I didn't come with any fixed expectations, and I sort of just branched out from there."

After establishing Global Perspectives, Kinooka and her team began working with organizations and senior leaders, and found that a lot of the change management she was implementing often returned to issues surrounding and driven by sustainability issues. "After a while we began to see a connection between our own passion for sustainability and the work we were doing in organizational change and people development, and we thought, 'Hang on a minute—there doesn't seem to be anyone connecting the dots here between what's happening in the sustainability world and how things are accelerating,' and that companies need to be taking action on this."

An 'aha' moment

Kinooka found that while most of the employees at the organizations she worked with were aware of environmental issues surrounding climate change, water use and deforestation in a general sense, there was a gap in their knowledge about what that actually meant to them. "For employees in a sustainability team, if it's not in their job description, if it's not in their KPIs (key performance indicators), it's very hard for them to see, 'Well, what does this actually mean for me?'" she explained. "For us, it was an 'aha' moment, and we needed to connect the dots." She realized that they could foster motivation within organizations to enable individual employees to make the connection

between the everyday tasks they were performing and the company's overall sustainability goals.

Kinooka believes it is important to embed this mindset of sustainability throughout the company rather than having the goals pushed down from management. She achieves this through a combination of consulting and in-depth programs that may include seminars, workshops and business innovation projects. Taking teams that are not directly involved in the company's sustainability goals, she walks them through various aspects of the energy use, durability and recyclability of everyday products and actions, helping them reflect on how their everyday actions can contribute to sustainability in both small and large ways.

"For example, we may take various products and ask the employees how they might rank them in a sustainability index—things we use every day, things we have choices in—and we look at perhaps the energy it takes to produce something, versus the recyclability of something that is comparable, and we can relate that back into people's own context and ask, 'Well, what is the impact of that service or product on people and planet?'" she explained. "We can help them build an impact map, step by step, so that once they understand the ecosystem that they are a part of, they can then understand their role in that ecosystem, and what their impact is, especially when it comes to choices A, B or C, so you can change the thinking because you can link it directly to their decisions."

Working with a refugee NPO

Kinooka's passion for her vocation in building sustainable practices in organizations



COSUFI

often takes her in surprising and rewarding directions. After holding a Global Perspectives workshop at the British Chamber of Commerce in Japan in 2016, she had the good fortune to meet Jane Best, the executive director of Refugee Empowerment International, a Japan-based nonprofit funding projects that provide opportunities for displaced refugee communities around the world. "Jane was looking for some people outside the organization to help guide her on how to take the organization forward, and we felt it was a good fit because all the projects they do are by refugees for refugees, and helping people rebuild their lives once things are under control."

For Kinooka, the opportunity to help

empower refugees in displacement camps to become independent was particularly inspiring. "How do you rebuild your life, regain your dignity? They don't want to be dependent on aid, there's no dignity in that. So the projects REI are working on are finding ways for the communities to build resilience and build skills and knowledge to support themselves." She gives the example of an organization in Kenya that offers business startup training for people fleeing conflict, to help them use the skills they have to establish themselves in a new environment. "REI can provide training and a starter pack—which is often their own ideas—to help them become independent, and the model has proven to be quite successful."

From U.K. to Japan to realize a dream

Tove Kinooka was born in southwest England near Exeter and spent the second half of her childhood in Scotland. She studied biology at Exeter University before getting a job in the horse-racing industry. She moved to Japan to teach English in 1998 before founding Global Perspectives K.K. with her business partner in 2015, and later founding Enteleco, where she is also a director.

Kinooka has lent her skills to the British Chamber of Commerce Japan's Responsible Business Taskforce, where she served as an Executive Committee member, and been a member of the management committee of Refugee Empowerment International for several years now. She now is a former One Young World Japan director and continues to attend OYW summits annually as part of her company's Sustainability Intrapreneurship Program. She holds a Business Sustainability Management Certificate from the Cambridge University Institute of Sustainable Leadership, and Global Perspectives also won the BCC's Responsible Business Award in 2022.

The view ahead?

