Introduction

From "*SDGs and Japan*" to "*SDGs and Local Communities*"

Seven years after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, media reports and publications about the SDGs continue to appear almost daily in Japan. Relative to elsewhere, Japan can be considered a country with high levels of enthusiasm regarding the SDGs, from the government to the corporate sector. It is commendable that interest in the SDGs is growing, along with the recognition that the SDGs are also challenges for Japan. The country faces a variety of issues, including widening inequality and poverty, difficult living conditions for women and children, fewer children and an aging population, the spread of infectious diseases, natural disasters, and climate change.

As seen from the government's SDGs Future Cities, Municipal SDGs Model Projects, Japan SDGs Awards, local governments' "Future City" initiative, and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment by private companies, most initiatives in Japan associate the SDGs with economic and environmental sustainability. Conversely, there is still limited understanding of the other significant dimension of the SDGs — that of protecting the dignity of each and every person, a fact that, I must admit, makes me uncomfortable.

SDGs Initiatives in Local Communities in Japan

- There is a tendency to view the SDGs as an issue of economic and environmental sustainability.
- Government of Japan: SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles, Action Plan: Eight Priority Areas

  SDGs Future Cities and Municipal SDGs Model Projects:
  > The Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan selects cities and regions that achieve local revitalization and sustainable development through the creation of economic, social, and environmental value.

  Japan SDGs Awards:
  > Awards for companies, NPOs, local governments, and organizations that are making outstanding efforts to achieve the SDGs. Many of the projects are related to sustainability, such as energy, environment, and resources, as well as to raise public awareness.
- Local governments: main focus is on "Future City" and similar initiatives.
- Private companies and organizations: promotion of "Society 5.0" and ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) investment, etc.
- School education and media: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)/SDGs education, supplementary readers, news features, etc.
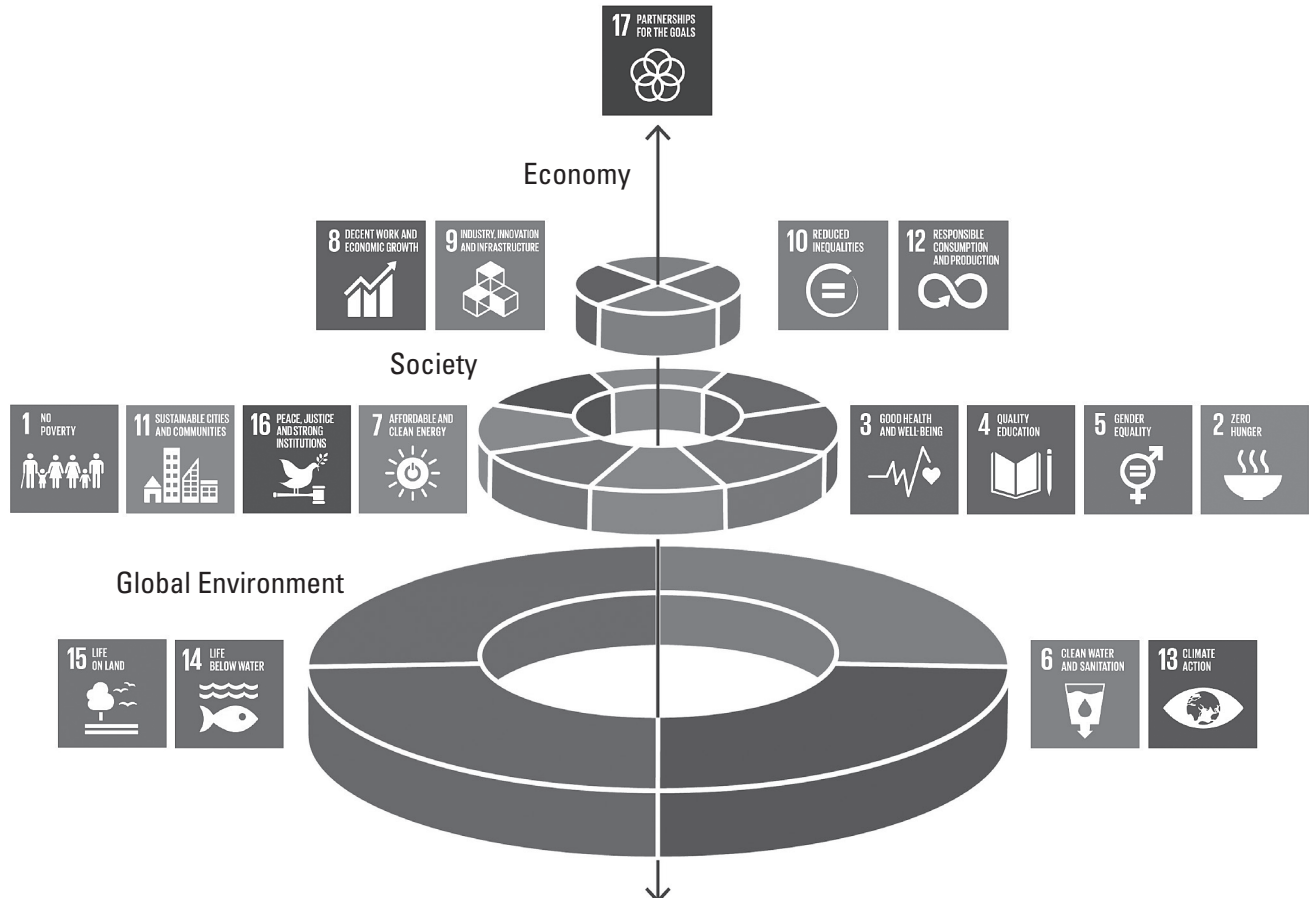
The Significance of the SDGs

