

Satoshi Ishida, 2022

Volume 3, pp. 19-39

Received: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

Revised: 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Accepted: 28<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Date of Publication: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/socv3.1939>

This paper can be cited as: Ishida, S. (2022). Drivers and Challenges in Municipal SDGs from Collaborative Governance Perspective. *Socialis Series in Social Science*, 3, 19-39.

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## **DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES IN MUNICIPAL SDGS FROM COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

*Collaborative governance is gaining attention as a model for improving public administration and increasing citizens' trust in government. Over the past two decades, theoretical and empirical studies have considered mechanisms for new forms of governance, and a variety of evidence assures that stakeholders can come together and work cooperatively to solve mutual problems. Existing research indicates that collaborative governance can be a possible alternative to command-and-control or adversarial policymaking and its implementation. In addition, there is interest in research that recognizes the variables that influence collaborative governance outcomes and whether collaboration is successful. These include the initial conditions of a collaborative process and essential elements of collaborative placemaking, such as trust-building and facilitative leadership. This study analyzes the literature on collaborative governance in terms of theoretical and empirical aspects, focusing on municipal SDGs in Japan. The SDGs are aimed at sustainable development in both developed and developing countries, and recently even in*

*Japan, some local governments have been actively working to rethink their existing policies in terms of SDGs. This study examines the drivers, conditions, and challenges of collaborative governance from the perspective of municipal SDGs.*

## **Keywords**

Collaborative Governance, Collaboration, Municipal SDGs, Regional Revitalization

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

New forms of governance are emerging to meet the growing demand for governance to effectively address sustainable development issues. These attempt to develop effective policies through cross-sectoral collaboration rather than total reliance on the government. The shift to more collaborative forms of governance is playing an important role in government efforts to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

An appropriate approach to policy formation and public management is needed to achieve cross-sectoral governance that is based on public-private partnerships and effective decision-making. Many studies define collaborative governance as a strategy that coordinates and integrates the goals and interests of multiple stakeholders. In a narrow sense, collaborative governance is a tool to foster collaboration to solve problems and conflicts that cannot be solved by a single sector alone and to resolve conflicts among the parties involved. In a more ambitious sense, it encompasses the restructuring of democracy through an inclusive process that gives non-state actors a voice. This includes partnerships among stakeholders as well as integrated and hybrid arrangements (Agrawal & Lemos 2007).

This study analyzes the literature on collaborative governance from both theoretical and empirical aspects. After confirming the significance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a governance tool, this paper focuses on the "Municipal SDGs", which have been actively addressed by local governments in Japan. This study examines the drivers, conditions, and challenges of collaborative governance from the perspective of the SDGs for local governments. The methodology is based on a literature review of previous studies on municipal SDGs and reports published by model cities such as SDGs Future Cities, and the

discussion is structured based on interviews with several municipalities conducted between October and December 2021.

## **1.2. Collaborative Governance**

The concept of collaborative governance provides a new perspective on how government and decision-making authority is shared. The concept shows diverse aspects depending on who collaborates and how the collaborative process is organized. Theoretically, it is outlined as a mode of governance that implies consensus-oriented decision-making by bringing diverse stakeholders together in a common space and working with public agencies. In general, the term "governance" refers to the act of governing. Lynn et al. (2001) emphasize that governance can be broadly understood as a regime of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, regulate, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services. Good governance is necessary for public policy to have the desired effect (Vedantham and Kamruddin 2015). Collaborative governance is involved with governance arrangements in both the public and private sectors. Stoker (1997) explains that governance is a kind of basic agreement on blurring boundaries between public and private sectors. Although various definitions exist, collaborative governance can be characterized as a form of governance that engages diverse actors in public policymaking and implementation and works across the sectoral boundary. In this paper, collaborative governance refers to a governance arrangement in which the government, together with non-state stakeholders, engages in a formal, consensus-oriented, deliberative, collective decision-making process to develop and implement public policy, and manage public programs or assets (Ansell & Gash 2008). The concept emphasizes multi-stakeholder interactions and consensus-oriented processes more than the conventional "governance" concept. In this paper, "private" actors are assumed to be a wide range of actors, including private businesses, NGOs/NPOs, and civil society organizations, in consideration of the inclusiveness of the SDGs concept. The definition includes several important criteria: 1) the forum is led by a government agency; 2) non-governmental actors are involved; 3) participants are not merely consulted; 4) participation in the decision-making process; 5) the forum is formally organized for collective decision-making; 6) the collaborative process focuses on public policymaking and public programs or assets. Despite its comprehensiveness, the term collaborative governance is widely used, making it difficult to construct a certain theory. Ansell & Gash defines public institutions as the archetypal originators of collaborative governance. However, to be considered "collaborative," the

participation of non-state actors is necessary. This representation means including major interest groups and representing all relevant interests on a specific policy issue (Connick & Innes 2003).

Here, stakeholders include both citizens who participate in decision-making as individuals and who participate in organized groups such as interest groups and social movements. This means collaboration between government and non-government actors. Elements of collaborative governance require participation of non-state stakeholders and that this participation not be superficial and narrowly defined. In this sense, a participatory process needs to be a collective process of decision-making in which public institutions and (non-state) stakeholders work together. Collaborative governance has been analyzed from both administrative practice and diverse research areas. In particular, the importance of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors in public policy process and its implementation is growing (Emerson et al. 2012). In some cases, collaborative governance and public-private partnerships (PPPs) refer to similar phenomena.

