

2024年6月

## Seminar “Revisiting ‘Population and Development’ from a Well-being Perspective”

On 4 June 2024, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA; Secretariat of JPPFP) held a seminar entitled “*Revisiting ‘Population and Development’ from a Well-being Perspective*” at the International Conference Room of the First Members’ Office Building, the House of Representatives. The seminar consisted of a tripartite dialogue and discussion on how a well-being point of view could cultivate the sociality and creativity of each individual in every generation in Japan. In addition, H.E. Kamikawa Yoko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, gave a special lecture on Japan’s well-being initiatives, global issues, and beyond 2030. The seminar was attended by a total of 80 people, 70 in person and 10 online, including Members of Parliament, representatives of enterprises, media, experts, students, and others.

*N.B. Please note that this article was translated from Japanese into English, for which APDA is responsible.*

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### 【Introduction】



In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more people are becoming aware of the importance of well-being, which is defined as “being in a state of good physical, mental, and social condition”.

International organizations and academia have been discussing well-being indicators and measures and their socioeconomic impact, both domestically and internationally. In Japan, the government has been promoting initiatives related to well-being, such as its Basic Policies, at the national and local levels, while business and academia are actively implementing projects with growing public interest in well-being.

The concept of well-being, which is generally interchangeable with happiness, is now drawing much attention because people are starting to reconsider how the Japanese society should evolve given its ageing population with fewer children and shrinking population and are starting to reflect more seriously than ever before on the lives they lead, such as the meaning of life and work.

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## 【Opening Remarks】

**H.E. Fukuda Yasuo, Chair of APDA and Former Prime Minister of Japan**, emphasized the importance of grasping the issues of population and development such as the SDGs, from both macro and micro perspectives, looking into not only the number of people, but also the quality of each and every person's life. He expressed his appreciation to the eminent experts who consented to participate as panelists and his hope that this seminar would contribute to making better policies for the future.



H.E. Fukuda Yasuo  
Former Prime Minister of Japan  
and Chair of APDA

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## 【Panel Session】

### Panelists:

**Kano Mitsunobu**, Vice Executive Director, Dean of the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems Professor of Okayama University

**Higuchi Yuriko**, Professor, Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Division of Biomedical Sciences, Kyoto University

**Noritake Ryoji**, Chair and CEO of Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPI)

**Moderator: Prof. Ikegami Kiyoko**, Secretary General of APDA

### 【Question 1】

Various measures were implemented by respective governments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having them in mind, what aspect of well-being is important for older persons to be mentally and physically healthy and to live proactive in Japan's super-ageing society?

**Prof. Higuchi:** One of the very difficult aspects of the COVID-19 measures was that personal values played a large role. It is difficult to decide what measures are best, since people living in different environments or countries could have different value

standards. Especially, achieving well-being is a very challenging task, because it involves people's feelings for happiness that they may not even be able to grasp or verbalize.

**Mr. Noritake:** It was great that the COVID-19 measures protected the lives of older people, but it meant placing them in isolation surrounded by plastic curtains in care homes and other facilities. The society as a whole needs to think about “what is the purpose of life?” and “What is life for?”. There is more to life than biological survival. I think there needs to be more discussion on this point in Japan.

**Prof. Kano:** I have the opportunity to work for the government, and its work is based on statistics. That is because if we do not get a whole picture, we may make mistakes. Having said that, what is “statistically correct” may hold true for many people, but not for everyone. Even if “outliers” are observed in statistics, they are individuals who represent a valid segment of the population. Introducing “statistically correct” measures does not necessarily lead to individual happiness. I think we need to strike a balance between the “whole” and the “individuals”.



Prof. Kano Mitsunobu  
Vice Executive Director,  
Dean of the School of  
Pharmaceutical Sciences,  
Graduate School of  
Interdisciplinary Science  
and Engineering in Health  
Systems Professor of  
Okayama University

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### [Question 2]

What kind of initiatives will be important to create a society in which young people feel like living longer?

**Prof. Higuchi:** As I am involved in research and education at university, I would like to teach my students about the importance of delving into answerless questions and working together through the process of finding answers. I believe that through this learning process, they will be able to have a solid ground for their own happiness and give an insight into how they see the world, which can lead to the creation of a new society.

