



Project Co-Leads



Citi Foundation



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UNDP and Citi Foundation Host Youth Social Entrepreneurship Programme “Youth Co:Lab Japan 2021”

Tokyo - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation held Youth Co:Lab events in Japan for the third consecutive year in 2021. Youth Co:Lab is the largest movement in the Asia-Pacific region to support young social entrepreneurs in starting and growing businesses that accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2021, two main events were delivered online. The first was “Japan Dialogues”, a symposium in which experts and young entrepreneurs discuss ways to expand the ecosystem for social entrepreneurship. This year, the Dialogues shed a spotlight on young social entrepreneurs and female social entrepreneurs. The second event was the SDG entrepreneur contest “Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2021”.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes to people’s lifestyles and values, momentum has been building towards the achievement of the SDGs. Promoting diversity and coexistence has become even more important, as further efforts are needed to realize a world where no one is left behind.

Youth Co:Lab believes that young people's commitment to social innovation is essential to achieving the SDGs. Through various activities, Youth Co:Lab has been working to expand an entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes government, civil society, and the private sector and also support young people who are trying to solve social and environmental problems through innovative business ideas.

The first Japan Dialogue session, “Pioneering the era of change: young social entrepreneurs and female social entrepreneurs,” took place in September. Two young social entrepreneurs, a female social entrepreneur, and an ESG-oriented investor were invited to the panel discussion.

The speakers were Mr. Koki Ozora, a university student and President of the NPO Anata no Ibasho; Ms. Marika Hayashi, CEO of Qibitech, Inc., a company that is using robotic technology to reduce imbalances in employment opportunities and economic disparity; and Mr. Yuta Hamada, who launched Local Flag Inc. to solve regional issues in Yosano, Kyoto Prefecture. The session was moderated by Ms. Eriko Suzuki of MPower Partners, Japan's first ESG-focused venture capital fund. The speakers shared their motivation for setting up businesses and their views on the potential, challenges, and future of social entrepreneurship.

The second Japan Dialogues session, "The realities and hopes of social entrepreneurship for young social entrepreneurs and female social entrepreneurs," was held in November and focused on ecosystem building, especially for young social entrepreneurs and female social entrepreneurs.

Two speakers shared their experience as social entrepreneurs: Ms. Aya Murakami, a university student who launched the apparel brand "Ay" in the Democratic Republic of Congo and is currently working on an upcycling business in Gunma Prefecture; and Mr. Shoji Marukawa, CEO of Nature Innovation Group, the operator of i-kasa, a mobile-based umbrella sharing platform. As entrepreneur supporters, Ms. Tomoko Tanaka, who established a support network for female entrepreneurs at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and Ms. Nanako Kudo, who is promoting impact investment and supporting social entrepreneurs at the Social Innovation and Investment Foundation (SIIF), presented their initiatives to nurture female entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. The moderator of the session was Ms. Ibum Hirahara, Co-Chair of WORLD ROAD.

The final of Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2021 was held on 25 November. This year, applications from high school students were accepted for the first time. Out of 78 applications from all over Japan and overseas, nine finalists were selected at first and second rounds of screening. The finalists pitched their SDG business ideas to the judges and to an online audience of about 200 people. Among the nine finalists, six were awarded the following prizes:

- The Excellence Award: "Implementing a new democracy platform to shape a society where everyone can make an impact", Mr. Hiroyuki Kurimoto, Ligitous
- The Idea Award: "Sustainable leather made from discarded fish skin", Mr. Tomohisa Noguchi, tototo
- The Scalability Award & CVC award: "Seawater farming technology for the era of climate change", Mr. Shohei Toyonaga, Cultivera LLC
- The CVC Award: "Sunglasses recycled from eye-drop bottles ~ Protecting the eyes of the world's poor ~", Ms. Rina Nagaoka, Eyeforthree
- The Audience Award: "Enteral nutrition made of sustainable insect food", Mr. Katsuki Ono
- Judge's Special Award: "A structure to boost the number of teenagers who tackle social problems with empathy", Mr. Yuujin Yamaguchi, Sustainable Game

These nine finalists, along with teams selected in Youth Co:Lab contests in 28 other Asia-Pacific countries/regions, will participate in an accelerator programme called "Springboard Programme" starting in January 2022. The top teams who participated in the programme will be able to showcase their businesses during the Regional Summit.

Mr. Hiroyuki Kurimoto, the Excellence Award winner, said:

"I am very honored to receive this award today. While the uptake of e-governance and open governance is accelerating in Japan, I believe this award represents expectations that Ligitous will continue to strive to renovate governance based on democracy."

Tetsuo Kondo, Director of the UNDP Representation Office in Japan, said: "The COVID 19-pandemic has accelerated social change and created new business opportunities and values. Diversity and inclusion are key to generating the innovative ideas needed to reconstruct a better society. The voices of the younger generation, including students, and women need to be heard more, and I believe that social changes and the evolution of technology can support this. At UNDP, youth are considered leaders of today and of tomorrow in sustainable human development. UNDP and the Citi Foundation will continue to believe in the potential and abilities of young people and support youth-led social innovation and entrepreneurship that contributes to achieving the SDGs."

Lee Waite, Citi Country Officer for Japan, said: "The Citi Foundation has been working on 'Pathways to Progress,' a job skills-building initiative that addresses the persistent global issue of youth unemployment. As part of this initiative, we are pleased to have held Youth Co:Lab events in Japan for the third consecutive year. While the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social issues, including the deteriorating employment environment, it is very encouraging to see the leadership initiatives initiated by youth and young entrepreneurs as well as their commitment to solving social

issues. We will continue to engage with investors, policy makers, NGOs and other stakeholders to further strengthen the ecosystem for fostering social entrepreneurship."

About Youth Co:Lab:

Co-created in 2017 by UNDP and the Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims to empower and invest in youth so that they can accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship. Youth Co:Lab also aims to foster young people's 21st Century skills by offering mentorship support for young entrepreneurs through the Springboard Programme, and collaborating closely with partners in the social entrepreneur ecosystem. Further details and ongoing updates on Youth Co:Lab Japan can be found on UNDP Tokyo's website and social media:

www.jp.undp.org | Twitter: [@UNDPTokyo](https://twitter.com/UNDPTokyo) | Facebook: [@UNDPTokyo](https://www.facebook.com/UNDPTokyo)

About UNDP:

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

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About Citi:

Citi, the leading global bank, has approximately 200 million customer accounts and does business in more than 160 countries and jurisdictions. Citi provides consumers, corporations, governments and institutions with a broad range of financial products and services, including consumer banking and credit, corporate and investment banking, securities brokerage, transaction services, and wealth management.

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About Citi Foundation:

The Citi Foundation works to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world. We invest in efforts that increase financial inclusion, catalyze job opportunities for youth, and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities. The Citi Foundation's "More than Philanthropy" approach deploys the enormous expertise of Citi and its people to fulfill our mission and drive thought leadership and innovation. For more information, visit www.citifoundation.com.

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