Welcome to KIZUNA, the official magazine of the Government of Japan. This bold work of calligraphy is 綆(kizuna) written in Japanese. Kizuna means the enduring bonds between people—close relationships forged through mutual trust and support. Originally describing the rope used to tether domestic animals such as horses and dogs, the meaning of kizuna has evolved over the years. A passage in The Tale of the Heike, compiled in the 13th century, uses the term to refer to the bonds of love between a father and his children. More recently, kizuna has gone beyond bonds tying together family and close acquaintances; it is now used in a broader sense of human ties and connections. Of particular note is the kizuna born among people during natural calamities, which fosters feelings of solidarity and serves as the underlying strength to overcome hardships.

Similarly, the kizuna cultivated among the countries of the world has the power to deepen cooperation for a better future. By reporting on a wide variety of topics concerning Japan, we hope that this magazine will provide opportunities for Japan and the rest of the world to connect and build strong kizuna.
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THE FIRST POLICY SPEECH
BY PRIME MINISTER KISHIDA FUMIO
AN EXCERPT
OCTOBER 8, 2021


Introduction
I am resolved to invest all my heart, mind, and strength to overcome this national crisis, the battle against COVID-19, together with the Japanese people, carve out a new era, and hand down to the next generation a Japan that is spiritually rich.

What is required of us now is to engage in politics worthy of trust and sympathy that reacts to citizens' voices with sincerity and gives those voices concrete shape. I will place importance on having thorough discussions with the citizens. I myself and indeed all the members of my Cabinet will repeatedly sit down in a circle with various kinds of people to have discussions. Beyond that, I will instruct them to do comprehensive checks on whether or not we are advancing policies well-tailored to the people's needs.

It will be upon the trust and sympathy earned through this process that I aim to foster a society that respects diversity. My mission is to arouse the power of the bonds Japan enjoys.

Measures to counter COVID-19
The essential element of crisis response is assuming the worst possible situation at all times. Now that the number of new infections is holding at a low, steady level, this is the time for us to anticipate various situations and take comprehensive steps to ensure peace of mind. We will reliably secure hospital bed capacity and medical personnel and thoroughly set measures in place to assist patients recuperating at home.

We will forge ahead with administering a second vaccine dose to all those wishing to receive one while also making careful preparations to enable the administration of a third round of vaccinations. We will also aim to have orally administered pharmaceutical treatments enter into practical application within the calendar year. Alongside this, we will work to make active use of digital vaccination certificates and expand free-of-charge testing for which advance reservations are not required.

To support business owners who have suffered significant impacts, we will provide subsidies in proportion to the size of the business, in a form that does not impose limits on the location or type of business. We will also implement support in the form of subsidies and other assistance to protect those in need, including non-regular employees and families with small children.

Bringing a new form of capitalism into realization
What I aim to do is to bring a new form of capitalism into realization. The concept is this: a virtuous cycle of growth and distribution, and developing a new post-COVID-19 society. I will establish a Council of New Form of Capitalism Realization and shape that vision into something concrete. Aiming for growth is absolutely critical, and we will make every possible effort towards actualizing it. However, without distribution, there will be no subsequent growth; this point too, I thoroughly endorse. We will extricate ourselves from the barren argument of “growth or distribution” and conduct a general mobilization of all possible policies to bring about “growth and distribution.”

Our growth strategy and our distribution strategy are two sides of the same coin by which we bring about a new form of capitalism.

The first pillar of my growth strategy is realizing a science and technology nation. We will boldly fund research and development in advanced science and technology, including in the areas of digital, green, artificial intelligence, quantum, bio, and space.

The second pillar is revitalizing regions and a Vision for a Digital Garden City Nation, which will link to the rest of the world. We will advance the implementation of digital transformation beginning with our local regions and give rise to a wave of new reforms.

The third pillar is economic security. Under a newly
established ministerial remit, we will advance our efforts to secure strategic goods and materials and prevent outflows of technology, while will materialize an autonomous economic structure.

The fourth pillar is putting to rest people’s anxiety about the era of hundred-year lifespans. We will make social security and the tax system neutral with regard to ways of working and endeavor to make universal workers’ insurance a reality. Looking ahead, we will work to build a social security system oriented to all generations in which all people, from children and those raising a family to the elderly, can feel assured.