### **1.3. Drivers and Conditions**

Recent studies have emphasized the drivers and various conditions that contribute to the promotion of collaborative governance. Influential studies examine the drivers of collaborative processes in stages (Emerson et al. 2012). First, as "starting conditions," basic levels of trust, conflict, and social capital are established. These are conditions that facilitate or inhibit cooperation between public and private stakeholders. Collaboration between stakeholders with different interests and perspectives can be contentious from an early stage, as the parties involved may resolve (or prevent) issues of distrust and conflict. Ansell & Gash (2008) identified power imbalances, incentives for cooperation, and a historical record of conflict and cooperation among stakeholders as necessary conditions for initiating and maintaining effective collaboration.

In multi-stakeholder collaboration, power imbalance among stakeholders is a common problem often observed. Unless parties have the capacity, resources, and organization to participate in the process, it is expected that a more powerful group of stakeholders will dominate the collaborative forum. In general, such power imbalances are likely to create mistrust and resentment among participants. Power imbalances have significant consequences for stakeholders who do not have a strong organizational capacity to be fairly represented in the process (Forester 2013). The more diverse and diffuse the stakeholders, the more difficult it is to build consensus and common understanding on behalf of the group. In addition, lack of expertise and time

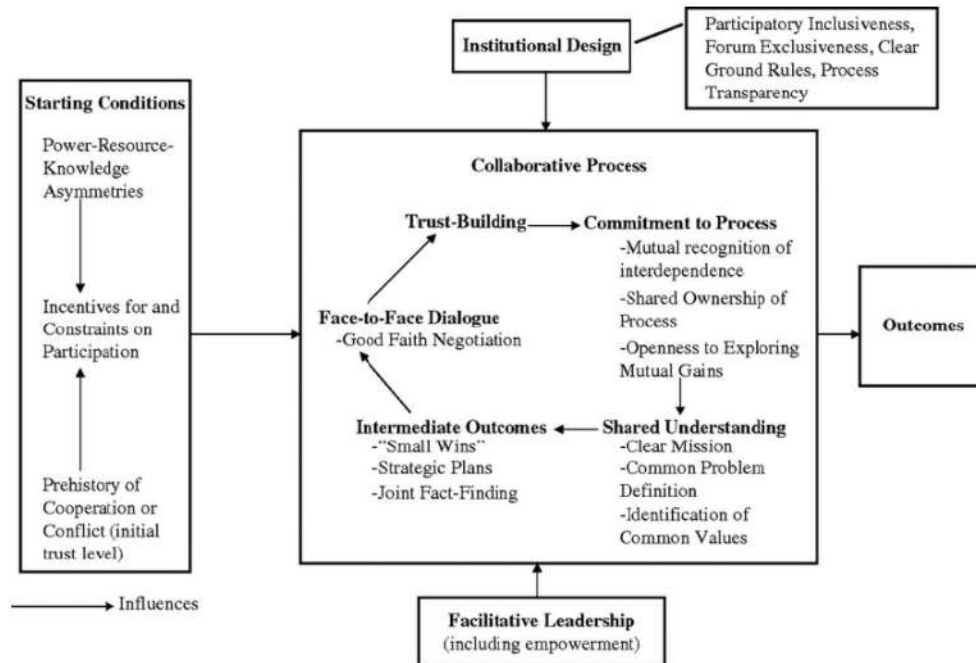
constraints can also make participation in time-consuming collaboration difficult (English 2000).

Gunton & Day (2003) argue that the power imbalance may affect the incentives of stakeholders to participate in collaboration and that this imbalance may discourage weaker stakeholders from participating in the collaborative arena because they may believe that the stakes are already stacked against them. However, if one stakeholder's goals are tied to those of other stakeholders, the incentives are likely to be stronger. Warner (2012) points out that incentives for participation partly depend on stakeholders' expectations of meaningful outcomes, especially when participatory aspects including time constraints are built into the collaborative process. An important characteristic of collaboration is the spontaneity of the process. Therefore, if stakeholders can succeed through other alternative means, incentives for participation are reduced and the collaborative process may be weakened. Stakeholders with easier access to politicians and courts are more likely to be able to negotiate and influence the decision-making process in their favor. Such options become attractive when certain stakeholders can unilaterally achieve their goals.

The history of perceived conflict and cooperation between stakeholders, and the resulting levels of trust, influence the working relationships of collaborative governance (Emerson & Nabatchi 2015). These levels can either promote or inhibit collaboration. Nevertheless, when stakeholders are highly interdependent, conflict can be a powerful incentive for collaborative processes (Innes & Booher 2010). However, if a stalemate arises in which the collaborative process is considered unsustainable, this could be a significant cost to the parties. The perceived history of conflict and cooperation among stakeholders and the resulting level of trust affect the working relationship of collaborative governance (Thomson & Perry 2006).

#### **1.4. Design and Leadership**

The "contingency model" proposed by Ansell & Gash (2008) states that the "initiating conditions" influence the collaborative process (Figure 1). This model figures out the key components required for institutional design and leadership of collaboration and assumes conditions for building an effective process.



