

Event Report for “*KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA*” Symposium

～Co-creating the future of Toyama～

【Second Half】 Panel Discussion

The panel discussion in the latter half of the program featured members of “*KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA*” who have been involved in the three seminars conducted thus far. The facilitator was Mr. Taro Tamura, continuing from the keynote speech.



【Theme】 How to Turn “Differences” into “Power”

【Speakers】

First seminar (Civil society)

Taeko Miyata - Representative Director, Diversity Toyama, NGO

Masaki Miyazawa - International healthcare study group KIK, Toyama University

Second seminar (Business)

Hidehiko Murao - CEO, Murao Chicken, Co., Ltd.

Everson Esteques Lemos - YKK Corporation

Third seminar (Education)

Yuka Aoki - Director, ALECE Takaoka, NPO

Mayara Nagata - ALECE Takaoka, NPO

Hiroyuki Tomita - Director General, Hokuriku Center, JICA

[* For the speakers' profile, see here.](#)

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Ms. Miyazawa, a university student and the first to take the microphone, shared her impressions from the process of creating the "[Hospital Consultation Guide for Muslima](#)," which was undertaken by the international healthcare study group at Toyama University, a student organization to which she belongs. She said that for religious reasons, Muslima are reluctant to expose their skin and hair; cannot easily be attended by male doctors; and rarely go to hospitals due to language barriers. To create the guidebook, Ms. Miyazawa interviewed a number of Muslima, which gave her an opportunity to learn about their cultural backgrounds. She shared with us the importance of "trying to know" through episodes in which she felt fear and wonder because of her ignorance, but as soon as she learned about the women, she felt closer to them.



In response, Ms. Taeko Miyata brought up the possibilities that dialogue can bring. Even among Japanese people, there are many things we do not understand about each other due to generational and environmental differences. However, through dialogue, discoveries are made and innovations arise. For example, she shared her experience in which all kinds of people—including women, children, and foreigners—got involved to "work together" to clean up the town and shovel snow. She explained that on such occasions, each person expands their connections, which become a source of "power."



Everson Lemos spoke from the perspective of a foreigner working in Japan. Originally from Brazil, Mr. Lemos has been living in Toyama for 14 years after being assigned to Toyama Prefecture as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR). He now works for a private company and is involved in

planning and implementing technical training programs.

There are many reasons why foreigners want to work in Japan, and these ideas change naturally over time. Mr. Lemos said, "While the goal during the training period may be to obtain qualifications, it is important to think together with the workplace about what to do afterwards." To have foreign personnel remain as valuable assets for a long period, it is necessary to discuss with them about their next goals and future career plans in the same way as is done with Japanese personnel.



Mr. Murao, who employs foreign personnel in his own company, touched on the Japanese corporate culture that is bewildered by "differences" and pointed out that although the days when the Japanese economy could be kept going with the domestic market alone are gone, if we continue to follow the Japanese cultural norms dating to the Showa period (e.g., working for the same company for a long time, not taking many vacation days), it is inevitable that differences in perception will become apparent with foreigners from different backgrounds. In other words, the corporate culture must be updated by hiring foreign personnel, and this can be seen as an opportunity to promote corporate restructuring. In fact, Mr. Lemos's company allows him to take a month's vacation when he returns to Brazil.

During the discussion, differences in employment patterns between foreign countries and Japan came up. Regarding the job-based employment in Europe and the U.S. (assigning people to jobs/developing specialized skills) and membership employment (assigning jobs to people/developing generalists), which is common in Japan, it was interesting to hear Mr. Lemos say that he does not think we have to choose one or the other. He said that while he would like his expertise to be valued, he also realizes the advantages of generalists. This sentiment is a contribution of Mr. Lemos, who has worked in Japan for a long time. This episode suggests the possibility of creating new standards and values by examining the advantages of both, rather than drastically changing policies in response to an increase in the number of foreign personnel.



Ms. Mayara Nagata of NPO ALECE Takaoka, who participated in the discussion from an educational perspective, spoke about her adolescent years when she could not see "difference" as "power." Ms. Nagata was born and raised in Japan, but her parents immigrated from Brazil, so at home she had a very Brazilian upbringing. Especially during her adolescence, she was embarrassed by her family's differences from Japanese family culture and would hide them. She had no difficulty with the Japanese language, so there was no language barrier, but she says that the cultural barrier within her influenced the formation of her identity.



