



Sustainability, Finance and Japan's Road Ahead: FDSF Conference 2023

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July 2023

The Future Design Initiative by Science and Finance (FDSF) Global Conference 2023, hosted by Brunswick Japan, FDSF and Archetype Ventures this month, convened a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the intersection of sustainability, finance and science. Speakers represented large companies including Toyota, Morgan Stanley, Bloomberg, Mizuho, Daiwa Asset Management and Asahi Kasei; government bodies; startups; academia and more.

Key takeaways

Japan has valuable, untapped potential in sustainability

Brunswick Partner Tereza Kaneta moderated a panel that included Matthew Leatherman (Focusing Capital on the Long Term's (FCLT) managing director) Yumi Otsuka (Toyota's chief sustainability officer) and Robert Feldman (Morgan Stanley MUFG senior advisor) to discuss Japan's strengths and weaknesses within the context of sustainability.

- They praised the Japanese culture of dense information networks (study groups, alumni meetings, etc.) as a means to circulate information and foster relationships, as well as the wealth of technology that can be used to tackle environmental issues.
- The panel also criticized the sluggish decision-making process that plagues most levels of society, as well as the tendency for people to stay within the same social circles.
- It is essential that Japanese companies maintain a sense of urgency in the environmental crisis, while actively facilitating cross-communication between a diverse group of stakeholders to spark discussion and innovation, and to create a truly sustainable society.

The next generation is eager to engage with sustainability, but finds Japan's current climate limits learning opportunities

University students from Tokyo University, the University of Edinburgh, Ochanomizu University and Hitotsubashi University, as well as Kyushu University Associate Professor Kim Schumacher, discussed how the next generation views sustainability.

- They highlighted the lack of discussion-based learning in Japanese tertiary education and emphasized the need (both within and outside the university context) to provide to develop a deeper understanding and consciousness of sustainability and other social issues.
- Companies must commit to educating, communicating with, and connecting with Japan's next generation about sustainability, to develop a workforce that can thrive in a complex, ever-changing world.

Panelists posited that government initiatives may be the conduit for promoting sustainability in the private sector and society at large

Brunswick Senior Consultant Yoichiro led a panel discussion with Ken Shibusawa (Brunswick Senior Advisor, CEO of Shibusawa and Company, founder of Commons Asset Management), Yo Yarimizu (director general for general environmental policy at Japan's Ministry of the Environment), Yojiro Hatakeyama (Director General for METI) and Shigeaki Tanaka (former director general for the Intellectual Property Strategy Secretariat, Cabinet Office).

- The panel emphasized the importance of investing in future human capital, as well as synchronized societal and corporate sustainability movements, such as convincing asset managers and owners to support and actively tackle sustainability issues in the investment chain.
- Japan's companies should be utilizing the public sector's resources (including regulation) to fuel their activities and achieve a truly sustainable business model.

Japan has a solid foundation and undeniable potential for developing sustainable finance and other sustainability-related actions. The FDSF Conference highlighted the potential for sustainability as not just a marketing gimmick, but a viable value-creation opportunity with high stakeholder expectations and anticipation for its future growth.

To continue the conversation

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