Policy Recommendations for Mainstreaming the SDGs

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SDSN Japan
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Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Japan has promoted a wide range of multi-stakeholder activities aiming to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), since it was launched last year (Appendix 1).

Recognizing that the G7 Summit and its related ministerial-level meetings this year are to discuss the implementation of the SDGs in Japan, SDSN Japan is calling for further leadership by G7 leaders and policymakers, and has developed policy recommendations on SDG implementation as inputs for these discussions.

In sharing the visions and actions included in these policy recommendations with SDSN members around the world, SDSN Japan would like to contribute to further developing the activities of SDSN by encouraging multi-stakeholder engagement.

This set of policy recommendations consists of three sections: (i) overview; (ii) governance and the roles of stakeholders; and (iii) major issues in the areas of climate change, sustainable consumption and production (SCP), biodiversity, and international development and education.

These policy recommendations have been developed based on discussions at a workshop that brought together experts from relevant fields (Appendix 2).

Overview:
Transforming Society through SDG Implementation

When mobilizing actions to achieve the SDGs, it is crucial to recognize the evolution from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which mainly aimed to advance economic development in developing countries, to the SDGs, which aim to address universal issues in all countries. In other words, the scope of the goals has been greatly expanded from economic issues to an agenda integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions. Therefore, it is important to note that the SDGs are aimed at transforming our society from a quantity-oriented one to a quality-oriented one, and that a broad range of stakeholders regard the SDGs as an opportunity to promote their own actions and reflect the SDGs in their activities. Focusing on the
actions of individuals echoes with the principle that “no one will be left behind” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and with the spirit of human security.

Transforming society requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, engaging local governments, the business sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), regional organizations and research institutions, among many others. In addition, mainstreaming the SDGs in business strategies can transform capital and markets.

In order to achieve the SDGs, which will require a transformation of society as a whole, it is essential that G7 leaders take the political initiative on SDG implementation. It is therefore highly recommended that the SDG policies of G7 countries be harmonized in an appropriate manner in order to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda.

Governance and the Roles of Stakeholders

Recommendation 1-1: Establishing a Headquarters

Since achieving the SDGs requires the mobilization of many different sectors, a mechanism should be established for integrated implementation of economic, social and environmental policies. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that countries set up a headquarters to steer all of the relevant policies in an effective, flexible and comprehensive manner as a leading governmental organization.

In Japan, the Cabinet Secretariat might be considered the most appropriate agency to take the lead in establishing such a mechanism. It is expected that this mechanism would not only be able to share information on policies and measures between relevant governmental agencies, but also develop its own policies and measures, with its own budget and authority, and function to realize integrated collaboration between the relevant agencies.

Recommendation 1-2: Implementation Strategies and Plans

In order to achieve the SDGs, it is recommended that G7 countries formulate implementation strategies and plans. This task could be one of the priorities for the headquarters proposed in Recommendation 1-1. These strategies and plans should reflect the priorities and national circumstances of each country. It is expected that these kinds of strategies and plans will be developed at the local level as well. It would also be useful to organize a mechanism for local authorities to learn from each other.

It is important to note that the SDGs should be mainstreamed in the context of inclusive growth strategies. The process of formulating strategies and plans must ensure that they reflect scientific knowledge.

While individual policy areas have been covered by the SDGs, the
integration of related policy areas will not be sufficient. Since it is impossible to achieve the SDGs by simply extending existing policies, the SDGs should be utilized as international guidelines and checklists for securing linkages between related policies. In this regard, the “Prescriptions for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Japan”, ¹ developed by the POST2015 research project, would be a valuable reference.

The strategies and plans will be developed in two contexts: national and international policy development. It would be useful to promote policy harmonization by using existing mechanisms such as the OECD, with the strong leadership of the G7.

**Recommendation 1-3: Policy Harmonization**

It is crucial for G7 countries to learn from each other and harmonize their policies, measures, strategies, plans and indicators, in order to maintain their leadership. It is proposed that the G7 take a directing role by assigning a lead country for each goal area and sharing responsibilities. Discussion on complementary indicators should be coordinated by the G7 and the OECD.

