

# Our Future

To build resilient and flexible rural communities



OISCA Japan

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What characters of people should be shaped; what kinds of social development should be achieved? What kinds of development assistance should be extended to realize them?

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### 1. Uncertainty over future prospects

In recent years, the enormous speed of globalization of economy, finance, and information is giving un-escapable influence on almost all parts of the world. Not only in developed world but also developing countries, there are people who take advantage, and are being financially better off. On the other hand, negative effects by globalization have affected many people both in developed and developing countries. Globalization has caused to widen the gap between urban areas and rural areas. Adverse effects of overheated economic operations as well as widespread poverty are causing to bring about damages to the local and global environment. In the era of climate change we have ever intensifying natural disasters, rises in the sea levels and coastal erosion, etc.

Massive natural disasters beyond expectations, widening gap between the rich and the poor and many other problems together are posing growing threat to our future. Developed world that has enjoyed affluence because of their continuously growing economy, now needs to struggle to preserve their status quo. In developing countries, some of privileged people are benefiting from the globalized economy, but it is certain that the majority of the people have to give up their dream to attain a lifestyle currently enjoyed by the people of developed countries.

We need to realize that growth in material prosperity has a limit; it will be growingly difficult to achieve it. Even the developed world with their ample capital and cutting-edge technologies cannot sustain material growth forever. The same is true with communities and individuals.

Then what will be the alternative foundation on which we secure our future? Efforts to find the answer will be a daunting task that will require many innovative ideas and approaches. This paper has described the conclusions of the workshop that we held to look for “hints” to support such efforts.

## 2. Unanticipated outputs in the workshops

The international workshop was aimed at (1) defining FURUSATO or home, and what the typical FURUSATO looks like, as OISCA is working to build “Our FURUSATO.” (2) It also sought to find how to develop the capacity to effectively contribute to successful FURUSATO building.

One of songs for school music classes, FURUSATO, admires the beautiful natural environment in rural setting, birthplaces for many people, who may bring to mind, and often miss. One of the main OISCA activities is conservation and restoration of nature in, for example, Satoyama – a semi-natural forest that coexists with a nearby populated area and is an important source of fuel, food, compost, etc. However, participants of the workshop emphasized humans, affections, trusts, and the place to nurture young generation – mostly human-oriented elements. Asked what they should support in FURUSATO, most of them replied they should support the next generation. In the following session on “an ideal human who can contribute to typical FURUSATO building”, more than half of them stressed sincerity, firmness of resolve, empathy, spirit of self-reliance – mostly connected to mental attitudes of humans.

The discussion in the workshop led to the conclusion that the participants – OISCA staff and supporters – sense the widening gap between what they thought should be, and actual deterioration in terms of spirituality, morality and mental attitudes. They appeared to feel it critical.

We do have rampant individualism, self-centeredness, which causes many incidences of deterioration in society. It may be possible to call the global environmental deterioration – global warming, pollution of air and water, and other problems – a product of humans’ self-centeredness, which created their insatiable pursuit of convenience and comfort. The workshop participants’ way of thinking, “for the benefit of next generation” would never be spawned if they were typically individualistic. What they said could be interpreted as their sense of crisis calling for more secure society that transcends the pursuits of security depending only on material prosperity.

Today many people have lost their familial ties and don’t bother to consciously maintain and regain their bonds with their family members. A newspaper article published recently described the following: Japan used to have firm familial bonds. The family members needed to support each other. Grand parents, parents and children all used to live together, and relatives often visited each

other. Their ties were forged as a matter of course. Many families today, however, are nuclear families. Each family member has a room for themselves often eating alone their separate meals. They live under the same roof, but separate life. Family, the smallest unit of communal life, and the members' mutual support system cannot be easily maintained unless they consciously try to build it. It has been years since they have lost naturally formed families.

OISCA has been providing training to overseas youth over the past more than 40 years. It gives trainees a humble sum of monthly allowance. In the past many of them saved the money to spend it later for their parents and families. Today trainees seem to use it for their own purposes. Many Asian countries have become better off and it may no longer be so much necessary that family members support each other.

Even remote communities, however cannot escape substantial changes produced on a global scale, some of which are caused by climate change, natural disasters, and economic and social influence given by global corporations. They are posing enormous challenges, which communal members must deal with by enhancing and facilitating their mutual cooperation. They need to strive to build a more resilient and vibrant rural communities. All people in the world must seek collective wisdom to figure out ways to move forward in preparation for ordeals that may lie ahead.

### 3. Power generated by “Inclusiveness x Bonds”

Sustainable future: “Sustainable Development” was a phrase that represented the core concept in the report, Our Common Future, published by the World Commission on the Environment and Development presided by Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway. Its definition was “Development that satisfy the needs of present generation without compromising the ability to develop in the future generations.”

