

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Hiramatsu
International Seminar
India-Japan Partnership for Achieving SDGs

Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog,
Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Director, ICRIER,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to organize this event on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with ICRIER.

India is the most appropriate country to think about how we can implement SDGs. As the target year of 2030 approaches, India will be the third largest economy in the world by 2028, with the world's largest and very young population. Without attaining success in India over SDGs, we cannot achieve the vision of 2030 Agenda.

I am particularly pleased that Japan is able to co-host this event at this time of the year. Only a week ago, we celebrated the International Women's Day, on 8th March. Women's empowerment and their active participation in all walks of life are indispensable to achieve the SDGs.

As an ardent supporter of women's agenda, I hope today's discussion will help brighten the future of women as well. Today, we will immerse ourselves into discussions on the select themes of health, hygiene and environment, issues all critical to women and their families.

I personally once led the international discussions on the 2030 Agenda at its very early stage, as Ambassador in charge of Global Issues. Through these processes, we were successful in transforming the way we look at sustainable development.

At the time of MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), the predecessor of SDGs, they were only meant for developing countries. However, now the SDGs are applicable to all the countries and all the people. Sustainable development can only be pursued through inclusive and concerted global efforts. Japan is actively participating in these global efforts.

During the era of MDGs, people often treated each goal separately. Now we are mindful of the interlinkages of different goals. For example, we are fully aware that we cannot take “water” as a single issue in a silo, but that we need to consider the food-water-energy nexus.

The concepts of “leaving no one behind” and a “people-centered approach” have always been strongly promoted by Japan.

Japan is a leader in highlighting human security. Human security calls for “people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people”. We should revisit this notion in the time of SDGs.

Japan is keen to consolidate global efforts to accelerate the implementation of SDGs, as it prepares to host the G20 and TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) this year.

Japan is committed to assisting resilient and environmentally friendly nation building of its partners. We are also willing to invest in their people. Health, sanitation and environment are some of the areas Japan focuses on. Though I will leave the details to subsequent sessions, let me sketch out a broader picture here.

On health, Japan is a leader in promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Japan is supporting India in its efforts towards UHC under ‘Ayushman Bharat’, by aligning with Japan’s Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative.

Japan accomplished the UHC in 1961. We are pleased to share our experiences and expertise in this area. We will also cooperate with India for human resource exchanges of doctors and healthcare professionals, as well as for the introduction of well-tested medical systems of Japan, including its advanced information technologies.

Of course, the SDGs demand concerted efforts by both public and private sectors. So, Japanese companies are on board. One good example is Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, which hires more than 3,500 women as Life Planning Officers, thereby empowering women socially and economically.

NGOs are also our indispensable partners and you will hear about the work of ‘Malaria No More Japan’, today.

Hygiene or sanitation is the area we attach particular importance on. Better hygiene is indispensable for achieving healthier lives of Indian people and realizing “Clean India”. Japan’s ODA is being used to upgrade waste water treatment in India, contributing to “Clean Ganga”. Japanese companies are active in this field, too. LIXIL, which is present here today, is manufacturing affordable and safe toilets in Andhra Pradesh. What is more, this company is planning to train plumbers to raise the level of their skills.

“Mottainai” is a Japanese word, meaning “Don’t make something wasteful”, a word embodying the spirit of resource consciousness. A picture book of “Mottainai Grandma” is hugely popular in Japan to promote the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle). Now the book is available in Hindi, and is being used in schools in Delhi and beyond.

Environment protection is a subject high on the agenda of our G20 presidency. We are planning to focus our discussions on marine plastic litter, as well as climate change and energy.

Japan has been an active partner for environment and biodiversity conservation in India. Our Embassy has launched “Blue Sky Initiatives” to contribute to cleaner air, using Japanese technologies, such as Hybrid cars. Hitachi Zosen, also present here today, is converting waste to electricity in Madhya Pradesh.

I mentioned that SDGs are relevant to all the countries. That means, they are relevant to both India AND Japan. It also means we can partner with each other to better tackle our common challenges. That is why Japan and India very recently exchanged notes to provide a 15 billion yen ODA loan for the implementation of SDGs in India.

I am pleased that Dr. Rajiv Kumar is joining us today, as he is leading the efforts in India to implement SDGs.

Implementing SDGs requires active participation by all the relevant stakeholders. The best way to achieve this is through raising public awareness. I am grateful to ICRIER for providing such an opportunity along with us today.

Japan is taking a whole-of-society approach to effectively implement SDGs. Prime Minister Abe chairs SDGs Promotion Headquarter where all the Ministers participate. We hold roundtables with stakeholders and ensure public and civic participations. Today's seminar is an extension of our efforts.

India is indispensable to achieve the future we want. And Japan and India are enjoying the best relations ever. Our relationship is now designated as a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership”. I am pleased that today we can hold discussions which are very pertinent to such a partnership.

I hope every one of you will take a moment today to rethink what you can do for achieving the SDGs, and how you can join in our common endeavor.

I wish you a great seminar today.

Thank you.