Next is our distribution strategy.

The first pillar is strengthening the function for distributions to working people. We will fundamentally strengthen our support within the tax code for companies that raise wages in an effort to increase the percentage of distributions allocated to labor.

The second pillar is enlarging the middle class and addressing the declining birth rate. We will reinforce our support for educational expenses and living expenses to provide support for families with small children.

The third pillar is increasing the incomes of those working at facilities providing medical nursing, elderly care, childcare services and the like. We will examine public prices and fundamentally review the state of public prices.

My fourth pillar is correcting the harmful effects resulting from deciding public finances on a single fiscal year basis, which determines public distribution.

In addition to these, we will actively invest in building up basic infrastructure as a step towards regional revitalization. Without reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake, there will be no revival of Japan. In keeping with my strong feelings on this, we will work exhaustively to realize assistance for disaster victims, the rebuilding of industries and livelihoods, and the reconstruction and revival of Fukushima.

Diplomacy and security that fully protect the Japanese people

On the basis of trust we enjoy from the international community, I will pursue resolute diplomacy in three areas in which I hold strong determination.

The first of these is my determination to fully defend the universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. I will vigorously promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Second is my determination to fully safeguard the peace and stability of Japan. We will undertake revisions to our National Security Strategy, National Defense Program Guidelines, and Mid-Term Defense Program. The cornerstone of Japan’s diplomatic and security policies is the Japan-U.S. Alliance, which I will raise to an even greater height. The abductions issue is one of the highest priority issues of the Kishida administration. I will do everything in my power to realize the return of all the abductees to Japan at the earliest possible date.

Third is my determination to lead the international community by confronting global-level issues and contributing to humankind. As a prime minister hailing from Hiroshima, the site of an atomic bombing, I will do my very utmost to bring about a world free of nuclear weapons.

New economic countermeasures

I instructed my Cabinet to take all possible measures to respond to COVID-19 and to formulate new economic policies in order to trigger a new form of capitalism. We will swiftly compile comprehensive and bold economic policies.

Conclusion

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

We must overcome the divisions arising from economic disparities, regional disparities, and the like and carve out a new era. To make that possible, we will forge one team aimed at all of us moving forward together. Every night eventually turns into dawn. Holding hands together with you, the citizens, we will take a step towards tomorrow.
PRIME MINISTER KISHIDA FUMIO’S PERSONAL TIMELINE

July 29, 1957
Born in Tokyo

Kishida was born in Tokyo in the early years of Japan’s economic boom—when the country was getting back on its feet after the war—as the son of KISHIDA Fumitake, a government official at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (currently the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry). His grandfather, KISHIDA Masaki, was a successful department store proprietor who also served as a member of the House of Representatives.

1963
Moves to New York

When his father was assigned to work in the United States, the family moved to New York. Kishida attended a local public elementary school from the first to third grades, where he was impressed by the liberal ambience of the U.S. and learned to respect diversity.

1973
Student Days

After returning to Japan, Kishida attended public elementary and middle schools before going on to Kaisei Senior High School, a prestigious private academy. He was an enthusiastic member of the baseball team, an experience that taught him the importance of working together as a team. In 1978, he entered the School of Law at Waseda University. When his father ran for the House of Representatives for the first time the following year, Kishida helped him to campaign.

1982
Gains Work Experience at a Bank

After graduating, Kishida joined the Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan (currently Shinsei Bank). He worked in foreign exchange in Tokyo and was subsequently transferred to the city of Takamatsu in Kagawa Prefecture where his clients included maritime shipping firms. He gained firsthand knowledge of the unfavorable economic reality there by watching small and medium-sized enterprises sometimes founder and fail due to cash-flow problems.
1993

**Joins the Political World**

Helping his father’s campaign and working for a bank awakened in Kishida an urge to serve the people directly by protecting their lives and improving society as a whole. That set him on his way to politics. In 1993, after his father’s death, he ran for his father’s seat in a district in Hiroshima and won his first political battle. He valued political stump speaking as a way to speak directly to voters—an approach that broadened his appeal and led to his winning the seat 10 times.

