



**For Immediate Release
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UNDP and Citi Foundation Host Youth Social Entrepreneurship Programme “Youth Co:Lab Japan 2022”

Tokyo - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation held Youth Co:Lab events in Japan for the fourth consecutive year in 2022. Youth Co:Lab is the largest movement in the Asia-Pacific region to support young social entrepreneurs in starting and growing businesses that accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Youth Co:Lab believes that fostering a commitment to social innovation among the young is essential to achieving the SDGs. Adopting the SDGs’ principle of “*Leave No One Behind*” as the theme for 2022, two main types of events were delivered online. The first was Japan Dialogues, symposiums where experts and young entrepreneurs discuss ways to expand the involvement of government, civil society, and the private sector in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. The second event was the SDG entrepreneur contest Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2022, which aims to support young people with innovative business ideas to solve social and environmental challenges. This year, Youth Co:Lab Japan shed a spotlight on businesses that help difficult-to-reach members of the community access support and services.

The first Japan Dialogue session, “*Tackling environmental challenges - Young entrepreneurs and the expanding ecosystem*,” took place in September. This session focused on the efforts and initiatives of the government and young entrepreneurs working on environmental issues.

Two environmental entrepreneurs — Mr. Seiya Ashikari, CEO of ecologgie Inc., a start-up that aims to create a new food cycle using crickets as an eco-friendly alternative protein resource, and Ms. Akira Sakano, Director of Zero Waste Japan/Green innovation, which is co-creating a zero-waste model and building a decarbonized society — discussed their visions and challenges. In addition, Ms. Saya Mizuno, Deputy Director for Green Finance at the Ministry of the Environment, explained the role of the government in the environmental and economic field. The panel was moderated by Ms. Lisa Fujise, who is a project leader at CIC Tokyo, a company engaged in creating innovation ecosystems; a senior researcher at venture company Innoqua Inc.; and a specially appointed assistant professor at Hiroshima University. The panelists discussed the importance of thinking globally and of government, startups, and the financial sector communicating and learning from one another to build a stronger ecosystem.

The second Japan Dialogue session, “*Towards a society where no one is left behind - the social entrepreneurs’ approach*,” was held in October and focused on initiatives to create a diverse and inclusive society from the perspectives of entrepreneurship and youth. The panel welcomed four speakers who are working to create “a society and future where no one is left behind.” While they

have different targets and approaches, they share a passion for solving social problems and involving others in their activities.

The panel included two social entrepreneurs: Ms. Yuriko Oda, a representative director of WheelLog and non-profit organization Patients Association for Distal Myopathy (PADM) and Ms. Mizuki Fukuju, representative director of Lorans Ltd. Yuriko has developed a barrier-free map app to create a world where people in wheelchairs and with mobility issues can fully enjoy their lives; Mizuki runs several businesses, including a café and flower shops in Tokyo, with the mission of “creating a society where everyone blooms, without exclusion”. Forty five of her 65 staff have physical or mental disabilities. They were joined by Mr. Reiji Yamanaka, managing director of KIBOW Impact Investment Fund, a fund that aims to generate a social impact alongside a financial return. The session was moderated by Ms. Chika Suzuki, a 20-year-old who is secretary general of the Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability (JYPS) and participates in the government's SDGs Promotion Roundtable Meeting as a youth representative.

The final pitch contest of Social Innovation Challenge Japan 2022 was held on November 15. A total of 54 applications from all over Japan and overseas were whittled down to eight finalists in two rounds of screening. The finalists presented their SDG business ideas to the judges and to an online audience of more than 200 people. Based on this year's theme, a Leave No One Behind Award was also presented this year. The five winners, which included two high school students, received the following awards:

- The Excellence Award & CVC award: **Mr. Kenshi Uchihashi, Yuni Inc.** “Transforming Japan from a waste-producing country to a resource-rich country by converting incineration plants into recycling factories.”
- The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) Award: **Ms. Himawari Motojima** “REF PROJECT — breaking the chain of poverty with the power of business”
- The Scalability Award: **Mr. Sho Nakata, Dots for Inc.** “Building a digital platform in rural Africa”
- The Audience Award: **Mr. Ryosuke Himeno, WAKU** “Using high-growth seedlings to bring sustainability to the forestry industry”
- The Judge's Special Award & CVC Award: **Mr. Hayato Kano, RelieFood Inc.** “Choppiri Egg Cookie — a cookie designed for people with food allergies”

The eight finalists, along with the teams selected in Youth Co:Lab contests in 28 other Asia-Pacific countries/regions, will participate in an accelerator programme called “Springboard Programme” starting in February 2023. The teams who produce the best results in the programme will be able to showcase their businesses during the Regional Summit 2023.

Mr. Kenshi Uchihashi, the Excellence Award and CVC Award winner, said: “I am very honored to receive the Excellence Award and the CVC Award. While recycling bedding material is a very niche service, our mission goes beyond that: we are tackling the challenges of the Japanese waste market, which favors incineration disposal. Through our business, we want to create a new social order in which materials are not wasted.”

Tetsuo Kondo, Director of the UNDP Representation Office in Tokyo, said: “Through the power of the Social Innovation Challenge finalists and Japan Dialogues panel speakers, we believe that this year's Youth Co:Lab has inspired not only those who want to start their own business but also those who want to take action to achieve the SDGs. Youth Co:Lab will continue to work towards achieving the SDGs by involving more people, especially the young.”

Lee Waite, Citi Country Officer for Japan, said: “As the Youth Co:Lab enters its fourth year in Japan, we are more encouraged than ever by the powerful and innovative initiatives of young people. Citi places great emphasis on giving back to the local community through its Citizenship contribution

activities, particularly in vocational training and entrepreneurship support for young people with the aim of creating employment opportunities around the world. Together with UNDP and other stakeholders, we will continue to make our endeavor to further strengthen the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. “

About Youth Co:Lab:

Co-created in 2017 by UNDP and the Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims 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. Youth Co:Lab also aims to foster young people's 21st Century skills by offering mentorship support for young entrepreneurs through the Springboard Programme, and collaborating closely with partners in the social entrepreneur ecosystem.

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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 planet.

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About Citi:

Citi is a preeminent banking partner for institutions with cross-border needs, a global leader in wealth management and a valued personal bank in its home market of the United States. Citi does business in nearly 160 countries and jurisdictions, providing corporations, governments, investors, institutions and individuals with a broad range of financial products and services.

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

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