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NRI calls for national discussions on updating SDGs

Sustainable Japan Network

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As the 2030 deadline for the United Nations' sustainable development goals approaches, the Nomura Research Institute has called for nationwide discussions on the goals focusing on what Japan and the world should do next: the Beyond 2030 Agenda.

Before potential new global targets are set, the institute launched a study group this year to bring together experts from across fields to examine how Japanese business can help address future global challenges.

Amid growing concern over slow progress toward the goals, global discussions have already begun on how to update them for the future. According to the U.N.'s 2026 report on the SDGs, only 36% of the 139 targets are on track or making moderate progress, while nearly half are moving too slowly and 15% are in reverse.

"They present a sweeping vision, but people often struggle to see the goals as their own issues," said Tomohiko Taniyama, senior chief researcher at NRI's Center for Strategic Management & Innovation. "Beyond the goals themselves, there are also challenges in



From left: Mai Nakata, Tomohiko Taniyama, Chie Iwasaki, Masayuki Isoya COSUFI

how they are implemented in society."

In 2015, all U.N. member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At its center are the 17 goals, which call for action and cooperation by all countries. The goals' wide-ranging issues include ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, easing climate change, preserving marine life and driving sustainable economic growth.

Global attention has not been evenly distributed across these various goals. "Goals related to clean energy and global warming have made some progress, supported by business and finance, but other goals have failed to generate enough business momentum to move people and capital, resulting in limited progress," said Masayuki Isoya, a consultant at NRI's Energy Industry Consulting Department.

To better understand the latest global opinions on how to revise the current SDGs, NRI conducted interviews with 12 international organizations in February, including the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result, the research institute identified three key areas for revising the goals: the time frame, the topics covered and social implementation.

On the time frame, it is essential to set long-term goals that include future generations. On the topics, new issues such as artificial intelligence have emerged over the past decade, while some existing themes have become more complex. Finally, we need to build a solid system to achieve the social targets, and they must work for people in different regions and from diverse perspectives. "Localization will likely be a key concept for social implementation in helping people understand the grand vision in their



Members of NRI's Beyond 2030 Agenda research team COSUFI

own contexts," said Mai Nakata, a senior consultant at NRI's Management Consulting Department.

"The ideal approach to achieving the SDGs was to work on all three main areas — environment, economy and society — at the same time. But the reality is that the environmental agenda moved far ahead as it became closely tied to green energy and its business, leaving social issues behind," Taniyama said. So people started to think they should tackle social issues anew and work toward possible solutions, he added.

In the process of reaching the development goals by 2030, social issues have not only made little progress but have wide ramifications, said Isoya. "Unlike the environmental agenda, social issues are multidimensional because they are shaped by historical

and regional context," he said. "Countries approach them from different standpoints: Some are still pursuing economic growth, while others are already wealthy. Viewpoints are also different among developed nations. For example, the gap between rich and poor is wide in the United States, but far narrower in Northern Europe."

One example of multidimensional social issues is "care." For developed countries, the concept of care is linked to the rising importance of healthcare and elderly care amid rapidly graying populations. In developing countries, however, the word "care" is often linked to gender inequality because women and girls are burdened with the unpaid labor of caring for children and elderly parents, which deprives them of job opportunities. "Experts say the economic value of the

unpaid care and domestic work should be made visible, as it underpins the socioeconomic system," Nakata said.

"The new focus is that 'care' is not just a labor burden, but a broader concept of supporting those who are willing to participate in society with dignity and autonomy. It also means the acts of caring for oneself, for others and for the planet," she said.

Moreover, in the Beyond 2030 Agenda, society-related concepts that are gaining new attention are people's happiness and well-being, Isoya continued. Some experts define well-being as a broader concept covering not only people but the whole planet, making it easier to examine social and environmental agendas together, he said.

The current indicators for the SDGs do not include subjective measures, such as assessing how happy people are in their lives. Isoya said that bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are studying ways to gauge personal happiness, and that such indicators are likely to be included in the post-SDGs agenda.

Another key social issue is the aging of populations across many parts of the world. Forecasts for the coming decades show that population growth will gradually halt and decline in more countries, though global demographic debates long focused on the fear of population explosions, Isoya said. This topic involves various points of discussion, he said: Besides issues of medical and nursing services for the elderly, they include preventive medicine, ageism and reskilling to support longer life.

NRI experts also said totally new elements of social issues have emerged in recent years as artificial intelligence and certain aspects of culture that do not appear in the current SDGs started to have large impacts.

Global experts are highlighting the importance of culture and its contribution to the

economy, calling it the creative economy or "orange economy." In recent years, they have come to acknowledge culture as a "global public good," insisting that it plays an essential role in a broad range of sustainable development goals, including climate change, poverty, gender equality and digital inclusion, Nakata said. "The world is shedding a spotlight on culture's value as the foundation to live as a human being, not just as the power to motivate the economy and society," she said.

