Part 3

SDGs Initiatives by Local Communities

Chapter 4

Proposals for Creating Communities Where No One Is Left Behind

To achieve a society where no one is left behind, the SDGs must first reach out to those who are the most marginalized. It is therefore critically important to step up efforts to achieve the SDGs at the local level, which is closest to citizens, while also implementing policy and budgetary measures at the national level. SDGs-related activities are underway in many communities in Japan, and we can now see sustainable development initiatives that involve the participation of residents. However, the emphasis to date has been mainly on environmental and economic sustainability, while efforts focusing on the dignity of each individual are still limited.

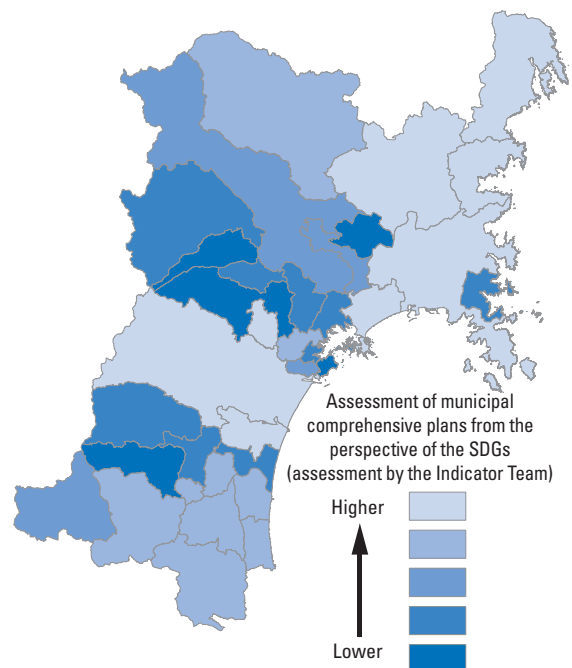Based on the challenges identified through the SDGs Miyagi Model, we would like to make the following rec-

ommendations to achieve "communities where no one is left behind" in every part of Japan.

1 Comprehensive Plans and Community Development Visions

The Miyagi Model assessed municipalities in Miyagi Prefecture using 12 criteria (**Figure 4-1**). The results showed that the comprehensive plans of many municipalities do not take the SDGs into account, and that while some municipalities associate their plans with the SDGs logo, they focus primarily on environmental and economic sustainability without adequately reflecting inclusivity and human dignity (Dignity Indicators, G1).

Figure 4-1: **Assessment of municipal comprehensive plans from the perspective of the SDGs (Indicator G1)**

Evaluation Criteria
(1) Does it refer to the SDGs?
(2) Are there links between individual measures and SDG indicators?
(3) Does it cover anything other than environmental or industrial sustainability?
(4) Does it set numerical targets to be achieved?
(5) Does it emphasize pride in one's occupation or hometown?
(6) Does it advocate for the protection of human rights?
(7) Perspectives of women/gender perspectives
(8) Perspectives of people with disabilities
(9) Perspectives of multicultural coexistence, respect for diversity, and social inclusion
(10) Is there substantial resident participation in formulating the comprehensive plan or community development?
(11) Are children's voices heard, and are their views reflected in policies?
(12) Proportion of women on the planning council

Assessment of municipal comprehensive plans from the perspective of the SDGs (assessment by the Indicator Team)

Higher

Lower

Proposal: **When developing and revising municipal comprehensive plans and community development visions, emphasis should be placed not only on sustainability but also on the dignity of individuals.**

Example: In order to emphasize human dignity and implement sustainable community development throughout a region, local governments, businesses, residents' groups, NPOs, and researchers work together to promote the SDGs under a regional "SDGs Consortium" or similar framework, taking advantage of the region's natural environment, industry, history, cultural heritage, and other unique features.

2 Disaggregated Statistics

Many statistics relating to municipalities are either not published or not broken down by attributes such as gender, age group, or disability status. In many cases, progress can't be monitored because the current situation and the goals to be attained are not being visualized.

Proposal: **Provide disaggregated statistics and set numerical targets to be achieved.**

Example a) The relative poverty rate and child poverty rate should be calculated and published, at the very least by prefecture and also preferably by municipality, and stronger measures should be taken to steadily reduce them.

Example b) Set a year for early achievement of zero children on waiting lists for childcare facilities.

Example c) At present, many statistics are not broken down into men and women (e.g., in the Miyagi Model, data on population inflow and outflow by gender, proportion of the medical workforce made up of women, etc.). The disaggregation of statistics by gender should become a standard practice.

3 Resident-Driven Community Development

Although individual municipalities are making efforts to listen to residents' views through municipal roundtables, residents' workshops, public consultations, and so on, most are led by the local government. In many cases, citizen participation remains a mere formality, although the successful efforts of the residents of Kesennuma to have a seawall plan revised is a landmark example of real citizens' power (Chapter 10, 10-3). It is essential to achieve true citizen participation, in which residents' opinions are reflected in policymaking, through the establishment of resident-led partnerships with local government.