**Figure 1: A Model of Collaborative Governance**

(Source: Ansell & Gash 2008, 550)

Although it has been modeled, in reality, it will not be easy to simply apply this model because the variables that constitute collaboration are diverse and context-dependent. However, the model helps to examine the key drivers of a collaborative process, including institutional design, leadership, and management approaches. In addition, diversity and inclusiveness of participants in the early stages are one of the key conditions for building successful collaborations. Gunton & Day (2003) also emphasize that clear ground rules and transparency in the collaborative process are also important in institutional design, contributing to process legitimacy and trust-building. Leadership is also considered important for successful collaboration (Page 2010). In collaborative governance, leadership is also an integral part of the decision-making process. Without the leadership of a strong countervailing force or a "neutral" organization representing a disadvantaged group, collaboration may favor the voice of more powerful stakeholders (Fung 2003). While some may consider this relationship simple and complementary, paradoxically, the concentration of power may reveal power imbalances in the collaborative arena. Ansell & Gash (2008), in describing a model of facilitative leadership that encourages weak stakeholder participation, point out that strong leadership is essential to enhance participation.

The public agency plays a unique leadership role in collaborative governance a specific

facilitative "effective leadership" is needed. It is about properly managing the collaborative process, achieving "technical credibility," and empowering all parties involved to make acceptable decisions (Emerson et al. 2012). In collaborative governance, leadership requires multiple opportunities and roles. Examples include facilitation, mediation, and organizational representation. In this context, leadership means engaging and mobilizing participants and building trust and collaborative capacity. Some leadership roles are necessary at the early stage of collaboration, while others become more important in the process of deliberation and conflict (Agranoff 2006). Collaboration is considered to depend on communication, trust-building, commitment, shared understanding, and outcomes (Imperial 2005). Such a cyclical process is crucial at all stages of collaboration, and in some situations, it becomes more important in the deliberative and conflict resolution processes (Carlson 2007).

### **1.5. Collaborative Process**

Empirical studies have shown that the structure of an inclusive collaborative process can mitigate conflicts among diverse stakeholders and promote effective collaboration through cross-sector cooperation. A more inclusive structure facilitates the management of the collaborative process and increases the feasibility of agreement reached among the parties involved. To this end, communication in the collaborative process is extremely important. Existing literature also holds that face-to-face communication in collaboration is an essential condition. Because face-to-face collaboration is believed to break down prejudices and negative stereotypes among the parties involved and contribute to building trust. (Ansell & Gash 2008; Bryson et al. 2015). However, since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the proliferation of remote work and online technology is gradually changing the way we collaborate and make policy decisions. This means that face-to-face communication may no longer mean physically being in the same space as another person. These changes are likely to bring about changes in collaborative governance, including faster communication for decision making, resource sharing, and new partnerships.

Communication mechanisms and the building of trust facilitate the development of a common understanding of problems faced by the parties and a commitment to a common solution. Ansell & Gash (2008) explain the importance of both internal and external legitimacy in the collaborative process and its structure. The former relates to the degree of commitment among participants and includes procedural legitimacy, where stakeholders feel that they have been heard in the collaborative decision-making process (Innes & Booher 2010). The latter include the need

for ongoing support from formal, public agencies. This informal presence helps less powerful stakeholders with little or no authority to engage in mutual collaboration with partners.

## **2. Municipal SDGs in Japan**

### **2.1. Background**

This section discusses the "Municipal SDGs" based on literature reviews and online-based interviews conducted by the author from October to December 2021. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), unanimously adopted by the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 2015, are an action plan for transforming our world by 2030, consisting of 17 goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators. It is a common global goal that integrates a wide range of economic, social, and environmental challenges to realize "no one will be left behind" in all countries and all people of the world. For example, SDG 16.7 has the goal of ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, which is in line with the philosophy that collaborative governance aims to achieve as discussed above. In turn, when considering the achievement of the SDGs in Japan's rural areas, with a declining birthrate and an aging population are rapidly advancing and the need to correct the concentration in the Tokyo metropolitan area and maintain the sustainability of local communities is under discussion, how to build governance systems that solve local sustainability issues is crucial. It's also important to promote the spillover of such social innovations and to build cumulative mechanisms and high-quality educational opportunities for the co-creation of social and technological innovations in society (Nazar et al. 2018). In a shrinking society, collaborative mechanisms and governance will become increasingly important to address increasingly complex local sustainability issues that cannot be solved by the government sector alone. In this context, as symbolized by SDGs Goal 17, "Partnerships for the goals," collaboration with diverse actors will be necessary.