2007

**Receives First Cabinet Posting**

Kishida joined the Cabinet for the first time as a Minister of State for Special Missions, a position in which he took on assignments in various fields including Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs, Quality-of-Life Policy, and Science and Technology Policy. He became Minister for Consumer Affairs in 2008, a position from which he worked for the establishment of the Consumer Affairs Agency.

2012

**Appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs**

In 2015, Kishida strove for the bilateral agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea regarding the issue of comfort women which was “resolved finally and irreversibly.” In 2016, he helped to actualize a visit to Hiroshima by President Barack Obama, the first ever such visit by a sitting U.S. president. Kishida served as Minister of Foreign Affairs consecutively for four years and seven months, making him the longest-serving foreign minister in postwar Japan.

October 4, 2021

**Becomes Prime Minister**

Upon winning the election for Liberal Democratic Party president, Kishida was appointed Prime Minister of Japan by an extraordinary session of the Diet. He vowed to lend a sincere ear to the voices of the Japanese people and to conduct politics in an attentive and broad-minded manner. Kishida filled nearly 30 notebooks in 10 years with comments and appeals from the people of Japan.

His favorite food is Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki* (Japanese savory pancake). He ate the dish on the day that he was elected to head the Liberal Democratic Party. "I'll never forget how wonderful it tasted," he says.
At the outset, let me start by commending my friend, Boris, for his leadership in hosting the COP 26.

I have come all the way to Glasgow to convey my own determination that Japan will be working in full force to take on climate change, a common challenge of humankind.

Six years have passed since the adoption of the Paris Agreement. At that time, under the leadership of then President Laurent Fabius, we had renewed our resolve. We must not forget that very moment. “Fumio, I really want to give this to you.” To this day, I have been keeping and cherishing the gavel that my friend Laurent presented to me as a testament to my own resolution to confront the climate issue seriously.

To achieve our goal, this coming decade will be critical. Together, with high ambitions, let us do all
By utilizing our own 2 trillion yen Green Innovation Fund, Japan will develop next-generation batteries and motors, hydrogen, and synthetic fuels, which all hold the key to the spread of electric vehicles. While spreading the fruits of these innovations across Asia, Japan will spearhead global efforts.

Furthermore, Japan will be participating in the Global Methane Pledge. As we are moving forward in the transition to decarbonization, the ongoing issue of rising energy prices also calls for our joint discussions among leaders to meet the challenge.

For adaptation to climate change, Japan will double our assistance to approximately 14.8 billion USD such as in the area of disaster risk reduction. Concerning global forestry conservation, I hereby announce that Japan will provide financial assistance worth approximately 240 million USD, utilizing advanced technologies and working in collaboration with the international organizations.

No one must be left behind as we confront the issue of climate change. Japan will dedicate all its strength to undertake actions and contribute to the future of humankind.

Thank you.
At his inaugural press conference in October 2021, Japan’s new prime minister KISHIDA Fumio announced his aim to realize a new form of capitalism.

There is a growing trend around the world to search out a capitalist economy for the new era in which corporations and governments make bold investments, while protecting the middle class—which forms the core of a healthy democracy—and preparing for global-scale crises such as climate change. The new initiative of the Kishida administration aims to take the lead of that global trend, focusing on sustainability and human capital.

The core concepts of the new initiative are “a virtuous cycle of growth and distribution” and “developing a new post-COVID-19 society.” Growth strategy and distribution strategy will work in tandem to realize them.

On November 8, the emergency proposal was formulated by the Council of New Form of Capitalism Realization, which was established to shape a vision toward the realization of a new form of capitalism and translate it into concrete measures. It emphasizes that growth must be realized first—positioning the growth strategy as the trigger for the virtuous circle of growth and distribution—while also stating that the distribution strategy serves as an essential foundation for sustainable growth. The proposal urges Japan to mobilize all possible policies toward the realization of the virtuous cycle of growth and distribution.