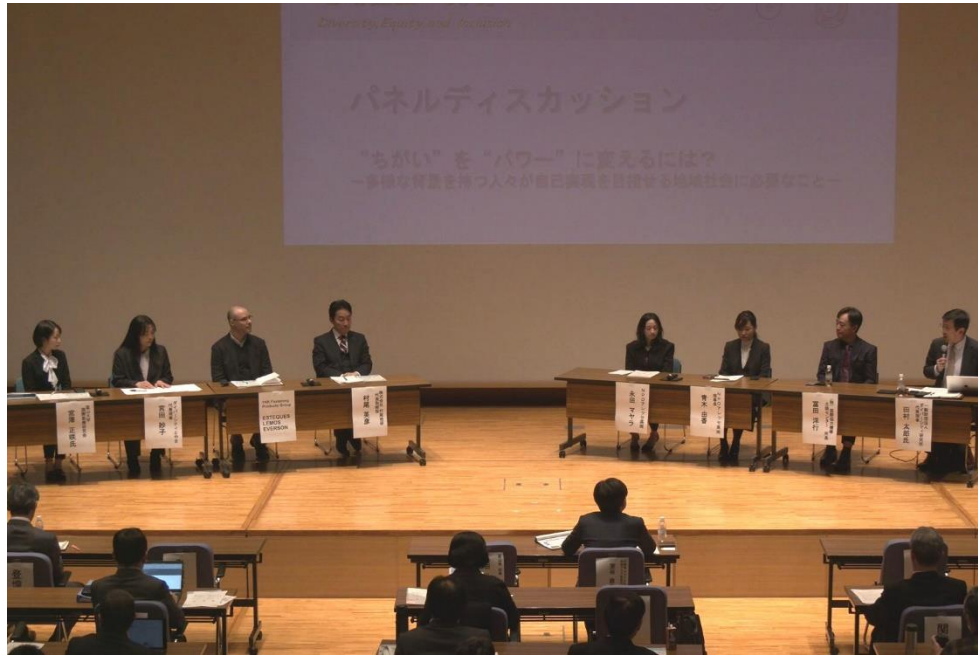
In response to Ms. Nagata's remarks, Ms. Yuka Aoki, Director of ALECE Takaoka, touched on the importance of a "sense of belonging." She said, "We have Japanese language classes and special-needs classes for children with diverse backgrounds, but we must not simply push children who are not easy to deal with (for adults) into these classes and be done with them." It is very important for diverse children to learn together in so-called regular classes and to feel that they belong there. We felt the reality of the situation in the field when she said, "Putting children into a box for reasons such as their foreign roots, disability, or illness may deprive them of opportunities for growth."

Ms. Nagata says that "differences" become "power" only when the person who is different can acknowledge the person's differences in a positive way. Only when the environment enables people to accept each other's "differences" for what they are can the power of the individual be maximized.

Regarding the series of efforts leading up to this symposium, Mr. Tamura asked Mr. Tomita, Director General of the Hokuriku Center, JICA, about future developments and possibilities.



As JICA's projects are mainly based in developing countries, it is rare for JICA to collaborate with actors in different fields to develop projects in regions within Japan. Therefore, the "*KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA*" project served as a continuous exploration. However, in an era in which Japan is receiving an increasing influx of human resources from developing countries, which are the main target of JICA's projects, Director General Tomita says that JICA's unique knowledge of developing countries can contribute to solving problems in Japan. He continued, "We have been working on international exchange, international cooperation, and interculturalism separately, but we are now going to return to the community and think about the world together with people in the community while also thinking about the community. There are many more things we can do together." He declared that JICA Hokuriku will continue to address diversity in Toyama and elsewhere in Hokuriku. (There is no turning back!)



Finally, what do you think is needed to create a diverse community?

Ms. Nagata, a mother of two, commented, "Having a lot of choices, and being able to do something when you want to. Hope is important." The youngest speaker, Ms. Miyazawa, a university student, said, "It's not about JICA or some NPO or NGO, but rather about the people around them wanting to do something for interculturalism. Then, that will become the norm." She also pointed out that the most promising possibility to change "difference" into "power" is "connection in the community."

How and with whom can we create a "free, tolerant, and comfortable community?" This symposium made us realize that interculturalism is not limited to relations with foreigners, but rather is a comprehensive concept that encompasses the future of our town. We would like to continue to create opportunities for dialogue and exchange among diverse people.

The panel discussion is available on JICA's official YouTube channel. Please take the time to watch the panelists speak in their own words. (Japanese only)

【Speakers' Profile】

- **Masaki Miyazawa** - Student, Toyama University

Member of the university student organization KIK (international healthcare study group) at Toyama University. Involved in the creation of the "Hospital Consultation Guide for Muslima" and other activities to promote cross-cultural understanding in healthcare. One of the speakers for the first seminar (civil society).

- **Taeko Miyata** - Representative Director, Diversity Toyama, NGO

Active in the promotion of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) in a wide range of fields, including reconstruction assistance for the Noto Peninsula Earthquake, in addition to a society of coexistence with foreign residents. Serves as Chief Director of the Japanese language school Toyama International Academy and is active as a Japanese language teacher. Led the first seminar (civil society).

- **Everson Esteques Lemos** - YKK Corporation

From Brazil. Worked as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) for the International Affairs Division of the Toyama Prefectural Government. Currently working for YKK Corporation. As a qualified simultaneous interpreter, interprets at English meetings and training sessions within the company as well as interprets in court in Portuguese. Also devoted to supporting children with foreign roots.

- **Hidehiko Murao** - CEO, Murao Chiken, Co., Ltd.

Based on his experience employing foreign talent in his own company, is working to promote corporate cross-cultural understanding and foster a corporate culture of multicultural coexistence. Led the second seminar (business) for "*KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA*" (Co-creating the future of Toyama).

- **Mayara Nagata** - ALECE Takaoka, NPO

A Japanese-Brazilian born and raised in Japan. As the project manager of ALECE Takaoka, led the third seminar (education). Currently, works at a temporary staffing agency with many Brazilian employees while parenting. Also serves as a foreign resident consultant at Imizu City Hall once a week.

- **Yuka Aoki** - Director, ALECE Takaoka, NPO

Working to create a community in which children and young people from diverse backgrounds can fulfill their potential through education, such as by supporting the learning of children with foreign roots and providing information support for education. Previously worked as a JICA Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer for Nikkei Communities (Nikkei school teacher) in Brazil.

- **Hiroyuki Tomita** - Director General, Hokuriku Center, JICA

Joined JICA in 2000 after working as a high school teacher. Worked at JICA overseas offices in Laos and Bangladesh. After returning to Japan, worked on planning issues and strategies and the JICA Global Agenda in the Governance and Peacebuilding Department. Took up a post at the Hokuriku Center in October 2023.