To assess the extent of public participation in government, American scholar Sherry Arnstein (1969) proposed an eight-rung "ladder of citizen participation" (**Table 4-1**). If we look at the activities of the Kesennuma Shishiori Community Building Council, described in Chapter 8, they range from local government-led activities with citizen participation (5th rung of the ladder), to activities conducted in cooperation with local government (6th rung of the ladder), to citizen-led activities (8th rung of the ladder). The higher the rung on the ladder, the greater the responsibility of citizens and the burden on local government. As such, it is necessary to take into account the nature of the project in question, as well as the burden on both local government and residents.

Proposal: **To avoid making "resident-driven community development" merely a platitude, it is important to reflect residents' opinions in policies instead of merely listening to them. Going forward, it is hoped that residents will play a greater role in their communities and that more resident-led activities will be undertaken.**

Example a) Support the creation of an environment in which the participation of local residents in realizing the SDGs, and the activities of organizations that play a role in this process, take root and expand.

⁛ Table 4-1: **The eight-rung ladder of citizen participation in public decision-making**

Real citizen power	8	Citizen control (involving local government in citizen-led activities)
	7	Delegated power (citizen-led activities)
	6	Partnership (collaboration between citizens and local government; shared decision-making authority)
Tokenism	5	Placation (participation involving citizens in decision-making at the initiative of the local government)
	4	Consultation (participation based on roles assigned by local government; invitations to the public to give written feedback on policy proposals, also called "public comment" in Japan; resident briefings, etc.)
	3	Informing (tokenistic citizen participation; limited participation)
Nonparticipation	2	Therapy (decorative participation, only to make people "feel better")
	1	Manipulation (manipulated participation with unclear purpose or roles)

Source: Author, based on Sherry Arnstein (1969)

Example b) Provide support for community development activities by residents (such as personnel, budget, and administrative assistance), and implement human resource development programs for each generation, from children to seniors, to encourage residents' participation.

Example c) Incorporate the act of listening to residents' voices into administrative processes and make it an integral part of the process (see Chapter 8).

Example d) Resident-led reconstruction, disaster prevention (shelter setup, seawalls, disaster prevention inspections) (see Chapter 10, 10-1, 10-3).

Example e) Directly solicit the opinions of women, single parents, people with disabilities, disaster victims, people who identify as LGBTQ, foreign nationals, etc.

Example f) Promote "multicultural society" forums involving foreign residents in the public and private sectors (see Chapter 13, 13-1).

✸ 4 Child-Friendly Cities and Violence Against Children

Child abuse, bullying, and non-attendance at school are serious issues in many municipalities. It is necessary to implement stronger measures based on the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: the right to live and grow up healthily, to live in safety and security, and to express opinions and participate in society. In particular, children's playgrounds form a community where people of all ages interact with the younger generation, creating a "hometown" ("*furusato*") for the children and supporting them throughout their lives (Chapter 11, 11-3).

Proposal: To let children's voices be heard and to end violence against them, strengthen initiatives that emphasize children's dignity at the family, educational, and community levels.

Example a) Together with environmental education, use ESD education in schools and designated UNESCO Schools to enhance learning about human dignity as part of the SDGs, and provide opportunities to learn about the Convention on the Rights of the Child (using a children's version with easy-to-understand explanations). In the future, we hope to see it become compulsory for all students (see Chapter 7, Chapter 9).

Example b) Participate in UNICEF's "Child Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative," in which children's views are reflected in community development (see Chapter 9 and Chapter 11, 11-2). Communities that are friendly to children will become friendly to everyone.

Example c) Redouble and enhance existing efforts to address bullying and non-attendance at school. In order to assess how effective these initiatives are, the number of bullying incidents and the number of students who have not been attending school could be published by each municipality.

Example d) Enhance the system of Child Welfare Centers to address child abuse and strengthen public support for NPOs and personnel training for programs such as child hotlines, playgrounds where children can interact with friends, have fun and learn, places to spend time outside of school, and free schools (see Chapter 11, 11-1 and 11-3).

Example e) Tell children as early and as often as possible where they can go for help when they are experiencing problems such as abuse, domestic violence, or deprivation (Chapter 11, 11-1).

5 Gender Equality

Despite the efforts of local governments, gender disparities persist in terms of employment opportunities, wages, time spent on household chores, and the number of female local assembly members, municipal managerial personnel, and members of advisory councils and disaster prevention councils (Dignity Indicators, H2-H6). In addition, policies on women are mostly discussed in relation to childcare support, with few efforts to eliminate gender disparities.

Proposal: Emphasize women-friendly communities and the elimination of gender disparities in municipal gender equality plans and childcare support measures.

Example a) Review and improve the approach to gender equality in local governments from the perspective of women's dignity, including measures to prevent domestic violence (see Chapter 12, 12-2).

Example b) Increase the rate of male employees taking parental leave.

Example c) Create spaces to nurture female community leaders through community development that draws on women's voices.

Example d) Set an initial target of 30% female representation in local assemblies, advisory councils, disaster prevention councils, and similar organs.