With both Enteleco and Global Perspectives now well established, Kinooka is building her team so that she can slow down a bit and focus more on family, especially as they enter a new chapter in life. "As a perfectionist, taking a step back and letting someone else take things in a new direction is tough for me, but we do have some great people who are coming in with a lot of energy." For the moment, she is trying to be conscious of not doing too much, but is looking forward to mentoring some up-and-coming people as well as continuing her sustainability integration consulting work. "I'd love to do it all, but one of my challenges is learning to say no."



Norway's lead on equality is result of long effort

ESG/SDGs

LOUISE GEORGE KITTAKA
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Norway is internationally regarded as a leader in gender equality and inclusivity, with progressive policies and a commitment to helping citizens balance work and family life. Kristin Iglum, the Norwegian ambassador to Japan, shared her insights on Norway's success in these areas and how diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have come to be embedded in the fabric of daily life.

Arriving in September last year to take up her role, Iglum was delighted to accept the posting to Japan. Having previously spent eight years representing her country in China, she already felt an affinity for East Asia and was keen to return. "I have a deep interest in what's happening in this region, so when I had the chance to work in Japan, I thought it would be wonderful," she said with a smile. "I joined the foreign service in 1991. I've always loved having the opportunity to get to know a new country. An important part of the job is to try and learn about all aspects of the country—not only the politics and business, but also the culture," she explained.

Iglum pointed out that Norwegians generally hold Japan in high regard and are very interested in the culture, with many people loving Japanese anime, manga and food. Norway and Japan also both have cultures rooted in fishing and maritime traditions. She feels a special connection to Japan through her love of reading, as she particularly enjoys the works of Haruki Murakami. She has been enjoying the opportunity to travel to various parts of Japan, with the "art island" of Naoshima in Kagawa Prefecture standing out for both its renovation of traditional buildings and its modern art and architecture. She was also deeply moved after attending



Walk with Pride in Oslo, 2022 CHRISTIAN BATUYONG — VISIT NORWAY

a memorial service in Fukushima Prefecture marking the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Norway takes the lead in DEI

At the core of Norway's DEI philosophy is giving people equal opportunities from the outset, and the Norwegian foreign service celebrates diversity. As Iglum explained, "Norwegian diplomats are encouraged to promote this in work environments across all embassies worldwide. And now that I am the ambassador, it is my responsibility to make sure that there is absolutely no discrimination among all the colleagues here."

"For me, I feel fortunate to have always worked in supportive environments. However, of course, it could have been a different experience if I had been working as a foreign expat in the local business environment," she added.

Iglum says that balancing work and family is not only encouraged in Norway but is also a norm embraced by both men and women. "When you have a large number of women participating in the workforce and most people would like to have a family, then you really need both partners to step up and do their share, because otherwise it just won't add up," she said. Norway ranked second on the 2024 Global Gender Gap list, highlighting its success in promoting gender equality. Moreover, in 2017, Norway was named the "world's most inclusive economy" by the World Economic Forum, which praised Norway's broad-based economy, job creation, poverty reduction and robust mix of policies supporting education and innovation.

A society where all thrive

According to Iglum, Norway is fortunate to be a small and relatively wealthy country—two factors that have contributed to the development of a very strong social security system. "I think that is actually an important basis for diversity, inclusion and equality, since basic needs are taken care of. We have a health care system paid for through taxes, so you don't need private insurance. And education is free, even university—you just pay a tiny fee," she explained. "Basically, if people are hungry, lack proper housing or aren't receiving adequate education, then it's hard to focus on some of the other trappings of society, like equality or inclusion."

A good social system is also of great importance when it comes to closing the gender gap in the workplace. Similar to Japan, pre-



The ambassador of Norway to Japan, Kristin Iglum HARUO MOTOHASHI

vious generations had larger families, and people lived together to help care for the youngest and oldest family members, but times have changed. Norway's government has prioritized providing quality child care and elder care, which makes it easier for women to work outside the home and enjoy career success.

Along with creating a system where everyone can participate fully in society, Norway also places importance on work-life balance. Iglum points out that it is quite normal for parents to leave work by 4 p.m. to pick up their children. She notes that many parents probably do squeeze in a little bit of work time later at night after the kids have gone to bed, but it is fully accepted that both mothers and fathers will leave the office early in order to prioritize family time in the late afternoon and early evening. "People sometimes ask, 'So how do you get the job done?' I can say that efficiency at work is very high. If you know you have to leave the office by 4 to pick up your children at nursery school, then you will get the job done on time," Iglum said. "I never felt more efficient than during the years when I had small kids. I was there to get the job done so I could leave on time!"