### **2.2. Policy Context**

Recently, SDGs have been attracting attention in Japan. In 2016, the SDG Promotion Headquarters, established by the Cabinet Office, set the "SDGs Basic Policy". The three priority areas of SDGs are Society 5.0, fostering the next generation and promoting women's activities, and regional revitalization. When considering the achievement of SDGs in Japan's local communities, where the correction of the concentration in the Tokyo metropolitan area and the

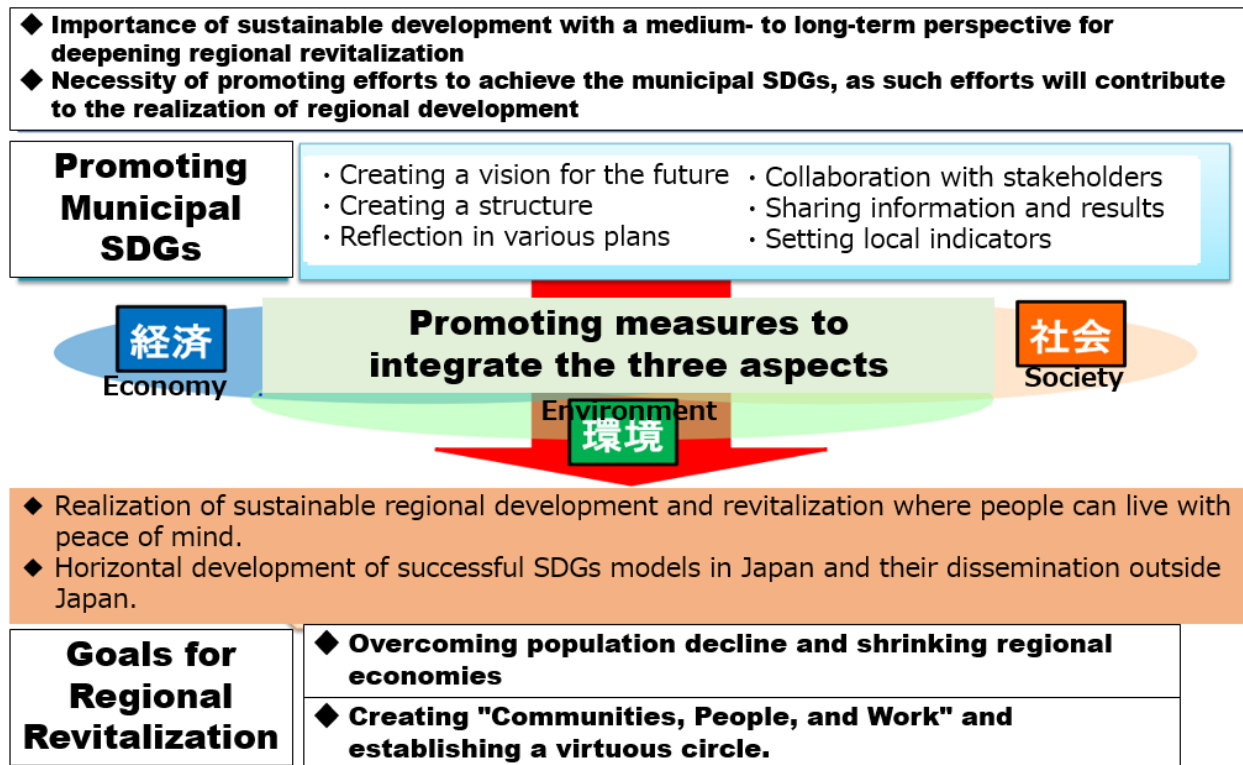


maintenance of sustainability of local communities are being debated amidst the rapid aging of society with a declining birthrate, how to create social innovation and governance systems that will solve local sustainability is a key issue. In addition, it is important to promote the spillover of such social innovation, as well as to build a cumulative mechanism and quality education opportunities (Nazar et al. 2018; Sendo 2018).

In 2016, Japan established the SDG Promotion Headquarters, headed by the Prime Minister, to address the national level, and established the SDG Implementation Guidelines and Action Plans to spread SDGs widely throughout the country. As for local governments, the selection of "SDGs Future Cities" and "Municipal SDGs Model Projects" began in 2018, and an increasing number of local governments have come forward to take part in the SDGs (Cabinet Office 2020). In 2014, a new policy of "Regional Revitalization (*chiho sousei*)" was launched by then Prime Minister *Shinzo Abe*, and the "Law for Regional Revitalization" was enacted the same year to make these policies effective. The term "*chiho sousei*" refers to a policy titled "*Machi, Hito, Shigoto sousei*" and its policy framework "*Machi, hito, shigoto sousei sogō senryaku*" [Comprehensive Strategy for "Communities, People and Work"]. *Machi* (Communities)" does not refer to towns or cities, which only remind us of administrative units or geographical areas, but rather to "places where each individual can have dreams and hopes, and lead a rich and fulfilling life with peace of mind. "*Hito* (People)" does not simply mean "human" in the biological or legal sense, but "human resources who are active in the community and play a role in community development. Finally, "*Shigoto* (Work)" refers to the basic idea of increasing the number of "quality jobs" that are attractive to young people, in particular, jobs that provide stable employment, adequate compensation, and satisfaction (Mizoguchi 2015).

For future regional revitalization, SDGs were adopted by the United Nations in September 2015, a year after the 2014 Law for Regional Revitalization came into effect. Since then, there has been a movement in Japan to utilize SDGs for regional revitalization after discussions within the government. The significance of municipal SDGs led by local governments is summarized in the following figure: By promoting policies that meet the three elements of SDGs - economic, social, and environmental - the government aims to mitigate the population decline and overcome the decline in regional economies, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of regional development and local

economies.