“Sustainable Society” is where sustainable development is being implemented. Every aspect of it along with nature that surrounds human communities has the sufficient capacity, quantity and quality that satisfy the needs for sustainability. In the field of industries and technologies, industries driven by renewable energies, resources obtained without looking to, or less dependency on the sources overseas, effluent and industrial wastes giving no or less burdens on the environment, may be called industries fit for sustainable society.

Now focusing on communities and humans that make up “sustainable society” on a geographically small scale, particularly rural communities. Big corporations

and global companies may give threats to industries in small towns. Global climate change, natural calamities, may destroy physical structures in the localities. They may also have pollution by garbage or agro-chemicals, exodus of youth to urban areas, and decrease of labor force. They may also have problems in their inner self; individualisms, materialism, consumerism, which may all do harms to sustainable society.

Individual ability and efforts often bring about breakthrough in economic and industrial development. In Japan, however, rural communities at the limit of viability due to aging and depopulation have un-surmountable problems – complex reality - that cannot be solved with the capacity of individuals or a single corporation. As they are situated in between mountains, they have limited access to markets, limited areas for cultivation, and various disadvantages because of the geographical conditions.

OISCA invites trainees from overseas to its courses in Japan. They learn agricultural technologies, Japanese language and traditional cultures. They are often invited to visit rural communities meet in person groups of people who are struggling to earn their livelihoods in adverse conditions. One of the places they visit is Kashimo settlement, with about 1,000 households, the population 3,100. Kashimo is located in the northernmost part of Nakatsugawa, Gifu, central part of Japan. About 94 % of the area is covered with forests, and their main livelihood, forestry and its population had been shrinking year by year until they introduced innovative methods of sustainable livelihoods.

Although city-ward migration of young people has not completely stopped, their new industries turned them into an incomparably vibrant community. They have successfully developed the housing industry making use of their traditional product – timber. The whole village has cooperated and made their cherry tomato a local specialty, and are selling them at Michi-no-Eki (Station on the Road) or rest area where tourists stop their cars and do shopping.

They are also enthusiastic in promoting traditional culture. The local Kabuki – a traditional form of drama and music performed by male actors – have been revived attracting many tourists. Kashimo public officer in charge of promoting industries explained that the first step to achieve the success was the formation of Kashimo Village Building Council – a network of the villagers joined in by villagers. Their activity theme is “reassurance”, “human capacity development”, “self-reliance – promotion of industries” and “originality, mingling, and information”. They have more than 100 subcommittees, each of which have active members, led by their chairs. Almost all members including young,

middle-age and elderly people take part in one or some of them contributing to the concerted efforts to invigorate their village. Tomato Producers' Cooperative belongs to "Self-reliance Subcommittee" and Kabuki Preservation Association belongs to "Human Capacity Development Subcommittee." They also actively invite artists to visit their village and urge them to settle down.

Kashimo's achievements give us lessons. Their success has depended largely on the contributions from each and every villager, who takes part in the Subcommittee activities, and share information and experiences through the Council. They can provide their idea and openly deliberate on them. They have been successful in building their brands. They are open to outsiders. All occupations are connected horizontally and vertically. They have their own mechanism to support each other.

To summarize, Kashimo does not exclude the weak or outsiders but make use of their diverse inputs to strengthen their community. As a result, they have successfully enhanced their creativity, promoting industries, and revive traditional cultures. It has also been observed that collective and concerted efforts to promote their industries can enhance their capacity to confidently deal with negative force that could destroy their infrastructures and properties. In other words, they now have resilience to rehabilitate their livelihoods when damaged by forces arising from a cause beyond their control. The system with popular participation has made their community resilient and flexible. The high degree of solidarity forged through involvement of all people including children and elderly, as well as outsiders, is far more future-oriented than individualistic people with the principle of living only for the present. They do put into practice their idea and ethos – "for the benefit of future generations."

Kashimo has exemplified FURUSATO embraced by the participants of the OISCA Workshop. They retain rich nature and have established strong network of people developing their community worth handing over to the future generations. Now consideration on what outsiders' assistance – international cooperation – could be extended and make difference achieving a result as exemplified by Kashimo.

#### 4. Toward effective cooperation for "Sustainable Society"

In order to cope with threats derived from the global warming, it will be necessary to have rich nature sufficiently restored or conserved. The core activities should include the conservation and restoration of nature as well as support of sustainable agricultural and livelihoods development in rural communities. Let us focus on key factors that should be observed in the course

of extending cooperation to achieve sustainable rural communities, also reflecting upon some activities that are considered necessary and effective.

Empowerment of the vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized

This has been pointed out on many occasions, but is considered worth reiterating at this time. As shown in the example of Kashimo, they have involved not only young or middle-aged male members of community, who are considered frontrunners of economic development, but also children, elderly or disabled people. The latter are usually regarded as recipients of aid from society, but in Kashimo has invited them to make active contributions. Therefore it would be effective if they have been empowered. External cooperation in empowerment of such people would be worthwhile. It should be not only the support in terms of transferring technologies and helping them develop their skills, but also in terms of skills development to organize an effective mechanisms and create atmosphere to have them competent members of productive groups of people.