**Recommendation 1-4: Institutional Design at the Regional Level**

International organizations at the regional level are expected to take a role in linking implementation, follow-up and review at the global and national levels. They can play a key role in integrating indicators and translating global goals into national ones.

**Recommendation 1-5: Stakeholder Action**

In order to facilitate action by various stakeholders, it is crucial to mobilize policies and measures to support new initiatives including grants, subsidies, tax exemptions and international standardization. It is also necessary to extend policies to support enterprises in mainstreaming the SDGs into their business strategies.

**Recommendation 1-6: Dissemination**

Since a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs is that they are widely recognized by the public, implementation must be advanced by promoting the understanding that each individual is responsible for addressing the SDGs, by sharing good practices that can be easily understood.

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Climate Change and Sustainable Consumption and Production

In recent years, climate change has increasingly threatened our social infrastructure. To cope with this challenge, the global community adopted the Paris Agreement at COP21, affirming its commitment to work toward a de-carbonized society. After COP21, previously radical ideas on technological innovation, changing lifestyles, emissions mitigation policies and goal-setting seem to be accepted by society as necessary and reasonable.

In order to achieve the goal set in the Paris Agreement of limiting the global average temperature to well below 2°C or even 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, it is imperative that in the second half of this century we achieve a balance between reducing greenhouse gas (GHS) emissions and removing GHGs through sinks. It is evident, however, that even the sum of the pledged emissions reductions submitted by national governments is far from sufficient to meet the long-term goal. As emphasized in the 2030 Agenda, which has the title “Transforming our World,” social transformation is essential in order to meet this goal. Comprehensive social innovation is urgently needed, going beyond technology development.

The SDGs are recognized as “action plans” for addressing climate change. Goal 13 is not the only relevant SDG; in particular, Goal 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) is also closely linked to climate change. To reduce emissions on a large scale, it is critical to consider the SDGs as ways of promoting concrete actions to reduce emissions in a range of areas.

The Paris Agreement has brought opportunities for new business models and new patterns of consumption and production. The agreement also indicates changes in the economic system whereby coping with climate change can lead to economic benefits. It is important for G7 countries, therefore, to lead by example in realizing sustainable lifestyles and new business models.

**Recommendation 2-1: Integrated Approaches**

Climate change policies should be implemented by integrating social and economic issues. It is essential for each country to design and implement climate change policies to complement other social and economic goals related to poverty, aging society, energy, food, urban planning and conservation of green space.

The Paris Agreement ended the process of goal-setting. From now, monitoring progress toward achieving the goals is of utmost importance, and developed countries should take the lead. Policy implementation and administration based on data and indicators are recognized as areas in which capacity building is needed for developing countries.

Economic activities are trans-boundary. In particular, there have been
serious problems related to the environment, labor conditions and human rights in farms, mining fields and factories, which are increasingly part of supply chains in the context of globalization. Sustainable public procurement leads to sustainable supply chains. While various certification schemes exist at present, it is suggested that such schemes are integrated on a global scale.

Food loss is not only an issue of “mottainai” (waste) but also a climate change issue, since food production and consumption requires energy for the production, transportation and disposal of food waste. Changing customs and behaviors in mass food production and disposal is a concrete example of how efforts in SCP can mitigate climate change.

**Recommendation 2-2: Stakeholder Roles**

Efforts to cope with climate change and advance sustainable development cannot be solely conducted by national governments. It is essential to build partnerships between the business community, non-governmental organizations, local governments, international institutions and the scientific community, and promote structural changes for emissions reduction.

In particular, it must be underlined that economic activities by private companies have impacts on changing the world. Changes are needed in investment behavior and decisions in order to realize a low carbon society. In fact, such changes are already underway. Many major investment firms have withdrawn finance from fossil fuel based investment. Now, such investments and related facilities are being recognized as “stranded assets”. This movement should be further encouraged and supported.