**Figure 2: Municipal SDGs in Regional Revitalization**

*(Source: Cabinet Office 2020)*

The SDGs have 17 goals and 169 targets, which are interrelated and require a cross-disciplinary and comprehensive process. At the national level as well, to mitigate the negative effects of stove-piped administration in the promotion of SDGs, the Cabinet Office is in charge of SDGs for regional development, as it is easier to coordinate the entire process. On the other hand, at the private-sector level, with the cooperation of the central government, the National Association of Mayors, Towns, and Villages, and the Governor's Association, such as the "Future Town Planning Forum (*Mirai Machidukuri Forum*)" is being held to discuss future regional development among related parties. The Municipal SDGs Review Committee has developed "SDGs for Our Cities - Guidelines for Implementation", which outlines key points for municipal SDGs (Municipal SDGs Guideline Review Committee 2018). In the guideline, there is an interesting section titled "Column 6: Hints for unique regional design". The two main points are as follows. First, in promoting municipal SDGs, it is important to come up with unique measures based on the unique conditions of each municipality. This is because, in the face of a declining population in Japan, it

is difficult for many local governments to consider SDGs-specific measures from scratch amid tight administrative and financial conditions. Secondly, it lists the basic components by factorizing the concept of "communities, people, and work," which is the keyword for regional revitalization promoted by the government. The concept of "factorization" above would be helpful for municipalities and organizations that intend to participate in municipal SDGs to map keywords and understand trends (Table 1).

**Table 1:** (*Components of Municipal SDGs*)

Keyword	Components
<i>Machi</i> (Communities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• revitalization of city centers, commercial facilities, facilities that attract visitors, cultural facilities, walking trails, regional cooperation, consolidation, depopulation</li> <li>• regional infrastructure: transportation, ICT, industry, medical and nursing care, resilience, compact city, redevelopment, neighborhood, landscape, downsizing and expansion planning, administrative reform</li> <li>• history, culture, social capital, ties, sharing</li> </ul>
<i>Hito</i> (People)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• women, citizens, young people, students, elderly, children, foreigners</li> <li>• declining population, nuclear family, late marriages, living alone, health consciousness, walking</li> <li>• lifestyle, values, morals, interaction, public service, human resource utilization, leadership, passion of the mayor, project manager</li> </ul>
<i>Shigoto</i> (Work)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local resources, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, manufacturing, service industry, tourism, traditional crafts, industrial clusters, new technology, new industries, social, physical and human capital, local government as the largest regional enterprise</li> <li>• employment, business schemes, market strategies, PPP, PFI(※1), conversion of land and facilities, taxes and subsidies, private capital, value-added creation, special zones and deregulation, business attraction, ESG investment</li> <li>• branding, local product premium, DMO(※2), education and human resource infrastructure, worker support</li> </ul>

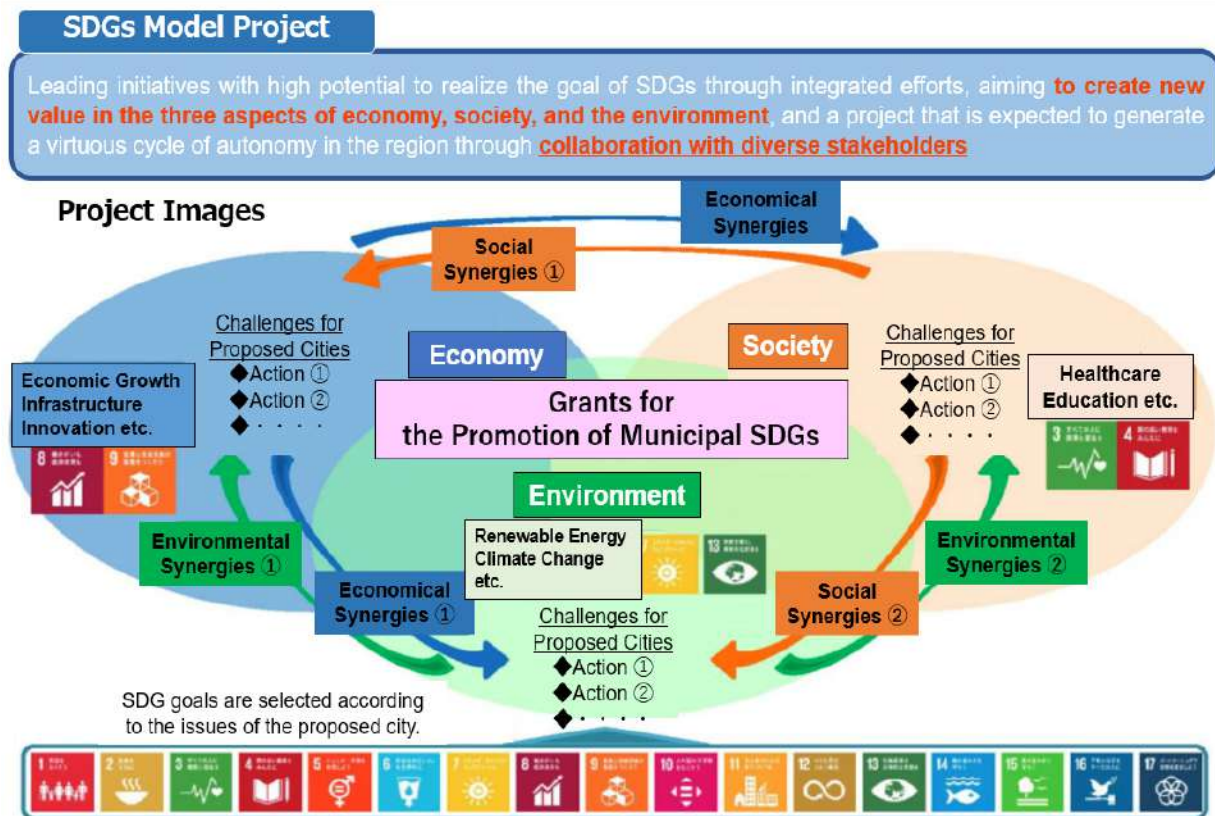
Note:

※1: PPP (Public Private Partnership) and PFI (Private Finance Initiative) refer to new methods of construction, maintenance, management, and operation of public facilities, etc., utilizing private sector funds, management capabilities, and technical capabilities.

※2: DMO (Destination Management Organization) is a corporation with a coordinating function to steadily implement strategies in cooperation with various parties involved, as a leader in the creation of a tourism region from the viewpoint of managing a tourism area to draw out the "earning money" of the region and to foster pride and attachment to the region.

(Source: Sasaya 2020)

However, even in regional revitalization, it may be difficult to break it down in terms of "communities," "people," and "work" components. This is also true for the SDGs because these components are deeply interrelated. Next, from the perspective of which SDG goals are "the real deal," this paper organized the SDGs of municipalities selected as "SDGs Future Cities (*SDGs Mirai Toshi*)," a model project approved by the Cabinet Office, as examples. The "SDGs Future Cities" selected has a unified format and screening criteria (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Municipal SDGs Model**

(Source: Cabinet Office 2020)

Table 2 shows the model municipalities selected as "SDGs Future Cities" organized in terms of "*Machi* (Communities)," "*Hito* (People)," and "*Shigoto* (Work)," with the corresponding SDG targets and factors listed.

**Table 2: (SDGs Future Cities)**

<b>Cases focus on <i>Machi</i> (Communities)</b>	<b>Components (Keywords)</b>	<b>Contents and Vision of SDGs Future Cities</b>
Shimokawa Town (Hokkaido)	Local Resources, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	- Shimokawa Challenge 2030
Saitama City (Saitama Prefecture)	Regional Cooperation and Consolidation	- SDGs International Future City: Saitama 2030 Model Project - Towards a city where everyone can be proud to live
Kumamoto City (Kumamoto)	Resilience, History, Culture	- Building a sustainable city resilient to disasters based on the experience and lessons learned from the Kumamoto Earthquake
Toyama City (Toyama Prefecture)	Regional Transportation Compact City, City Center, Resilience	- Realizing a sustainable value-added city through compact city strategies
Hakusan City (Ishikawa Prefecture)	Industrial Culster, New Technology, New Industry, Enterprise Invitation, Educational Human Resource Base	- The "Hakusan SDGs Future City 2030 Vision," a gift of the blessings of Hakusan to the next generation
Shizuoka City (Shizuoka Prefecture)	Health, Visitor Attraction Facilities, Education, History/Culture, Marine, Branding	- Creating a World-Class Shizuoka: Five Major Initiatives in Shizuoka City× SDGs
<b>Cases focus on <i>Hito</i> (People)</b>	<b>Components (Keywords)</b>	<b>Contents and themes of SDGs Future Cities</b>
Odawara City (Kanagawa Prefecture)	Education, Values, History, Culture	- Creatiing "Local Self-Sufficiency Areas to Protect and Nurture Life"
Okayama City (Okayama Prefecture)	Health Orientation, Walking, Business Scheme, Education (ESD)	- Promote Okayama as a city where everyone can be healthy, learn from each other, and be active throughout their lives.
Mitsuke City (Nigata Prefecture)	Health Orientation Walking	- Realization of a healthy city where people can be happy and healthy just by living there.
Ube City (Yamaguchi Prefecture)	Human Resource Utilization, Children	- Ube SDGs Promotion Project - Further Evolution of Coexistence, Co-prosperity and Cooperation
Sabae City (Fukui Prefecture)	Women, Citizens, Youth, Manufacturing	- Sabae, a Sustainable City of Eyeglasses - A City Where Women Shine
Kameoka City (Kyoto)	Art, Great People	- Kameoka Fog Art Festival" - An Innovation Hub for Creating Sustainability
Osaka City (Osaka)	World Expo, G20 Summit, Environment	- Toward the realization of an "SDGs Advanced City" with the impact of the 2025 Osaka Expo
<b>Cases focus on <i>Shigoto</i> (Work)</b>	<b>Components (Keywords)</b>	<b>Contents and themes of SDGs Future Cities</b>
Maniwa City (Okayama Prefecture)	Local resources, Agriculture, Forestry, Manufacturing, Value- added creation, Market strategies	- Local energy self-sufficiency rate of 100%. - Realization of the 2030SDGs Future City Maniwa: Towards a model of farming and mountain villages with lasting development
Nishiawakura Village (Okayama Prefecture)	Forests, ESG Investment, Private Capital, Employment	- SDGs Future Village to be Created through the Use of Forest Funds
Osaki Town (Kagoshima Prefecture)	Local resources, PPP	- World-class recycling-based regional management model
Sapporo City (Hokkaido)	Citizen, Sharing, Branding, Lifestyle, Values, Fair Trade	- Environmental Capital SAPPRO
Senboku City (Akita Prefecture)	New technology/ industry (renewable energy), Local resources (lakes)	- IoT, Hydrogen Energy Utilization Platform Project
Shima City (Mie Prefecture)	Food, Exchange, Tourism, World Heritage, Japan Heritage	- Creating a Sustainable <i>Miketsukuni</i> (Food, mainly seafood, provided to the imperial family and imperial court in ancient Japan)