Outline of the basic ideas of the emergency proposal

Since the 1980s, a growing emphasis has been placed on short-term shareholder value, resulting in a sluggish growth of the middle class, widening disparities, an increasing burden on subcontractors, and adverse effects on the natural environment and others. Thus, the government, private sector, universities, local communities, and citizens and consumers should all play their respective roles to solve pending issues. Private companies are requested to enhance their mid- to long-term earning power by strengthening their investments in the future in areas such as human capital, and to achieve sustainable growth by circulating their profits through wage increases and other distributions, as well as through further investment in the future. We are committed to building a sustainable capitalism focused on various stakeholders. While our basic principle is to realize economic growth by utilizing market functions, it is also important for the public and private sectors to work together to create an economy for a new era, with the government providing a supplementary response in areas that are not sufficiently addressed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people’s mindset about their work style and lifestyle has changed, with digital transformation—which
until now had not proceeded very far—suddenly beginning to make rapid progress. Now is the time to reform conventional socioeconomic practices and restrictions as well as institutions to build a new society premised on coexisting with COVID-19.

As a trigger for a virtuous cycle of growth and distribution, it is necessary to realize growth in the first place. We need to promote efforts to realize a science and technology nation, including those for digital transformation (DX) and growth of the green sector toward a solution to the climate change, thereby drastically strengthening our capacity for innovation. We also need to provide comprehensive support for startups as the driver of innovation that will carve out the future of Japan. It is also important to use innovation to solve social issues in a bid to create a highly convenient society and to promote the improvement of productivity in a wide range of industries and enterprises, thereby helping to create of a prosperous middle class.

Our distribution strategy serves as an important foundation for growth. Consumption is expected to increase through distribution to employees in the form of wages, which then stimulates demand, leading to improvement in corporate earnings and sustainable growth. In order to realize growth and distribution at the same time, it is necessary to strengthen investment in people through efforts ranging from those in childcare and early education, to those within companies. We must also respect diversity and inclusivity to create a society where all citizens can participate and play an active role and establish an environment where each individual can create added value.

From such perspectives, Japan should mobilize all possible policies toward the realization of a virtuous cycle of growth and distribution that will then achieve subsequent growth. To this end, it is essential to increase productivity through our growth strategy and to distribute the fruits of that growth in the form of wages to working people, thereby raising the income level of a broad range of citizens.

**Issues to be addressed as an utmost priority**

The emergency proposal outlines the multiple measures that should now be given utmost priority by the Kishida administration.

Under the growth strategy, the top priority is promoting the realization of a science and technology nation, to which end, a university fund will be established at a scale of 10 trillion yen during the current fiscal year. The second priority is promoting the revival of the dynamism of Japanese companies and providing comprehensive support for startups as the driver of innovation while simultaneously strengthening tax support for large companies assisting startups. The third priority is launching a Vision for a Digital Garden City Nation by implementing digital technology such as telework, drone delivery and autonomous driving, beginning with local regions. The fourth and final priority is promoting economic security. A fund will be established, with innovative technologies to be developed in crucial areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum technology.

Under the distribution strategy, the first course of action will be to provide support to the private sector to strengthen the distribution of wealth. Support will be drastically strengthened within the tax code for companies that raise wages to increase the percentage of the distribution allocated to labor. The second course of action will be to strengthen the distribution function in the public sector. Public prices will be revised to increase the incomes of those working at facilities providing medical nursing, elderly care, childcare services, and the like.

In response to this emergency proposal, the government will make a concerted effort to immediately address the matters outlined. The Council of a New Form of Capitalism Realization will continue to conduct brisk discussions to compile, by next spring, a grand design and an outline of the approaches to substantalize it, and will keep the world informed of its progress.
Surrounded by seas, the Japanese archipelago is surprisingly cold in winter, with plenty of snow. Its climate has given birth to fantastical scenery, fostering local, technical solutions.
SEA FOG

The Seto Inland Sea is rimmed Honshu and the Island of Shikoku. On cold, bright winter mornings, this long, thin body of water produces a layer of fog when air laden with moisture becomes chilled. Superb views of the phenomenon can be enjoyed from the observatory in Mihara City, Hiroshima Prefecture, looking out over more than 700 islands and islets dotting the fog in a tapestry that never repeats itself, creating a magical fantasy world.

SNOWY GARDEN

Owing to the winds blowing in from the sea, the area facing the Sea of Japan has heavy, moist winter snows. At Kenroku-en Garden (Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture)—one of Japan’s finest with over 300 years of history—numerous pine trees are trussed with rope during the winter, giving extra support to branches laden with the heavy snow. The beautiful conical shapes, produced through traditional wisdom and skill, are topographical poems symbolizing the Japanese winter.