A special feature of the SDGs is that they take a comprehensive and multilayered view of economic, social, environmental, and global issues from the perspective of each human being (see **Figure** below). As we move toward not only environmental and economic sustainability, but also "a society where no one is left behind" (the 2030 Agenda), what is being addressed is the dignity of every person. For example, Goal 1 (Eradication of Poverty) aims to halve the percentage of people living below the poverty line, broken down by age, gender, and region, by 2030. Since there are wide variations in poverty rates by gender and region in any given country, an approach based on assessing country-level figures will not lead to the achievement of this goal. Only when we focus on individuals and achieve goals at the level of the specific local communities in which they live, will we come close to reaching the SDGs. In this sense, numerical data disaggregated by age, gender, region, and so on, is essential for fulfilling the aims of the SDGs. As such, it is data that represents the driving force behind the SDGs.

For this reason, the United Nations and other organizations around the world are looking at not only the national level, but also at how to localize the SDGs at subnational levels. People-centered community development is being emphasized on the basis that "A key avenue for accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals is to move the focus below the national level to the subnational level, including cities and communities" (Report of the International Peace Institute, July 2020). Whether the SDGs will be achieved or not depends precisely on the extent to which they are implemented at the local level.

Figure: SDGs Wedding Cake Model

Source: adapted from figure by Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University (CC BY 4.0)

❂ Human Security Indicators

An effective way to achieve the core objective of the SDGs, which is to realize "a society where no one is left behind," is a human security approach in which global issues are viewed from the perspective of single individuals, rather than from the national level or as an aggregation, with a focus on the most vulnerable and on protecting their lives, livelihoods, and dignity, accordingly. To this end, the NPO Human Security Forum formed an Indicator Team consisting of experts and researchers from various fields, as well as staff from NPOs, foundations, organizations, and associations engaged in practical activities, to highlight the priority issues of each local community for achieving "a society where no one is left behind." This team developed a set of prefecture-level human security indicators for Japan (consisting of Life Indicators, Livelihood Indicators, and Dignity Indicators) and published the results in the book *SDGs and Japan* (JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development).