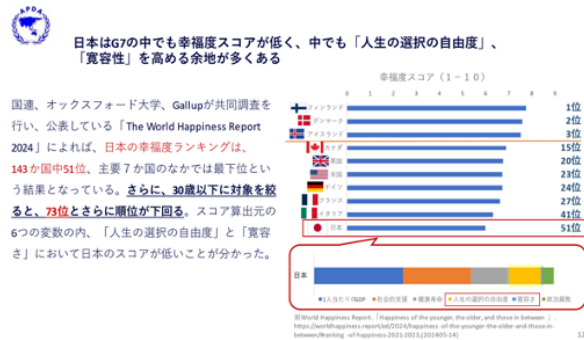
**Mr. Noritake:** It is very important for everyone, including younger generations, to think about and actively communicate how to live and learn, rather than letting higher-ups decide for you. In this post-pandemic phase, I believe that “biopolitics”, which was outlined by Michel Foucault, should be re-examined. Listening to the voices of younger generations is a necessary process for the good of the nation.

**Prof. Kano:** I referred to statistics earlier, and “what everyone thinks is right” is not necessarily right for you. That is why each one of us should think about what is right.

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### [Question 3]

According to the “World Happiness Report 2024”, Japan ranked 51st out of 143 countries, the lowest among the Group of Seven nations. Furthermore, young Japanese (aged 30 and under) ranked even lower at 73rd. Of the six variables, “GDP per capita”, “social support”, “healthy life expectancy”, “freedom to make life choices”, “generosity”, and “perception of corruption”, Japan scored low in “freedom to make life choices” and “generosity”.



*What role is expected of the working-age population in realizing a society where Japan's next generation can feel more “freedom to make life choices”?*

**Mr. Noritake:** We should not discuss “freedom” if it refers to pseudo freedom or freedom only in a modern or contemporary sense of the word. It is necessary to discuss it from a broader public perspective. For example, when it comes to making a decision to take over a family business, some may say these people have no career options. But we need to move the discussion forward to a more holistic view; we should talk about a sense of pride in what they do, and a wide range of options available other than going to university in Tokyo and joining a good company.



Mr. Noritake Ryoji  
Chair and CEO of Health  
and Global Policy Institute  
(HGPI)

**Prof. Kano:** If we take the time to think about what kind of skills are required as a whole, which ones you already have, and which ones you have to ask someone else to do for you, it will enable us to bring a broader public perspective to discussions, as Mr. Noritake mentioned.

**Prof. Higuchi:** What Mr. Noritake just said is thought-provoking, in terms of freedom. Freedom is not only about making choices from a large array of options. Even when people make choices from a limited set of options, it is very important that they feel satisfied with their decisions.

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### [Question 4]

What is the role expected of the current generation in achieving a society in which

the next generation can feel more “generosity” in Japan?

**Prof. Kano:** It seems that in our society, there is a single-ish standard for determining which is superior or inferior, and which is capable or incapable. Perhaps there could be more diverse standards that you can measure against. It would be good if various standards could create a new awareness that individual variations balance out in a society with diverse people.

**Prof. Higuchi:** In order to realize variations from the standard, it is important to know yourself first. Without knowing yourself, you would not be able to recognize differences from others. You may learn to look at yourself objectively by tackling various challenges or thinking about yourself through daily communications with friends in the days of your youth.



Prof. Higuchi Yuriko  
Professor, Graduate School  
of Pharmaceutical  
Sciences, Division of  
Biomedical Sciences, Kyoto  
University

**Mr. Noritake:** I think we need to pursue every person’s freedom and happiness in a mature civil society. I think that building a society where people can respect each other’s happiness will lead to the value of generosity.

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## 【Special Lecture by Minister for Foreign Affairs H.E. Kamikawa Yoko】



H.E. Kamikawa Yoko  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website:**

[H.E. Kamikawa Yoko, Minister for Foreign Affairs, delivered a speech at the seminar “Population and Development Issues from a Well-being Perspective” \(Japanese\).](#)

[Lecture by Minister for Foreign Affairs H.E. Kamikawa Yoko \(Japanese\).](#)

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## 【Discussion】



Hon. Makishima Karen

**Hon. Makishima Karen:** As for the elderly, I believe that Japan can disseminate the concept of “Ikigai”, the idea of which is to have a purpose in one’s life is key to happiness, to the rest of the world. When older persons play a role that is different from work– it may be a leader in the community, etc.– it will become their pride and joy in life, rather than a burden. What are your thoughts on this?