As a wide range of topics is likely to emerge for the post-SDGs agenda, how can Japan contribute to the world?

NRI experts said Japan could support the world in several ways, including through its technology and its ability to build platforms and foundations for addressing challenges in labor and nursing care. Taniyama said Japan's experience in revitalizing remote communities could also make a valuable contribution.

Currently, global experts are working on future-generation indicators for the post-SDGs era. They are known as "Beyond GDP" indicators, reflecting concerns that GDP remains as part of the current SDGs targets. In a recent report, expert groups proposed indicators under 22 themes for achieving the fair, inclusive and sustainable well-being of people and the planet.

In April, the research institute held its first roundtable meeting on the Beyond 2030 Agenda. It plans to hold more meetings to share global trends and develop new proposals with Japanese companies, academics and central and local governments, aiming to compile a final report early next year. "Rather than only discussing ideas and concepts, we hope to put forward proposals from Japan on how to implement them in society," Taniyama said.

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Foreign wrestlers have a long history in sumo

Sustainable Japan Magazine

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Strictly speaking, sumo had foreign wrestlers even before World War II — two Japanese-Americans competed in the 1930s — but the first wrestler of foreign appearance was Hawaiian-born Takamiyama, who started competing in 1964. Takamiyama not only won tournaments in the top *makuuchi* division but was popular for his friendly personality.

His scouting efforts also brought in fellow Hawaiians Kinoshiki, who rose to the rank of *ōzeki*, as well as Akebono and Musashimaru, who both attained the top rank of *yokozuna*. The two played the role of antagonists to the popular Japanese brothers Wakanohana and Takanohana during the early 1990s, helping boost the sport's popularity and winning respect for Hawaiian-born wrestlers from the Japanese public.

During this period, young men from Tonga, Argentina and Brazil were also scouted and brought to Japan, but few adapted well to the lifestyle and the sport, and no outstanding wrestlers emerged.

At the same time, sumo wrestlers began arriving from Mongolia, which had begun democratizing in the early 1990s. They were accepted after a formal request from the federation that governs "Mongolian sumo," known as "*bökh*." At one point, there were so many Mongolian wrestlers that a group of them once tried to escape their stables to go home. That prompted the stables to stop accepting foreign wrestlers for a while, but they resumed in 1998 after agreeing that each stable would have at most one foreign wrestler. Since then, there have been six Mongolian-born yokozuna: Asashoryu, who became known for some behavior unbecoming of his rank; Hakuho, who holds the record for the most makuuchi division wins with 45; and the current yokozuna Hoshoryu.

Europe has also provided several physi-

cally imposing wrestlers, with Estonia's Baruto, Bulgaria's Kotooshu and Aoiyama, and Georgia's Kokkai, Gagamaru and Tochinoshin all formerly active in the makuuchi division. The currently active makuuchi wrestlers include Roga from Russia and two from Ukraine: Aonishiki and Shishi.

There are also Muslim wrestlers, such as the retired Osunaarashi from Egypt, who was the first wrestler from Africa to become a *sektor* (ranking in the top two divisions). Currently, there is Kinbozan from Kazakhstan, who has his traditional *chanko* hotpot made with halal ingredients at his stable.

Just as the great Showa Era yokozuna Taiho had a Ukrainian father, many Japanese sumo wrestlers actually have diverse backgrounds. Among active wrestlers today, there are Japanese wrestlers with roots in the Philippines, Thailand, Russia and Nigeria. As they hold Japanese nationality, they are not counted in the one-foreigner-per-stable quota.

On the other hand, since Japanese nationality is necessary for those wanting to remain in the Japan Sumo Association as stablemasters after retiring, many of the foreign wrestlers become naturalized. Hakuho is one of them, and he ran the Miyagino stable for a while after retiring, but was eventually forced to close it due to a scandal involving one of his wrestlers. While awaiting approval to reopen the stable, he unexpectedly resigned from the association in June this year.

"I aim to contribute to the development of sumo from the outside," he said, and he has also proposed the concept of a "World Sumo Grand Slam." Many will be closely watching his next moves — as well as his evolving relationship with the Japan Sumo Association.

Hoshoryu Tomokatsu

From Mongolia, Hoshoryu is a nephew of former yokozuna Asashoryu. He gained exposure to judo and wrestling from an early age and traveled to Japan to train as a wrestler at Nippon Sport Science University Kashiwa High School. Inspired after seeing sumo for the first time at the Ryogoku Kokugikan, he joined the Tatsunami stable in 2018. He was hailed as a

"yokozuna candidate" almost immediately and steadily advanced through the ranks, eventually becoming a yokozuna in 2024. It is thought he may need a bit more time to fully embrace the role of yokozuna, which demands not only victories but the upholding of the dignity of the rank.