NEW YEAR’S DELICACIES

The Japanese New Year comes with special delicacies. The custom of placing lucky foods in tiered boxes and eating them at seasonal milestone originated as a way of expressing the concept “stacked with luck.” Each of the foods is made with long-lasting ingredients, enabling the entire family to eat leisurely during the New Year holiday period. In that way, Japanese people celebrate the beginning of the year in peace.
The Olympic and Paralympic Games present an invaluable opportunity to draw people’s attention away from day-to-day matters to the wider world, by way of sports. Taking advantage of the momentum that the Games create, the Nutrition for Growth Summit is held in conjunction with them, in their host city, offering the opportunity to think globally about nutrition and instigate action.

With the first summit having been held in London in 2013, following the London Olympics of the previous year, the third—the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021—will convene on December 7 and 8. Leaders of governments, international organizations, businesses, civil groups, and academia, and other relevant stakeholders from around the world will gather to discuss five themes: health (making nutrition integral to Universal Health Coverage); food (building food systems that promote safe, healthy diets and nutrition); resilience (addressing malnutrition effectively in fragile and conflict-affected contexts); accountability (promoting data-driven accountability); and financing (securing new investments to tackle malnutrition). The overall goal is to indicate the future direction of global efforts to tackle malnutrition through the following actions: adopting stronger, evidence-based nutrition policies at global, regional, and country levels; pledging to increase financing for proven nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions; and making commitments to align
and harmonize actions across sectors and stakeholders.

Japan, host of this year’s summit, has reserves of knowledge and practical expertise regarding nutrition that were gained through years of experience. After World War II, the country was quick to rekindle the training of nutritional specialists and establish a cadre of qualified professionals, as well as to monitor the nutritional well-being of its citizens. Not only does Japan provide school lunch programs and nutritional counseling, both of high quality, but it also participates in a wide array of international efforts to improve nutrition. “I think Japan has a lot to share,” says Gerda Verburg, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. SUN was established by the UN to tackle the world’s nutritional problems and will play a vital role in the upcoming summit by addressing the ways in which participants can commit to the solution to these problems. “In the 1950s and 1960s, Japan learned a lot about the importance of not just food security, but also the quality of food and what food nutrition can do for physical health, cognitive development, and mental well-being.”

Nutrition has become an increasingly complex problem in recent years, with many countries facing what is called the “double burden of malnutrition,” where undernutrition, which stunts growth, coexists with overnutrition, which causes lifestyle-related illnesses and other problems. One in every 10 people in the world suffers from hunger, and one in every three suffers from obesity. “If someone has been stunted as a child, it will affect their metabolism, and then they may be more vulnerable to becoming overweight or obese later in life. In the same families, you can see stunted children and obese adults,” Verburg explains.

Nutritional problems are also deeply linked to serious global issues such as flaws in the food system and climate change. “Our food system is one of the root causes of malnutrition. Our current, imbalanced way of feeding ourselves is bankrupting our health systems and exhausting our planet,” declares Verburg.

A cross-sector approach— involving health, agriculture, the food industry, and education—is essential if we are to deal with such a complex issue. Government–led efforts are not enough; innovation and awareness-raising within the business community and the civil sector are also needed. At the summit, governments, international organizations, businesses, civil groups, and all other stakeholders are expected to make commitments that are both specific and achievable. A successful outcome is greatly desired if we are to accomplish not only the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) of achieving food security and improved nutrition for the world by the year 2030, but all SDGs, as nutrition drives healthy economies and prosperity. Verburg emphatically says, “I want countries to be extremely ambitious in order not to fail to meet the goals. We need a doubling down on ambition.”

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, launched in 2010, works globally to bring together people and organizations in government, business, and civil society—as well as across the United Nations system—to improve nutrition. Gerda Verburg (right), formerly Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality in the Netherlands, was appointed United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Coordinator of SUN in 2016 by the UN Secretary-General.

Left: Japan is committed to international cooperation in improving nutrition. For example, a cooking lesson was provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to teach practical recipes using common ingredients in Madagascar in 2018. SHINICHI KUNO/JICA

Right: Japan deploys specialists to provide nutritional guidance at schools, childcare centers, hospitals, and other places where nutrition is key. Photo shows a day-care center for infants and children. JAPAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION
Diet and nutrition teacher NAKADA Tomoko finds joy in watching children eat happily.