The following is an example in Indonesia: this country is achieving rapid economic development. Sizeable investment is spread not only in urban areas, but also to rural communities, creating jobs. But employment has been offered mostly men and single women. Housewives who have their children to support have not been given opportunities. Many of them engaged in agriculture, but cultivate only a limited types of crops. One of their problems is unbalanced nutrition.

Under the circumstances, OISCA started a project to help housewives make vegetable gardens and cultivate some cash crops as well in Sukabumi, South-Western part of Java. OISCA has been providing technical guidance to the housewives. This project has been run for three years. The housewives have set up their producers/marketing cooperatives. They also have taken the initiative in establishing a farm to produce crops to be marketed.

The marginalized people who have been slighted or neglected must have untapped potential to contribute to regional development. It will be essential that international cooperation projects should help them develop their potential.

Training program in group life

The participants of the workshop concluded that FURSATO should be built for the benefit of future generations. Kashimo example has demonstrated that a community of a multilayer structure involving diverse actors – men, women,

outsiders, children and elderly and their high degree of solidarity could provide better chances of thinking of the future, and working for the benefit of future generations. Today in urban areas, people generally are oriented towards individualistic lifestyles but people who care for the future generations must be more altruistic. If one leads life often acting alone, they could be inclined to be individualistic. If that is the case, they should be given greater opportunities to experience group life so that they have more empathy and even compassion.

OISCA provide agricultural training and the trainees are living in the dormitories. OISCA has training centers in different countries. What they have in common is trainees sharing their rooms. There are three training centers in Japan, and they accommodate trainees from different cultural backgrounds. The trainees live together under the same roof, and eat together the same meals. Japanese youth join them. Since they are from different countries, and often belong to different age groups, they, at times, have discords. But rigorous training with discipline could provide them atmosphere and time to foster friendship. Their experience should be the start of action taken for the purpose of handing over to future generations a better world – sustainable communities.

They don't stick to a particular area but study holistically

People in Kashimo don't stick to a particular subject but carry on numerous activities simultaneously as a means to have their community and livelihoods survive. Their participatory approach focuses on various themes such as culture, welfare, industries, and education. They have revived their traditional Kabuki, which is presented at their special playhouse, "Meiji-za". This theater is used by artists who visit this village from outside. All these activities attract increasing number of tourists from other parts of Japan. It is considered that their activities are interconnected, and provide synergetic effects. This gives us lesson – external assistance should be formulated so that it gives positive influence not only on a single sector, but many others which are interrelated.

At OISCA training centers in Japan trainees from Asian countries receive training. The subject is mainly agriculture. The trainees also learn Japanese language. They learn the local language and come close to Japanese culture. They can associate with Japanese farmers and supporters directly. They make warm friendship with Japanese people. Their strong relationships often last long and lead to direct assistance from Japanese supporters provided to the young trainees, who still need mentor and supports. Their direct interaction with Japanese supporters deepen their understanding and experience distinct feelings that they are making progress through their training program in Japan. They can change their ways of thinking and attitudes.



Next is a case study of Papua New Guinea. OISCA training center in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea provide training to young people from all over the country. Their dormitory sometimes accommodates youth from tribes who are antagonistic to each other. Formerly fighting often broke out between trainees from tribes who couldn't get along with. Papua New Gueinea most people are Christians and they set up a church within the premises of the Center and named it, "The House of God for All who believe in Jesus." They started moral education provided by clergymen. As a result tribal conflicts in the Center decreased markedly.

If a training program is aimed only at providing skills and techniques efficiently, the Center's function must be divided vertically into divisions, and the trainees should concentrate on their study and training in techniques. It appears that the programs based on ODA in particular adopt this method invariably. However, if the root cause of the problems that we are confronted with today can be identified as self-centeredness and materialism, concerning more humans' mind-setting and mental attitudes, it may be preferable the training should be provided holistically, even touching on culture and religions. Causes and effects in rural community development extend over a wide range of issues. "Kaizen" – improvement could ultimately be effected more when people try to deal with the whole.

The three examples mentioned above specifically contrive situations which to bring people into close proximity. They are aimed at fostering people's sociability. When the global community is faced with various problems including abnormal weathers stemming from man-made causes that have emerged in rampant individualism and materialism, sociability and care for others could be a seed for hope. If there are many people with a spirit of cooperation will play a great role in creating strong and resilient society that can be confidently handed over to next generation. Participants of the workshop emphasized and repeated such words as "determination", "discipline", "a spirit of self-reliance", "empathy", "altruism" and "dedication – commitment". All of these words represent ideal characters and capacity of people who can dedicate themselves to the task to create a sustainable future.