

Keynote Speech

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Towards carbon neutrality in 2050 —creating a better future from local communities



As you might have noticed, large-scale natural disasters are increasing in number and frequency. In recent years, quantitative data can show us how many of these natural disasters are caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities. If these emissions continue unchecked, the temperature will rise by 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in 2030.

International long-term goals are important for envisioning the future, defining the social challenges, and indicating the innovations and transformations to be made. Achieving carbon neutrality in 2050 is an indispensable requirement in keeping what we have agreed to in the Paris Agreement, which is striving to limit the increase in temperature below 1.5°C. With many countries making the transition to become carbon neutral, Prime Minister Suga declared that Japan aims to become a carbon-neutral society by 2050. However, this goal certainly cannot be achieved with our current policies. Energy, architecture, and transportation—every aspect of our society must change significantly.

Today, more companies are taking action to reduce emissions through their supply chain, shifting to ESG investing, and integrating countermeasures for climate change in their management policies. Also, in some cases renewable energy is creating new jobs, improving resilience in natural disasters, and solving regional challenges. I look forward to hearing more dialogue on actions for climate change from local communities.

(Excerpt and summary of keynote speech)

Panel Discussion

⟨Moderator⟩ **Mariko Harada** Coordinator at Think the Earth



Case report



■ **Masaaki Kobayashi** CEO of Japan Environmental Storage & Safety Corporation

Masaaki Kobayashi, CEO of Japan Environmental Storage & Safety Corporation
Both the SDGs and Paris Agreement set the shared large-scale goals for developed and developing nations alike. “Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere,” which is the SDGs translated to suit Japanese society, will be the key to building sustainable local communities. He hopes that the older generation will gain inspiration and support the younger generation to realize the SDGs.



■ **Kenya Katayama** Mayor of Niseko Town, Hokkaido

With the spirit of ‘mutual aid’ which correlates with the philosophy of the SDGs, the town is working collectively with the citizens to build a new housing development that incorporates the perspectives of the SDGs and a sustainable super-insulated town hall with a natural circulation system. By 2050, Niseko aims to reduce its CO2 emissions by 86%.



■ **Toshikazu Suganuma** CEO of Ohisama Shinpo Energy Inc.

To avoid leaving environmental problems for future generations, he partners with many regions to promote solar energy which can be generated locally and used to build active local communities. He organizes the Iida Renewable Energy College to increase access to environmental education. In the next 10 years, he hopes to supply renewable energy to half of the Shimoina region in Iida.



■ **Mayumi Fujikawa** President of Ueda Citizens’ Energy

She promotes the use of solar energy through the “Ainori-kun project” which connects rooftop owners and investors, holds DIY workshops on installing heat insulation to increase the sustainability of buildings, and works on fostering sustainable communities. She believes that even though small in scale, citizen-led actions have significant impacts in changing society.

Panel Discussion

Harada What is your impression of Nagano Prefecture's countermeasures for climate change?

Kobayashi Nagano is one of the most progressive and motivated prefectures in Japan with a governor who is passionate about sustainability, a cross-cutting government body, and a local culture which welcomes new challenges. I hope other local governments can learn from Nagano Prefecture and work towards the shared goal in healthy competition.

Harada How do different generations approach climate change differently?

Suganuma Junior high and high school students understand very well that they are facing the effects of climate change daily. The older generations are feeling the effects, but do not seem to realize that the effects will be even larger if we do not make a transformation now.

Harada How has the social situation regarding "Ainori-kun" shifted in the past 10 years?

Fujikawa At first, it was little-known or assumed that only certain people would join. Today, many people join more casually.

Harada The SDGs are large-scale shared goals illustrating the kind of future we hope to have. Please share your experience of working with future generations.

Fujikawa In Nagano Prefecture Hakuba High School, students themselves host workshops on installing heat insulation for their classrooms with adults supporting them. Recently, schools often ask us to give talks. I believe that climate change is becoming a major theme in education.

Katayama We hold the SDGs international future conference for high school students. Providing an environment where the younger generation can learn and take action on the SDGs and sustainability is a crucial role of local and national governments.

Harada How are you building a sustainable community?

Katayama Niseko Town has established Niseko Machi, Inc. as our second town hall for implementing the SDGs and environmental policies. We are also learning a lot from other pioneering local governments. Creating a sustainable environment is an exciting collaborative action for the future of our children. Our citizens' passion for the local community is what motivates us.

Harada What are the challenges and solutions in the citizen-led solar energy project?

Suganuma We have been supported by many people throughout Japan who bought our investment funds and building owners who let us use their rooftops almost free of charge. We have established a retail electricity supply company to promote the use of energy that is locally generated, but it is very difficult to get people to fully understand the difference from other sources of electricity.

Harada What kind of relationship should a local government and its citizens have in addressing climate change?

Kobayashi Solving climate change requires major transformations, which cannot be done by local and national governments alone. Partnership is highly valued in the Paris Agreement. Spreading this message throughout all local governments, NPOs, and citizens is what truly makes a difference, but is also a challenge. I believe it is vital to build more communities where all of us can freely discuss the SDGs and Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere.

Takamura Every panelist seems to strongly believe that combating climate change is indispensable in passing the local community to future generations.

(Summary of discussion)