After World War II, Japan instituted school lunches to improve children’s nutrition. This photo was taken in Tokyo in 1947.

When the morning lessons end, several students quickly change into white clothes and race down the hall as it is their turn to serve meals to their classmates at school lunch, a much-awaited time of the day. Although everyone must eat without engaging in conversation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are plenty of smiles around as the children take big bites of nutritious food prepared with seasonal ingredients.

Nutrition is essential to any child’s healthy growth. While undernutrition is a deep-seated problem for those living in poverty, in recent years, many countries, regardless of their wealth, have faced complex issues, including overnutrition.

To make progress toward solving that global problem, Japan will hold the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021 in December. Today, more than a century since the founding of the National Institute of Nutrition in Tokyo in 1920, Japan expects to leverage its experience in nutritional policy to build international momentum surrounding better nutrition.

The three important pillars of Japan’s nutritional policy are diet, specialists, and evidence. The policy recommends that meals consist of a balanced combination of staple dishes—such as rice or bread—that provide the body with energy, along with main dishes—such as meat, fish, or soybeans—that supply protein, and side dishes that deliver

SCHOOL LUNCHES: THE KEY TO CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND PROSPERITY

The healthy growth of children in Japan owes much to the provision of nutritionally balanced school-lunch menus and a long standing commitment to nutrition education. Japan also offers school-lunch support internationally, leading to improved nutrition and higher quality learning.

16
JICA assistance helps local residents provide school meals in Madagascar.

Children harvesting rice. Growing and harvesting one’s own food is an important part of food and nutrition education.

Vitamins and minerals. After World War II, Japan promptly eliminated nutritional deficiency with support from international organizations. The country’s nutrition policy, developed in response to the malnutrition of its citizens, became the foundation for an expanding economy.

Japan’s policy also focused on training of nutritional specialists including nutritional education and food-service management. Diet and nutrition teachers and dietitians play a key role in settings where school lunches are served. Most elementary schools in the country provide well-balanced school lunch menus devised by nutrition teachers and school nutritionists. These are based on national standards for nutritional intake in the implementation of school lunches, which are set according to the stage of a child’s growth. Menus are also creatively devised to consider children’s favorite foods.

NAKADA Tomoko, a member of the board of the Japan Dietetic Association, is a diet and nutrition teacher in Tochigi Prefecture. She says, “I take care to transform school-meal menus into learning materials. For example, if children learn in their home economics classes that traditional local cuisine is made by using ingredients in a non-wasteful manner, they will be aware of the need to reduce food waste and will be more likely to finish their meals.” Nakada makes it a point to impart children with appropriate knowledge through food and nutrition education. “A meal can have consequences for an individual’s entire life span, starting with the time spent in the womb. Nothing gives me greater joy than to see children learn about nutrition through school lunches and grow into healthy adults.”

Japan also helps introduce lunches at schools in other countries. For the children receiving those meals, the assistance not only improves their nutrition but also enhances the overall quality of their education.

For example, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been aiding local communities in Madagascar since 2017, helping them serve community-based school lunches to children. The assistance is part of the School for All project, which seeks to improve a learning environment in which parents and guardians take turns preparing school lunches. By 2019, the program had expanded to 146 schools. While nutritional deficiency is still a pressing issue for children in Madagascar, many can now get the meals they need from their school lunches, which boosts their motivation to learn.

A fourth-grade teacher says, “The children can concentrate in class on days when we serve lunch. Community-school lunches clearly encourage them to attend school and participate in the various activities there.”

The children unfailingly smile when they eat the school lunches that help them to grow and create happy memories.
In Pakistan, agriculture—a major part of the country’s economy—has experienced grave destruction due to swarms of desert locusts. Japan has taken action to assist the beleaguered farmers.

Countless locusts form swarms and take to the air, totally blocking out the sky. Not satisfied with just eating the vegetation in forests and savannahs, they migrate from farm to farm, devouring produce wherever they go. The formation of the locust swarms every few decades is related to an imbalance in the delicate natural environment caused by extreme weather events—droughts, heavy rains, and the like.