*(Source: Cabinet Office 2020)*

### **2.3. Place-Making and Social Acceptability**

Matsuoka (2018) discusses the importance of "placemaking" and "social acceptability" in the promotion of SDGs by local governments through comparative studies in three cities. He points out that placemaking with actors inside and outside the local community about sustainability can be found in social institutions characterized by collaborative governance. For example, he presents the case of Iida City, Nagano Prefecture, which promotes a low-carbon society. The city established institutional acceptance at a national level with the entry into force of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and its adoption by the government for the Eco-Town project. In addition, since the Earth Summit in 1992, ISO 14001 certification has gradually become a condition for entry into the European market, establishing market acceptance for related industries. On the other hand, as a factor that increased the acceptance of local communities, the pioneering institutional design unique to the "Environmental City Concept" and "21 Iida Environmental Plan" municipalities is considered to have a significant impact on subsequent municipal SDGs measures in terms of both institutional and social acceptance (Matsuoka 2018). In addition, the city is notable for the involvement of civil society organizations in collaborative process. For example, there is the existence of a non-profit organization (e.g. *Minami Shinshu Ohisama Shinpo*) that aims to promote social innovation and sustainability, and in 2013, these NPOs contributed to the enactment of an ordinance establishing "local environmental rights" that position natural energy as the property of residents, with the goal of "local production for local consumption of energy." Also often mentioned is the case of Kitakyushu City, Fukuoka Prefecture: in December 2017, Kitakyushu City was selected as one of the winners of the Japan SDGs Award organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in April 2018, the OECD selected Kitakyushu City as one of the "Global Model Cities to Promote the SDGs". In June 2018, Kitakyushu was selected by the Cabinet Office as a "SDGs Future City" and a "Municipal SDGs Model Project." In July 2018, the Mayor made a presentation as a representative of Japan at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum held at UN Headquarters (OECD 2021). Kitakyushu City has a history of suffering from pollution problems during the period of rapid economic growth after World War II, long before the adoption of SDGs. At that time, the movement to overcome pollution was led by the local women's association, which called for the creation of a city free of environmental pollution and subsequently moved the government and corporations. The environmental initiatives in Kitakyushu have been based on the background of citizens' movements (Kanzaki 2016). The city has also developed a

pollution control organization, and implemented the financial and regulatory systems necessary to promote anti-pollution measures, conclude agreements with companies, and provide relief to victims.

In 1997, the city launched one of the largest eco-town projects in Japan with the concept of promoting a recycling-oriented society. The city invested 78 billion yen in the project, which created more than 1,000 jobs. Recently, Kitakyushu has begun to export its environmental technologies developed in the areas of waste disposal, energy, water supply and sewage, and environmental conservation to other countries, together with local companies. Thus, the idea is emerging that Kitakyushu should lead the world as an environmental city; it was selected as an "SDGs Future City" in 2018 and has set its own goals for 2030 as a priority. For example, in the environmental field, the city more than doubled the amount of renewable energy installed to 700 MW in July 2018; reduced the amount of household waste from 164,000 tons in July 2017 to 160,000 tons in July 2018; accepted a total number of trainees for environmental human resource development in Asia from 9,083 in March 2018 to 10,000 in increase, among other initiatives. From a social perspective, under the mayor's leadership, efforts are underway to increase the percentage of female participation in management positions in all city administrative agencies to more than half by 2030. In Kitakyushu, citizen activism and institutional design for the environment and sustainability at the municipal level seem to have led to the foundation of public-private collaborative governance that promotes the municipal SDGs today. Recently, in addition, the political leadership has also contributed to building institutional and social acceptance of the municipal SDGs.

The characteristics of driving factors common to the above two cases are: addressing sustainability issues at the multi-government level and building institutional and social acceptability triggered by private sector and citizen participation initiatives. In achieving SDGs at municipal level, the key is to create a "space" where diverse actors can collaborate across sectors. Moreover, it is also a legitimization process of resource mobilization that supports participants' efforts to mutually and socially embrace new ideas and give them shape in society.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1. Trends of Municipal SDGs**

This section discusses contents and trends of municipal SDGs from collaborative

governance perspective.

### **3.1.1. Positioning in municipal comprehensive plans**

Incorporating SDGs into municipal plans such as the "Basic Concept," "Basic Plan," and "Implementation Plan," which define basic principles, goals, and policies of municipal policies and measures, means positioning SDGs as an important issue for local governments to address. In addition to Kitakyushu's case, Shiga Prefecture and Yokohama City have been among the first in Japan to include SDGs in their comprehensive plans.

### **3.1.2. Political leadership**

Political leadership is also important. In Kitakyushu, a system has been established to address SDGs in an integrated manner within the city government. For example, the Mayor of Kitakyushu has been actively communicating with the media, proposing and supporting specific ideas at the city's internal promotion headquarters. The Mayor of Yokohama has also been actively promoting initiatives related to SDGs through symposiums and other events. In this way, some local governments take the political initiative to build a promotion system and actively disseminate their activities through the media and share case studies.