6 Municipal Government Systems

Government structures at the municipal level are siloed in terms of cooperation with central government agencies and in ordinances and budget execution. A comprehensive and multifaceted approach is essential for supporting children and women. A few municipalities have implemented initiatives that cut across organizational boundaries, but these are the exception. The National Diet's approval of the Act for the Establishment of the Children and Families Agency and the Basic Act on Children will provide an opportunity for local governments to strengthen their systems.

Proposal: Promote initiatives that cut across organizational boundaries (initiatives for children on education and welfare, and for women on employment, childcare, and prevention of abuse and violence). Provide public services through cross-border cooperation between neighboring municipalities.

Example a) Consider establishing and enhancing support centers that provide comprehensive services to support children, women, and the elderly, and expand the functions they offer.

Example b) Consider having "children's social workers" who work exclusively on children's issues and who have the skills to solve children's problems by connecting education and welfare, in cooperation with families, schools, and government.

7 Community-Based Mutual Support

Many NPOs have a keen awareness of the issues facing the community and undertake distinctive initiatives rooted in the local area. They address social issues by emphasizing partnerships with local government, businesses, advocates, supporters, and new actors. However, most of them are small in scale. In order to increase their social impact through sustainable activities, it is also important to strengthen their ties with companies, local government, NPOs, and other organizations (Chapter 6).

In municipalities with declining numbers of children, demographic aging, and declining populations, organizations, businesses, and local groups such as community associations and co-ops are complementing public assistance and providing services that are finely tuned to the needs of residents. This kind of community-based mutual support will play an increasingly important role in the years to come.

Proposal: Strengthen partnerships between local government and residents by maximizing the use of local networks and human connections. Collaborate with local government initiatives by encouraging and supporting mutual aid activities that involve community-based organizations, civil society such as NPOs and volunteers, and the private sector.

Example a) Encourage and provide the necessary support for NPOs and resident-led activities that strengthen human and community ties.

Example b) Encourage housing for multi-generational households, oversight for elderly people living alone, and shopping assistance.

Example c) Promote compact city development, collaboration with neighboring municipalities that share common spheres of daily activity.

8 Economy and Employment

In addition to falling numbers of children and demographic aging, many regions are experiencing an outflow of young people and a rapid decline in populations outside urban areas. However, not many municipalities have taken effective measures to deal with this situation.

Proposal: Expand employment through private-sector partnerships, enhance government services aimed at new residents, and create communities that young people, especially women, will want to move to, settle in, or return to.

Example a) Promote high value-added and branded agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishing, manufacturing, and tourism, that make the most of regional characteristics, history, traditions, and resources.

Example b) Expand the industrial base by working with institutions of higher education to attract and retain advanced industries such as IT and remote work.

Example c) Incorporate a gender equality perspective into policies on inward migration and settlement.

Example d) Provide one-stop services for supporting inward migration and settlement.

9 Outreach That Draws on Local Pride

Many local communities are blessed with rich natural, historical, and cultural resources. While local governments are working to communicate these merits, their efforts are not always effective.

Proposal: Enhance the impact of outreach to domestic and international audiences regarding the attractiveness of municipalities in terms of visiting, settlement, and inward migration, through wide-area cooperation.

Example a)　Businesses that take advantage of digital technology, increase opportunities for employment (including remote work), and aim to increase people's mobility.

Example b)　Make efforts to establish an image of the area as a comfortable place for foreign nationals to live.

Example c)　Attract tourism, inward migration, and foreign residents from across the country.

⚙ 10　Disaster Recovery and Natural Disaster Preparedness

In natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, and heavy rains, the same people who are vulnerable under normal circumstances, such as the elderly and people with disabilities, suffer the greatest harm. Even during the recovery process, these people take longer to rebuild their lives, leaving them at risk of being left behind. To ensure that this does not happen, it is important to take their views on board, mitigate their vulnerability, and build a society that is comfortable for everyone to live in (Chapter 10, 10-1, 10-2).

Proposal:　Pass on the lessons about natural disasters to the next generation. Furthermore, to prevent people from being left behind in disaster recovery and disaster prevention, focus on the situation of each individual, remedy the disparities and inequalities which exist in normal times, work to alleviate vulnerabilities, and build a society of mutual support in which all people can live comfortably.

Example a)　Pass on memories and lessons about natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, to the next generation (e.g., Kesennuma Rias Ark Museum of Art, Ishinomaki Minamihama Tsunami Memorial Park, Minami-Sanriku Memorial Park, and many others).

Example b)　Aim for sustainable reconstruction where no one is left behind, by taking care of the emotional and psychological needs of victims.

Example c)　Set goals for improving the seismic reinforcement rate for municipal sewage systems.

Example d)　To increase resilience in the event of natural disasters, encourage residents to collaborate during normal times with local governments, community organizations, NPOs, and businesses, and to develop local disaster support networks in preparation for emergencies. Put arrangements in place for cooperation with neighboring municipalities in advance (see Chapter 10, 10-2).

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