Swarms of desert locusts that formed in eastern Africa and the tip of the Arabian Peninsula from 2018 to 2019 arrived in Pakistan in both 2019 and 2020. They damaged a total of 17.8 million hectares of farmland in the country, making it the largest and most destructive locust disaster ever.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which has long been implementing agricultural cooperation activities in Pakistan, started to provide...
emergency support in 2020—primarily aid to small farmers who had suffered heavy damage from the locusts. HAGIWARA Ritsuko of JICA’s Pakistan Office says, “At first, agriculture extension officers wanted us to send pesticides to control the locusts. However, considering the various circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic such as the inability to provide proper guidance on how to use pesticides, we decided to distribute wheat seeds in time for the fall 2020 planting season to help restore farmers’ livelihoods in the affected areas.” Therefore, instead of pesticides, JICA sent seeds and fertilizer to 3,000 small farmers. Harvesting the crops from these seeds should provide enough income to offset the locust damage.

To implement the support, JICA leveraged the network that it had built up in the country over the years. It has enlisted help from Pakistan’s local government officials and technical experts to decide which farmers should receive the aid and how to fairly select, store, inspect, and distribute the supplies. The transport of seeds between provinces—otherwise limited on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and Pakistan’s food policies—was thus smooth.

JICA has also partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which possesses specialized knowledge on controlling locusts. As part of a one-year plan that began in March 2021, they have enhanced the monitoring and control capabilities of government officials in Pakistan to help them quickly identify new locust groups and share information about them nationwide, which will lead to more effective countermeasures, such as the timely distribution of pesticides. An information network has been set up across Pakistan to measure locust density and predict swarms by collecting photos with GPS metadata taken and sent in by local observers.

AZEGAMI Tomohiro from the JICA Economic Development Department says, “We need to keep up a steady pace of training to prepare for future locust swarms. I hope to use this experience going forward so that we can support even more countries when the next locust swarm strikes.”

Although the next outbreak of locusts may be decades away, Japan will continue to offer support to Pakistan and elsewhere to help people avoid similar difficulties whenever they may occur.
MEALS TO SOLVE THE GLOBAL FOOD IMBALANCE

Some people in the world today have difficulty getting enough food to eat, while others struggle with obesity as a result of eating too much. One Japanese NPO seeks to resolve that food imbalance, helping individuals on both ends of the spectrum.

How wonderful would it be if two people—one living in a developed country and another in a developing country—were able to share their food equally? TABLE FOR TWO (TFT), a Japanese NPO established in 2007, has created a system to do just that. For each nutritionally balanced TFT meal selected by a diner at an employee cafeteria or a restaurant, a donation of 20 yen is generated. TFT...
For every meal a diner eats from the TFT menu, a donation is made to a developing country. The photo shows a TFT meal at a Toyota Motor Corp. employee cafeteria. TOYOTA MOTOR CORP.

Right: TFT helps local schools plant vegetable gardens to teach children how to make their own food. TABLE FOR TWO

Bottom: Dietary education programs in the U.S. teach children lessons such as how to prepare nutritionally balanced Japanese food. TABLE FOR TWO

works with partner organizations to turn that 20-yen donation into a school meal in a developing country.

Many people in developing countries still cannot get enough food to obtain the nutrition they need to live. According to reports by UNICEF and other international organizations, since 2020, soaring food prices and distribution network disruptions caused by the rampant spread of COVID-19 have exacerbated the situation. As a result, about 10% of the world’s population is now underfed. To achieve the SDG of zero hunger by 2030, much remains to be done. Meanwhile, the percentage of obese people in developed countries continues to rise owing to higher calorie meals and a lack of exercise due to the prevalence of desk work.

Resolving that global food imbalance is TFT’s goal. According to its executive director, KOGURE Masahisa, “Many people can’t make big donations on a continual basis. That’s why TFT created a system that lets them contribute a little bit every day.” The amount of each donation is small and manageable and can therefore be included within the price of a single meal, making it possible for individuals to contribute while enjoying a delicious and healthy dish—these advantages to the system eliminate the psychological and economic obstacles blocking donations. As of April 2021, around 650 companies and organizations are involved with TFT. In addition, TFT has offices not only in Japan, but also in the U.S. and Germany, where it is recruiting more sponsors.