**Mr. Noritake:** I have also heard that “Ikigai” is a concept that can be exported abroad. Perhaps the world has changed its view on Japan in the last 30 years or so. I think a paradigm shift occurred when people realized that being connected to society in some way, whether at work or in the community, forms the basis for a healthy and long-living society. This is how this momentum of transferring “Ikigai” globally has grown. Having achieved healthy longevity, Japan is in the right place to bring this concept into the global spotlight.



Hon. Niki Hirobumi

**Hon. Niki Hirobumi:** Through today’s seminar, I feel that in our finite lives, just being able to try various things is key to happiness – of course it is best if good results are achieved out of trying many options. I think this is a major pillar of well-being. On that point, it was mentioned that it is difficult to use a single piece of data as an indicator of well-being; what do you think about how to use the data?

**Ms. Higuchi:** Data is used to explain things, in my view. In research, a philosophy comes before the data, and the data is used to explain the philosophy. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of data, interpret the data (figures) appropriately from multiple perspectives, and use them well to feed into the next step.

**Hon. Shimizu Kayoko, Former Minister of Environment:** I have been involved in APDA’s activities for 30 years and am very impressed that the concept of well-being is taken up in a seminar like this. I am glad that freedom is now so abundant that we have too many options to choose from, since I once lived in a time when we lacked freedom. However, I am shocked by the data I just saw. There are so many people in Japan who do not want to live longer. In our generation, not many people wish they had not lived longer. So, this data makes me worried that there are a lot of problems.



Hon. Shimizu Kayoko  
Former Minister of  
Environment

**Dr. Yamamoto Taro, Emeritus Professor of Nagasaki University:** Every patient has a different story, and while evidence-based medical treatment is necessary, I have recently begun to think that it may be important to provide a kind of medical care that is not only evidence-based, but also value-based, based on the value of each individual. When we think about population issues and well-being, today's discussion made me realize that if we look at population issues from a macro perspective, they have to do with the issues of national security and economy, while if we look at these issues from a more value-based perspective, I think they boil down to the happiness and well-being of each and every individual.



Dr. Yamamoto Taro  
Emeritus Professor of  
Nagasaki University



Hon. Abe Toshiko  
State Minister of  
Education, Culture,  
Sports, Science and  
Technology

**Hon. Abe Toshiko, State Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology:** Since we have young people here today, I would like to ask them a couple of questions. The first question is, please raise your hand if you want to live longer. (A few people raised their hands.) The second question, please raise your hand if you love yourself. (Several people raised their hands.) I believe it is important to create a society in which we can love ourselves and do what we want to do. Those who do not want to live longer, please tell me why in secret later.

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## 【Conclusion】

**Mr. Noritake:** As H.E. Fukuda referred to the macro and micro perspectives at the beginning, I strongly feel that we need to reconsider human activities on a micro scale, translating them into policies or overhauling policies, especially in the medical field. Also, seeing that not many young participants gave positive responses to Hon. Abe's questions, it got me thinking. But young people's enjoying their youth and their hope to live longer may be two entirely different things.

**Prof. Higuchi:** Words can be construed in different ways depending on the person. For instance, today's seminar has made me re-think about the meaning of freedom. I also think that happiness differs from person to person. Well-being is based on such diverse perceptions and it varies from person to person, so we may face the challenge in translating well-being into policy, and it may be limited by engaging a large number of people and their diverse perspectives.

**Prof. Kano:** When we look into well-being, there is a hypothesis that if GDP goes up, well-being will also go up. The data, however, proved otherwise. When we talk about “Beyond GDP”, we have to look at what can be managed with money and what cannot.

**Dr. Ikegami:** Listening to the participants today, I was reminded once again that the freedom of individual choices is extremely important. Some say that the word “generosity” is a condescending word, but I hope that we can build a society where people respect each other with an open mind in the hope that younger generations will feel happy, glad to be alive, and want to live longer. From now on, we would like to further our discussions on well-being toward policy recommendations.



Prof. Ikegami Kiyoko,  
Secretary General of  
APDA

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## JPPF

Established in 1974, JPPF has the longest history in the world as a supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development. JPPF, in concert with APDA, has created a network of parliamentarians on population and development, through which a diverse range of knowledge and experience has been shared to accomplish concrete results.

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