Kirishima Tetsuo

Born into a nomadic family of sheepherders in Mongolia, he developed strong legs and overall physique from horseback riding. He came to Japan on a whim to take a sumo test after being introduced by an acquaintance, and decided to join the sumo world "to honor his parents." Initially known by the ring name Kiribayama, he changed his name to Kirishima upon promotion to *ōzeki*, inheriting the ring name of a predecessor. He has since fallen from that rank due to injury. His current mentor, Otowayama, is the former yokozuna Kakuryu, who is also from Mongolia.

Oshoma Degi

Introduced by Asashoryu, Oshoma trained as a wrestler at Nippon Sport Science University Kashiwa High School alongside Hoshoryu. He picked up sumo after progressing to Nippon Sport Science University. In 2020, during his fourth year, he won the title of student yokozuna and qualified to enter the *makushita* division. He joined the Naruto stable in 2021. His master is the Bulgarian Kotooshu, and so his ring name includes the Japanese character for Europe (pronounced "ō") despite the fact that he is Mongolian.

Aonishiki Arata

Aonishiki started sumo at the age of 7 and became a member of the Ukrainian national team for the Junior Sumo Championships at the age of 15. At 17, he won the Ukrainian wrestling national championship in the 110-kilogram class. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he came to Japan, trained at Kansai University and entered the Ajigawa stable at the age of 18. Using a low-stature attacking style reminiscent of wrestling, he quickly racked up



At the sumo tournament in May 2025, Aonishiki pushes Kotozakura to the edge of the ring. Although he eventually lost this bout, he later got his revenge at the Nagoya tournament, defeating Kotozakura with some sharp technique and demonstrating remarkable progress. MANAMI TAKAHASHI

wins and advanced in rank. He has sent the money he earned from awards like the Fighting Spirit Prize to his parents, who are living in Germany as refugees.

Onokatsu Kazuhiro

During his time in Mongolia, Onokatsu played soccer, but at the age of 15, he came to Japan and began sumo wrestling at Niina Gakuen Asahioka Senior High School. He continued sumo after enrolling at Nippon Sport Science University, and in 2022, during his fourth year, he won the title of student yokozuna. This qualified him to enter the makushita division and he joined the Onomatsu stable in 2023, advancing to the top division in just five tournaments. Before coming to Japan, he won the Uvs Province mathematics olympiad, showing his talents also extend to academics.

Kinbozan Haruki

At 195 centimeters, Kinbozan is the tallest wrestler in the makuuchi division. He has a background in judo and came to Japan at the age of 18 after an introduction by Asashoryu. He started sumo at Meguro Nihon University High School and continued sumo at Nihon University. At the national student sumo championship, his team won and he was runner-up as an individual. He entered the Kise stable in 2021 to compete in the *sandanme* division. He was promoted to the top makuuchi division after nine tournaments. He is the second Kazakhstani sumo wrestler, after Taiga Kazafuzan.

Tamawashi Ichiro

Mongolian Tamawashi is known as the "iron man" for continuing to compete in the top division even at the age of 40. During his university days, he decided he wanted to try sumo wrestling to make use of his large frame, and in 2004, he came to Japan with the help of his sister, who was a graduate student at the University of Tokyo. Without any sumo experience or Japanese-language skills, he entered the Katoonami stable and was promoted to the top division in four years. He has won the top division championship twice and continues to compete. He is unusual for a sumo wrestler in that his hobbies include handicrafts and baking cakes. He has acquired Japanese citizenship.

Chiyoshoma Fujio

With a father who was the equivalent of *ōzeki* rank in Mongolian sumo and an acquaintance of Asashoryu, Chiyoshoma became interested in sumo from an early age. He was scouted by former yokozuna Chiyonofuji, the master of the Kokonoe stable, and enrolled at Meitoku Gijuku High School. He dropped out after two years and entered the Kokonoe stable in 2009. He was diligent and hardworking, but it took him seven years to reach the top division. He has struggled with injuries recently and is expected to be demoted to the second division in the next tournament. He has acquired Japanese citizenship.

Roga Tokiyoshi

Roga was born in the Tuva Republic of the

Russian Federation. His father is Mongolian and his mother is Russian. He changed his nationality to Mongolian after moving there, but identifies as Russian. Although he specialized in wrestling, he traveled to Japan to participate in the Hakuho Cup, hosted by yokozuna Hakuho. He achieved good results and went on to train and study at Tottori Johoku High School. He defeated current yokozuna Hoshoryu on his way to becoming high school yokozuna. He entered the Futagoyama stable and made his debut in the top division in 2023.

Shishi Masaru

Ukrainian Shishi started wrestling at the age of 6 and switched to sumo at the age of 15. He competed in the European Sumo Championships, finishing third, and then set his sights on Japanese sumo. He entered the Irumagawa stable (now the Ikazuchi stable) in 2020 and became the first Ukrainian in sumo, preceding Aonishiki. He made his debut in the top division in 2024. However, he failed to secure enough wins at the Nagoya Basho; he might yet get demoted to the second division. He enters the ring wearing a blue *magashi*, the same color as the Ukrainian flag.

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