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Citi Foundation



Seven Years of Youth Co:Lab in Japan: UNDP and Citi Foundation Driving Youth-Led Social Innovation

Tokyo – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Citi Foundation marked the seventh year of Youth Co:Lab activities in Japan in 2025, continuing its commitment to empowering young social entrepreneurs and accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Since its launch in 2017, Youth Co:Lab has been advancing social innovation across the Asia-Pacific region, recognizing that youth-led innovation plays a critical role in achieving the SDGs. The initiative supports young innovators and strengthens entrepreneurial ecosystems by engaging governments, civil society, and the private sector.

In October, “Youth Co:Lab Japan Dialogue 2025 in Hokkaido~ From Local to Global: Expanding SDGs Impact through Social Entrepreneurship ~” was co-hosted by Otaru University of Commerce, and with support from the Hokkaido Startup Future Creation Development by the Japan Finance Corporation (JFC) and Mutual Support Networks (HSFC), which is a university-based startup support platform, managed in collaboration with Japanese universities in Hokkaido area.

The keynote address featured Ms. Hiroko Okubo from JFC, who delivered a lecture on the latest trends in social entrepreneurship in Japan. The panel discussion featured Ms. Tomoka Ishikawa, CEO of Tozuki LLC, who launched her business in her twenties, and Mr. Takayuki Tanabe, Entrepreneurship Promotion Ambassador at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Science and Technology (MEXT) and CEO of Panasonic ITS Co., Ltd. The session provided valuable insights into the realities and challenges of advancing regional revitalization. The importance of ‘serendipity’ emerged as a central theme of the discussion.

Ms. Hideko Hadzialic, Director of the UNDP Representation Office in Tokyo, highlighted common social challenges faced both domestically and globally, emphasized the critical role of youth and social entrepreneurship in addressing these challenges. She also shared examples of social entrepreneurs expanding into overseas markets through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Associate Professor Kanae Fujimi from Otaru University of Commerce highlighted examples of university–corporate partnerships and emphasized the importance of building “connections” and the power of bringing people together.

On 20 November, the SDG-focused business contest “Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2025 Alumni Grand Prix – Demo Day” took place. In its seventh year, this special edition brought together past winners of the contest. Seven teams, selected from 32 previous award-winning teams, showcased the evolution of their businesses and their visions for the future. The event gathered a diverse audience representing the public and

private sectors as well as academia, with more than 100 participants joining both onsite and online to witness the dynamic and inspiring pitches.

The seven awardees of the Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2025 Alumni Grand Prix:

- **The Grand Prize, the CVC Award, the Audience Award:** Shunta Igarashi, With The World Inc. “Connecting Global Classrooms to Build a Peaceful, Inclusive World Free from War”
- **The Excellence Award, the Yachiyo Future Impact Award:** Reiji Kobayashi, HAKKI GROUP Inc. “Redefining Credit for a New Era”
- **The Challenge Award:** Ryosuke Himeno, WAKU Inc. “Achieving Food Security through the Plant Stress-Response Molecule “Glutathione””
- **The UNHCR Award, the Yachiyo Future Impact Award:** Rie Tonomura, Dots for Inc. “Digital hub for digitally divided rural communities in Africa”
- **The CVC Award:** Riko Yasuda, YOMY Inc. “Next-generation EdTech: ‘YOMY!’ an online school empowering children to express themselves through picture books and dialogue”
- **The AWS Award for women entrepreneurs:** Mariko McTier, Social Innovation Japan, mymizu, “Refill for the Future: Building a Better World, One Action at a Time”
- **The Yachiyo Future Impact Award:** Mio Tsunoda, Darajapan Inc. “AI x IT Human Resource Development and Employment Support for Emerging Countries IMANI Hacking”

Mr. Shunta Igarashi, CEO of With The World Inc., who won the Grand Prix at the Alumni edition, expressed his gratitude, saying:

“It is a great honour to receive this prestigious award, and I am deeply grateful. Around the world, there are still a number of children who wish to learn but lack access to education. My starting point was the pure gaze of children I met in the slums who showed me their desire to learn.

With The World was founded to respond to that aspiration, creating opportunities for young people to learn together across borders and shape the future together. This award represents the strength of the teammates and partners around the world who have joined us in this challenge. We will continue striving to build a society where every child can learn, recognize one another, and take action to address social issues. I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who planned, organized, and supported the Youth Co:Lab Social Innovation Challenge, and to all who have stood by us.”

This Grand Prix was co-hosted by the University of Tokyo, CVC Foundation/CVC Capital Partners, Amazon Web Services (AWS), and Yachiyo Engineering Co., Ltd., with support from the UNHCR Representation in Japan and UTokyo Innovation Platform Co., Ltd., and under auspice of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

Winning teams will receive the opportunity to participate in training programme, leveraging Youth Co:Lab’s unique Asia-Pacific network, mentoring support from Citi, CVC, UNHCR, and Yachiyo Engineering, as well as grant prizes for the CVC Award, AWS Award, and Yachiyo Future Impact Award.

About Youth Co:Lab:

Co-created in 2017 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region 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. Learn more at www.youthcolab.org or follow @youthcolab



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**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 the planet.

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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, catalyse job opportunities for youth and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities. The Citi Foundation's "More than Philanthropy" approach leverages the enormous expertise of Citi and its people to fulfil our mission and drive thought leadership and innovation. For more information, visit www.citifoundation.com.

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