### **3.1.3. Coordinating Organization**

Since the contents of municipal SDGs are diverse, local governments need to involve not only environmental departments but also other departments that deal with urban development, disaster prevention, and infrastructure, as well as those that are responsible for cross-boundary coordination. In Kitakyushu, the Planning and Coordination Bureau was responsible for the promotion of SDGs as well as the operation of the city government's internal promotion headquarters. In Yokohama, the Global Warming Prevention Headquarters promotes the SDGs in cooperation with the Policy Bureau as a coordinating department. In this regard, at this stage, there are not a few municipalities where only environmental departments (only) handle municipal SDGs, but in the municipalities mentioned above, it can be seen that the coordination department is deeply involved.

### **3.1.4. Multi-stakeholder Collaboration**

A collaboration with multi-stakeholders was noticeable, although the form of collaboration was different in each case. For example, in Yokohama, several projects have been created in collaboration with several companies. In Kitakyushu, the experience of pollution control measures in which citizens, businesses, and government were united was utilized, such as the development



of water business globally, including in Malaysia and Cambodia, working with business communities. Kubota (2018) notes that not only the "third sector" represented by civil society such as NPOs and NGOs, which has emerged in Japan since the 1990s, is participating in the policy process, but also that collaboration between the private sector (the second sector) and local governments are becoming more active. This does not mean that NPOs and NGOs are not involved in SDGs, but it indicates that in recent years, there has been a growing tendency on the part of local governments to consider the private sector as a partner for collaboration. According to the Japan NPO Center, Japan's NPOs and NGOs recognized the importance of SDGs even before the adoption of SDGs and began activities such as holding opinion exchange meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is in charge of UN negotiations, and established the "SDGs Civil Society Network" (<https://www.sdgs-japan.net/>) in 2017, whose mission is to "propose policies to achieve SDGs".

### **3.2. Challenges**

What was observed in this paper can be said to be not the policy process related to SDGs, but the organizations and institutions that appeared as outcomes related to them? Kitakyushu City, for example, had been accumulating public-private partnerships before the adoption of SDGs by the United Nations, and it may not be possible to say that SDGs have created a new type of collaborative governance. However, given the current emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration in the municipal SDGs, it is unlikely that SDGs will weaken public-private sector collaboration, even if it strengthens it. It could be argued that a municipality that is enthusiastic about SDGs is only possible because it is a city with a large number of powerful local companies and civil society organizations. Smaller municipalities have less corporate activities in terms of both quality and quantity compared to larger municipalities. However, this is not to say that public-private partnerships are not possible. Furthermore, even in policy areas where these companies cannot participate in public-private collaboration, it is possible their efforts will be possible in the future. This point could not be fully discussed in this paper and will be an issue in the future.

In addition, while sectionalism in government has been pointed out for a long time, the SDGs may be an opportunity to develop stronger governance under the leadership of the chief executive, for example, the "Yokohama SDGs Design Center" in Yokohama City, to deepen interdepartmental cooperation within the government and to solve problems in cooperation with various stakeholders inside and outside the municipality. There is a possibility of developing a

stronger governance system. Once such network-type governance is established, the potential for innovation and resolution of issues that cannot be achieved by a single sector alone, which is the idea of collaborative governance, will increase (Emerson & Nabatchi 2015).

Today, not only pioneering municipalities but also many others are embarking on initiatives toward SDGs. In promoting these efforts, we should not just end up superficially labeling existing measures in line with the contents of SDGs. For example, in some cases, only the wording of SDGs is included in the update of the comprehensive plan, leaving the existing intentions intact (Kubota 2015). To prevent this situation, it is necessary to develop and evolve conventional policies and initiatives through the filter of the SDGs.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1. Findings**

From a collaborative governance perspective, this paper has examined the current situation and issues, albeit in a rather cursory manner, through the recent municipal SDGs in Japan. At the national level, the Cabinet Office's SDG Promotion Headquarters is working to spread awareness of SDGs among local governments and business communities. In the cases focused on in this paper, local businesses and civil society have been enthusiastically addressing environmental and sustainability issues since before the adoption of SDGs, but there is a tendency to develop and evolve existing initiatives through the filter of SDGs. In addition, it was confirmed that additional drivers, political factors such as the mayor's leadership, the creation of a cross-sectional specialized department and coordinating structures, and collaboration with stakeholders inside and outside the municipality are also key factors. These trends can be evaluated as a move toward strengthening collaborative governance, both in terms of local governance and policy processes. However, the success or failure of the municipal SDGs will depend on whether they can be reflected in existing policies and upgraded, rather than superficially associated with and labeled as municipal policies and SDGs.

### **4.2. Limitations and Scope of Future Research**

One of the limitations of this research is that due to the constraints on field research activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the space available for the paper, a few municipal cases were taken up as case studies and have not yet been theorized in any elaborate way. More empirical studies of collaborative policymaking for enhancing municipal SDGs through multi-

stakeholder processes are needed. In particular, this research has not sufficiently identified issues of power imbalance among actors in the collaborative process. This will be a future scope of the research.

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