Norway's government leads by example. The climate and environment minister, Andreas Bjelland Eriksen, is currently taking 16 weeks of paternity leave, highlighting

the country's commitment to normalizing shared responsibilities. His colleague Tore O. Sandvik has stepped in as the acting minister in the interim.

Norwegian civil servants often leave by 3 p.m. in the summer to make the most of the longer days. "We have very strict rules when it comes to vacation time. It's every manager's responsibility to make sure that people take the vacation to which they are entitled," said Iglum. In a similar vein, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry encourages employees to think carefully before scheduling meetings. If people choose to set up a meeting, then they should ensure there is a clear purpose and an agenda, to make the most of the time.

Step by step to inclusivity

While Norway is a successful example of an inclusive society, Iglum notes that such progress is by no means quick or easy. "I think it's important to mention that has actually been due to hard work taking place over many decades, with consistent efforts, step by step. If we talk about gender equality and women's political participation, for example, it has been a combination of concrete policies from the government at the top and a lot of effort at the grassroots level with local political parties and by women's organizations," she explained.

Over the decades, the government has

faced criticism for introducing certain policies supporting societal change, and it has taken time to gain understanding from citizens about why these policies are beneficial.

"For instance, the story of women's political participation in Norway began in the 1960s with initiatives to encourage female candidates in local elections, and at first, nothing happened. Then during the '70s, we had the women's movement, there were campaigns on television, and things began to move. Change definitely didn't come by itself, and if people don't move and ask for change, then nothing will happen," Iglum said.

Iglum believes there are parallels with Japan's current situation. After hitting a record low of 125th out of 146 countries in the gender gap rankings last year, Japan rose to 118th this year, though women's participation in political and economic sectors still lags well behind that of men. Nonetheless, Iglum says it is encouraging that the government is taking this matter seriously, and she has welcomed the chance to engage in dialogue with various stakeholders in Japan.

One such opportunity came at a recent symposium organized by the Vision Network, which brings together female governors and mayors from around Japan. They were joined by Japanese women in entrepreneurial roles and female ambassadors for discussions centered around strengthening women's participation in decision-making positions in Japan. "I think it is very important to have these kinds of opportunities for women to be able to support other women," Iglum said. "But we also need to discuss these issues with men, too—you can't have just half of the population making decisions."

New challenges, perspectives

Issues connected to DEI continue to evolve as fresh challenges present themselves. With the rise of the internet and social media, cyberbullying has become a major problem in modern society. This includes using technology to harass or target someone, or posting personal information, pictures or videos designed to hurt or embarrass someone. Iglum points out that female politicians and those in other positions of power are disproportionately targeted, often becoming the victim of comments about their appearance, for example.

In Japan, online harassment of female local assembly members has also become a serious issue, and younger members who are



A father spends some quality time with his child. CALEB JONES

active on social media are particularly likely to become victims. Problems range from disrespectful attitudes and remarks because of their gender to slurs based on their age, marital status and other private aspects of their life.

The Norwegian government is tackling the issue through education, since children and young people experience cyberhate and hate speech far more often than adults. With the premise that young people have the right to grow up with a safe online environment, the Norwegian Media Authority provides teaching and discussion resources related to cyberhate, online behavior and democracy for pupils in year five of primary school and upward. Iglum points out that freedom of speech is a basic value well established in Norway, but that the government's efforts to combat speech that spreads hatred toward other people gets broad support.

And while conversations about DEI tend to focus on how to empower women in society, men are not a monolithic group by any means. There is growing awareness that gender equality challenges affect men, too, including in terms of education and employment, family life, health, civic life and social inclusion. Established in 2022, the Men's Equality Commission is a government-appointed commission mandated to examine gender equality challenges faced by boys and men in Norway. Where relevant, the commission will examine the relationship between such challenges and prevailing norms of masculinity.

While Norway's journey to inclusivity took decades of effort, the nation stands as a reminder that sustained policy change and societal engagement can shift norms. With Japan making strides in this direction, there is room for meaningful cross-cultural exchange and continued growth in gender equity for all.