❂ From *"SDGs and Japan"* to *"SDGs and Local Communities"*

In order to identify the challenges in protecting the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of all people and in realizing "a society where no one is left behind," it is important to create municipality-level indicators (which are more closely linked to the daily lives of residents than prefecture-level indicators), to visualize priority issues and problems, and to support participatory community planning. As a starting point, the Indicator Team developed a set of municipality-level human security indicators for Miyagi Prefecture (the "SDGs Miyagi Model"), a prefecture which had been severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and was facing significant challenges compared with other prefectures. Another reason for selecting Miyagi Prefecture as the first prefecture for municipality-level indicators was that many members of the Indicator Team, including myself, had worked in Miyagi Prefecture to support the people affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. We had a strong desire to do what we could to help make Miyagi Prefecture a comfortable place for its residents to live.

The interim presentation of the results was held at an event held on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake at the Sendai International Center in March 2021. After this, the results were introduced at various events across the country, including seminars for the Miyagi Prefectural Government, Prefectural Assembly members, and various municipal governments. As a result, many people who are working diligently to achieve the SDGs in different parts of Japan have expressed their desire to use the SDGs Miyagi Model as a guide for creating indicators to re-examine the issues where they live. To address these calls, this book, a sequel to *SDGs and Japan*, explains the problems and challenges faced during the process of creating the SDGs Miyagi Model and provides examples and information that can be used as a reference for creating indicators tailored to local circumstances.

The book is structured as follows. Part 1 addresses the core objective of "a society where no one is left behind" that the SDGs aim to achieve, as well as the significance of human security and the meaning of dignity, and then describes the approach taken to develop the indicators. Part 2 provides details on the challenges facing Miyagi Prefecture ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and describes the SDGs Miyagi Model. Part 3 introduces various proposals to realize "local communities where no one is left behind." It presents ways to develop and use human security indicators at the municipal level, some unique local initiatives, and practical case studies of ESD. It also discusses how to realize the SDGs through resident participation, and the significance of Child-Friendly Cities and Communities projects. Part 4 highlights specific issues, with chapters presented by people who are working in Miyagi Prefecture and who cooperated in the development of the indicators. These authors give examples of their efforts based on their experiences in the Great East Japan Earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues they describe include people affected by disasters, resilience in the face of natural disasters, reconstruction, local participation, children, women, the impoverishment of single-mother households during the pandemic, the internationalization of local communities, and the challenges of multicultural coexistence.

◉ International Outreach

The outcomes of *SDGs and Japan* were presented in the 2019 edition of the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (December 2019). The methodology used in the book was recognized as a pioneering attempt to index human security factors as comprehensive indicators, with human dignity at its core and adapted to developed countries. In 2020, the book was published in English with the cooperation of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development. Since then, it has attracted international attention as a developed-country version of SDG indicators which complement the existing SDG indicators for realizing the core objective of "a society where no one is left behind."

Various initiatives related to the SDGs are already underway throughout Japan. Movements toward the creation of a sustainable society, based on regional indicators and involving the participation of local residents, can also be seen. However, the majority of these efforts relate to local economic revitalization, preservation of the environment, and resource and energy sustainability. There are still only a few which use the SDGs as a catalyst for social change, for building "communities where no one is left behind" and where the dignity of each and every person is respected. Identifying local issues using indicators is only the beginning. The true significance of creating the indicators will only be realized when their recommendations are put to use, and action is taken to resolve the priority challenges that have been brought to light. Based on the recommendations of the Miyagi Model, a project to support the dignity of women and children has already been launched in Kesennuma City (see Chapter 12, 12-4). We hope that this book will be used in municipalities to help local governments, citizen groups, researchers, students, schoolchildren, and businesses to take specific actions, tailored to the characteristics and conditions of individual areas, to solve the priority issues of the SDGs.

It would be our great pleasure if many people working across the country to achieve "a society where no one is left behind" find this book useful for creating community-led local indicators.

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