In addition, more than half of the world population now lives in cities, and efforts toward building low carbon societies at the city level are becoming increasingly important. The role of local governments is also crucial. In this context, it is suggested that countries establish national goals for the number of sustainable municipalities. The development of local indicators is equally important.

**Recommendation 2-3: Climate Change (Mitigation and Adaptation)**

It is imperative and urgent that a resilient society should be built to cope with climate change. In this respect, mitigation and adaptation measures are equally important. With regard to mitigation measures, the Paris Agreement requires that each Party regularly provides the information necessary to track progress made in implementation and achieving its contribution at the national level. While the agreement requests national governments to communicate their targets every five years, no details have yet been decided on the periodical review of reporting toward meeting the targets. From now, it is essential to establish procedures for the items to be reported and for the examination of reporting, in order to avoid countries
setting targets but failing to make efforts to achieve them. In this context, the items to be included in the reporting are important. It is possible, for example, to monitor the trend of emissions per capita to assess progress toward the long-term goals. In addition to encouraging actions to meet the long-term goals, it is equally important to deepen the pledged targets. 2020 will be the first opportunity to review short- and mid-term targets, and it is necessary for each country to review these targets before then.

While the SDGs target 2030, coping with climate change requires much longer-term efforts. The Paris Agreement calls for countries to strive to formulate and communicate long-term low emission development strategies that should take into consideration a time frame beyond 2030. Carbon pricing is a tool to integrate into the SDGs long-term thinking on climate change and the short- to mid-term thinking behind behavior in production, investment and consumption. It is a tool to place an appropriate price on carbon and shift people’s perceptions and behaviors. The introduction of additional measures is necessary, however, to promote adoption of innovative technologies that advance efforts toward a low carbon society, as soon as they are developed.

Adaptation measures for coping with the effects of climate change, such as hurricanes, heat waves, and torrential rains, are necessary in both developed and developing countries in order to protect society, and such efforts should be expanded to the grass-roots level. In particular, adaptation measures being implemented in developing countries, including the use of green infrastructure, should be consistent with the concept of sustainable development.

In addressing climate adaptation, it is vital that a broad range of stakeholders, such as local governments, enterprises and citizen’s groups, play an active role in identifying climate risks and incorporating adaptation measures into their activities. The role of local governments is regarded as the most important among these. It is recommended that national governments develop platforms to collect information on scientific knowledge and best practices, and provide this information to the various stakeholders, so that they will be able to develop their own adaptation measures. Governments must also contribute to building resilient societies by sharing knowledge and experiences through international networks.

**Recommendation 2-4: Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)**

Over the last 20 years, efficiency improvement approaches have been mainstreamed in policy and product development related to resource efficiency and energy efficiency. In addition to such efficiency-focused approaches, it is necessary to consider consumption on the demand side and changes in lifestyles. Ideas of self-sufficiency (for example, recognizing the global limits of nature and changing our lifestyles by acknowledging what is enough, or adopting the mindset of a global citizen) should be translated into
policy concepts to shift social and economic systems toward SCP.

It is also noted that the strategic promotion of resource-efficient or energy-efficient lifestyles contributes to resource security in the long run.

In particular, considering the possibility of an expanding infrastructure gap (including energy, transport and waste management) in the context of a society that is both aging and urbanizing, building a decentralized, resource-efficient, low-carbon society by utilizing renewable resources through SCP can be a key socio-economic strategy.

In order to achieve sustainable lifestyles at the city level as well as at the household level, it is necessary to work urgently on infrastructure development and promote research and development strategies in urban planning. It must be noted that stakeholders successful in advancing an attractive socio-economic model for sustainable lifestyles lead the inclusive economy for our well-being.

At the global level, the 10 Year Framework Programmes on SCP is an important initiative. It is essential to integrate the programmes into frameworks for implementation at the regional level, including in the Asia-Pacific region.

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services:
Ecosystems as Basic Constituents of Life

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment that was released in 2005 found that the existence of sound biodiversity on Earth contributed to human well-being through providing ecosystem services. It is estimated that the annual gross value of ecosystem services on Earth in monetary terms would total 125 trillion US dollars, equivalent to 1.7 times global GDP.

Conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems contributes to achieving all SDGs, for example by providing food and water, improving health and sanitation, mitigating climate change, reducing disaster risk, securing livelihoods and providing opportunities for strengthening community bonds. However, these linkages have not been properly recognized, even though efforts towards achieving other SDGs contribute to conservation of biodiversity.

While there has been significant progress in taking action for conservation of biodiversity, biodiversity has drastically deteriorated at an unprecedented rate due to population growth and the expansion of economic activities. If this trend continues, in the near future humanity may not be able to enjoy a sufficient level of ecosystem services, increasing the vulnerability of society. This would be a significant obstacle to achieving the
Japan is one of the countries that faces natural disasters most frequently, and experiences many different types of disaster. In addition, the Japanese economy and society are largely dependent on imported ecosystem services from other countries. In other words, Japan is also responsible for the biodiversity loss that is occurring abroad. Unless biodiversity can be used sustainably, it may not be feasible to maintain the current level of social and economic activities. While local communities in Japan have traditionally co-existed with nature, there has been a gradual transformation towards resource consumption, in particular through the period of high economic growth.

While the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services has gained more attention, the necessary research, policies and implementation measures remain underdeveloped. Therefore, each G7 country is encouraged to promote these elements through close cooperation.

Recognizing the past and present state of biodiversity in Japan and other countries, we hereby present our recommendations as follows:

**Recommendation 3-1: Realizing a Resilient Society**

Recalling a society in which humans once lived in harmony with nature, we emphasize the need to realize a resilient society based on the idea of “nature-based solutions”, by applying the expertise, technology, human and financial resources of the G7. This requires that biodiversity is recognized as “natural capital”, and that we strive to achieve a society that is sustained by the services and systems provided by nature.

**Recommendation 3-2: Mainstreaming Biodiversity**

In order to further conserve biodiversity and ecosystems, all stakeholders in society must take account of the value of biodiversity. This mainstreaming of biodiversity is required in various decision-making processes, ranging from the development of strategies and action plans by national and local governments and companies, to the consumption choices of individuals. Appealing to human values, and thus changing the behavior of all stakeholders, would prevent irreversible environmental changes that exceed planetary boundaries. By visualizing ecosystem services through assessments such as economic evaluation and Ecological Footprints (EF), and incorporating these into national accounting and reporting systems, as appropriate, it is crucial that we become more aware of ecosystem services.
that are about to be lost and thus commit to transforming society.

**Recommendation 3-3: Multi-Stakeholder Engagement and Implementation**

Securing ecosystem services requires not only conservation of biodiversity but also multi-stakeholder engagement and implementation, including in the improvement of education and gender mainstreaming, poverty reduction and the sustainable consumption and production of natural capital.

Effective incentives should be introduced and promoted widely. For example, certification systems for agricultural, forestry and fishery products that are produced in a sustainable manner can alter individuals’ consumption behaviors and influence the procurement processes of national and local governments and private companies. Other examples include adjusting fair market prices that take into consideration additional costs and burdens related to biodiversity, and securing financial resources for conservation by actively utilizing existing financial mechanisms. Through these incentives, we aim to build a society in which all stakeholders, including future generations, can enjoy the blessings of nature.

**Development, International Cooperation and Education**

Sustainable development is imperative both for addressing the challenges of poverty and want, and for healing and securing our planet, by transitioning to a sustainable and resilient path. The world still faces poverty and serious economic disparity, while fear, violence and terrorism threaten peace, even in developed countries. All possible actions must be taken to advance global sustainable development. In this section, we focus on global partnership based on the spirit of global solidarity, and the empowerment and engagement of individuals.

Some developing countries already have good practices for the SDGs, based on their experience pursuing the MDGs, in making the paradigm shift to sustainable development. In this regard, it is necessary to leave behind the dichotomy of developed countries and developing countries, and move toward thinking in terms of horizontal and equal partnerships at all levels. It is also necessary to review current policies for development and international cooperation, and to mainstream the SDGs inclusively, while re-examining current social structures.
It is essential to strengthen, through education, the foundations of a society in which the three dimensions of sustainable development — the economy, society and the environment — are integrated, and in which all actors can make their own decisions. In particular, it is crucial to develop independent and autonomous global citizens who respect equality, appreciate different values, are sensitive to vulnerable people, and have knowledge and life skills.

G7 member countries must play a leading role in contributing to the transformation of social structures through development and international cooperation, and education for realizing sustainable societies. The following policy recommendations have been developed:

**Recommendation 4-1: Addressing the SDGs in Strategies for Development and International Cooperation**

Current strategies for development and international cooperation must be reviewed in order to address their contribution to achieving the SDGs. This can be achieved by addressing the contribution to the SDGs in the policy dialogue of each project.

Valuable lessons can be learned from reviewing the experience of the OECD/DAC’s strategy, “Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation” and the MDGs as global governance frameworks, in order to mainstream the SDGs, to ensure that each project is designed to contribute to issues including the reduction of income inequality and achieving gender equality, and to include in the rules or protocols for non-ODA projects a requirement to contribute to achieving the SDGs. It is also important to ensure that both “hard” and “soft” approaches are taken — that is, building infrastructure as well as developing methodologies, which are both essential for realizing inclusive societies.

**Recommendation 4-2: Realizing the SDGs through Development and International Cooperation**

For all development and international cooperation projects, it is necessary to respect the responsibility of the national government and the autonomy of local governments, which should be secured by developing equal and transparent monitoring mechanisms. Through these measures, the governance structure and horizontal mutual dependence at all levels will be secured.

It is necessary to monitor the implementation of each project, by using
appropriate indices to measure social equality realized through equal social participation. For the development of such indices and for monitoring, further research is necessary to analyze the detailed situation and social structure, as well as the development of indices through international collaboration.

**Recommendation 4-3: Education as the Foundation of Development**

Individuals are the basis of society and education, which empowers individuals, is the foundation of development. Access to education has greatly increased through the MDGs. However, inclusive and equitable quality education in all aspects — for opportunity, processes and outcomes — is necessary to reduce economic inequality and the chain of poverty. Providing quality education will contribute to building the resilience of the poor and the vulnerable, which will consequently strengthen the resilience of society to disasters.

The empowerment of individuals through education will improve labor proficiency and productivity, and normative consciousness in the global context will also be strengthened, which will contribute to better business. It is important to mainstream the SDGs in economic activities.

As stated above, it is necessary to restructure current educational systems to develop human resources, which are the foundation of sustainable development. This restructuring must be done in a flexible and open manner so as to utilize both formal and non-formal education systems. Furthermore, it is important to make society provide opportunities for people who receive a quality education to demonstrate their abilities and play important roles.

**Recommendation 4-4: Promoting ESD**

Among the targets under the SDG for education, Target 4.7 addresses the need to develop in individuals the ability to directly contribute to the SDGs. However, it does not explain how to act on the target or provide indices for measuring progress. Therefore, it is necessary to promote global research to clarify concepts, share relevant knowledge, and conduct studies on possible plans and measures to meet the target, which would enable the development of inclusive and equitable indices as well as transparent monitoring.

It is also important to promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which has been fostered through the UN Decade of ESD and promoted at the local level, and contribute to the Global Action Programme on ESD (GAP).
**Recommendation 4-5: Further Promoting Funding Mechanisms**

In order to implement the above recommendations, it is important to facilitate funding mechanisms such as the Global Partnership for Education.

**Conclusion**

The primary target for these policy recommendations is the G7 Summit process in 2016, aiming to seek G7 leadership for achieving the SDGs. However, the recommendations call for a wide range of actions by various stakeholders. Therefore, these policy recommendations provide important messages for all stakeholders.

Our aim is for these policy recommendations to also be shared with other SDSN members around the world, since the visions and actions included in the recommendations will provide the members with useful directions for their future activities. The target audience is also expected to expand from the G7 to the G20 countries, since the SDGs are global and universal goals.

While the scope of the policy recommendations is limited to certain goal areas due to time constraints, we expect to expand this scope by mobilizing the expertise and resources of SDSN. For goal areas which need further in-depth discussions to develop more concrete actions, the recommendations must be followed up by mobilizing experts in these areas.

In conclusion, it is our hope that these policy recommendations will make an important contribution to further promoting global action toward achieving the SDGs.
Members of the Council for SDSN Japan

HAMANAKA Hironori
Chair of the Board of Directors, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

TAKEUCHI Kazuhiko
Professor, The University of Tokyo
Director, Integrated Research System for Sustainability Science (IR3S)

HANAKI Keisuke
Professor, The University of Tokyo
Vice-President, Science Council of Japan

SUZUKI Yuji
Vice Director-General, National Federation of UNESCO Associations in JAPAN

KANIE Norichika
Professor, Keio University
Senior Research Fellow, UNU-IAS

NAKAGUCHI Takahiro
Professor, Shibaura Institute of Technology
Director, the Coalition of Local Governments for Environmental Initiative

ARAKAWA Hiroto
Advisor, Sumitomo Corporation

ARIMA Toshio
Chairman of the Board, Global Compact Network Japan
Executive Advisor, Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd

SUEYOSHI Takejiro
Vice-Chair of Executive Board, Japan Renewable Energy Foundation
Special Advisor, the UNEP Finance Initiatives

KURODA Kaori
Executive Director, CSO Network Japan

HASEGAWA Masayo
Chief Researcher, International Environment and Economy Institute
Committee Member, Future Earth Engagement Committee

TAKEMOTO Kazuhiko
Director, UNU-IAS
Director, Secretariat of SDSN Japan

International Advisor:
ISHII Naoko
CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility (GEF)
## Appendix 2

### Participant List of the SDSN Workshop

(29 March, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position and Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAKEMOTO Kazuhiko</td>
<td>Director, UNU-IAS, Director, Secretariat of SDSN Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KANIE Norichika</td>
<td>Professor, Keio University, Senior Research Fellow, UNU-IAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIMA Toshio</td>
<td>Representative Director, Global Compact Japan Network, Executive Advisor, Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUZUKI Yuji</td>
<td>Vice Director-General, National Federation of UNESCO Associations in JAPAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KURODA Kaori</td>
<td>Executive Director, CSO Network Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAKAGUCHI Takahiro</td>
<td>Professor, Shibaura Institute of Technology, Director, the Coalition of Local Governments for Environmental Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KURODA Kazuo</td>
<td>Professor, Waseda University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KITAMURA Yuto</td>
<td>Associate Professor, University of Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUZUKI Masachika</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Sophia University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SODENO Reiko</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Keio University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAMEYAMA Yasuko</td>
<td>Head of the Center for Social and Environmental Systems Research (Sustainable Social Systems Section), National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan (NIES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTTA Yasuhiko</td>
<td>Area Leader; Principal Policy Researcher, IGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAMURA Kentaro</td>
<td>Deputy Director of the Kansai Research Centre; Principal Policy Researcher, IGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTSUKA Takashi</td>
<td>Director, ICLEI Japan Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOSHINO Kazuaki  Specially Appointed Professor, Kagoshima University
HIBI Yasushi  Head, Conservation International, Japan
FURUTA Naoya  Coordinator, Japan Liaison Office at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
Professor, Taisho University
SUZUKI Wataru  Satoyama Initiative Senior Coordinator, UNU-IAS
SERIU Kazuhiko  Satoyama Initiative Programme Associate, UNU-IAS
TOYOZUMI Asako  Programme Coordinator, UNU-IAS
SAKurai Yoichi  Principal Researcher, IGES
KABAYA Kei  Policy Researcher, IGES
YOSHIDA Tetsuro  Task Manager (SDGs); Senior Policy Researcher, IGES
NISHIMURA Mikiko  Senior Associate Professor, International Christian University
KOMATSU Taro  Professor, Sophia University
ISHII Tetsuya  Principal Fellow, IGES
KUNIYA Hiroko
ISHIGURO Ichiro