TFT helps serve school meals mainly in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, and the Philippines. With the donations collected in 2020, the organization delivered about 5.5 million school meals. More than just offering children better nutrition, those meals also provide the motivation both to attend school and to study while there. According to one of the students, “Thanks to the school meals, I can really focus on my studies.”

In addition to assistance with school meals, TFT helps plant vegetable gardens for schools and communities to create a sustainable food supply system. Kogure says, “We often hear from recipients that they want to be able to produce their own food rather than just relying on aid. But they lack the technology and funds. So, we started to help plant vegetable gardens with the idea of assisting them in producing food.” Along with improving food self-sufficiency and economic independence, such organically cultivated vegetable gardens provide places for teaching children about nutrition and food safety.

Kogure enthusiastically says, “We want to recruit partners beyond our own current field of activities so that we can provide even more assistance to developing countries.” As the waves of TFT’s influence spread, we will come much closer to a world without hunger or obesity.

Right: TFT helps local schools plant vegetable gardens to teach children how to make their own food. TABLE FOR TWO

Bottom: Dietary education programs in the U.S. teach children lessons such as how to prepare nutritionally balanced Japanese food. TABLE FOR TWO
HEALTH & WELFARE

BRINGING THE COVID-19 VACCINE TO ALL CORNERS OF THE WORLD

As the world continues to face shortages of COVID-19 vaccines, the Japanese government is actively working to deliver vaccines and contribute to “Last One Mile Support” by building cold chain systems in developing countries and establishing equitable vaccine access in every corner of the world.

Vaccination on a global scale is essential for the early containment of COVID-19. Recognizing the urgency of this need, the Japanese government is conducting various support measures to accelerate fair and equitable vaccine access for people in all countries and regions.

Key among these measures is the distribution of vaccines to developing countries. Japan has disbursed 200 million dollars to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, an international framework for the joint purchase and rapid and equitable distribution of vaccines to people in all countries. At the COVAX AMC Summit, co-hosted by the Japanese government in June this year, Japan announced an additional sum that would bring its total contribution to 1 billion dollars. Furthermore, Japan has distributed vaccines to countries and regions in need through such channels as COVAX. So far, a total of 25 million doses have been delivered, with plans to provide up to approximately 60 million doses in total.

Japan has been supporting the development of the cold chain system, an effort known as “Last One Mile Support,” to ensure the safe delivery of vaccines to developing countries. Those countries often lack suitable infrastructure for transporting and storing COVID-19 vaccines, which must be kept at low temperatures.

In addition to supplying materials, equipment, and so forth to 57 countries in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, and Africa through UNICEF, Japan also supplies six countries and one region with grant aid through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Bilateral grant aid through JICA normally takes more than a year to be finalized due to the time required to work out the details of the aid specification. In this particular case, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and JICA have been able to accelerate the process, reducing the time to just four months. KUBOKURA Ken, director of the Office for COVID-19 Response at
Vaccine transport boxes developed by Twinbird Corporation are among the equipment provided by Japan. Since the boxes can draw power from a car’s cigarette-lighter socket and are resistant to shaking, they are already being used in Timor-Leste to store and transport vaccines in areas where the power supply is unstable. JICA

JICA, says, “I believe that our longstanding relationship of trust with the health and medical sectors in the partner countries enabled us to obtain the necessary details from them within a short time frame. That is why we were able to start the cooperation promptly.”

JICA’s cooperation goes beyond providing materials and equipment, extending to technical cooperation and human resource development. For example, a webinar in which a Japanese expert offered a variety of information on COVID-19 vaccines was attended by 494 people from 68 countries. Also, this past June, JICA supplied 15 high-quality vaccine transport boxes to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and held training sessions on the operation and handling of the equipment. “We load the boxes onto vehicles provided by the Government of Japan. The temperature of the boxes is properly controlled, and they can be powered from the vehicles, which is beneficial when we deliver vaccines to remote areas where there is no electricity,” a local official commented. “On behalf of the people of Timor-Leste, we really want to thank Japan for supporting us in the very difficult time of COVID-19. Going forward, we will work closely with Japan to improve health care for our people.”

In its fight against COVID-19, Japan will continue to actively address the challenges of developing countries and provide comprehensive support for the delivery of vaccines to every corner of the world.

Toyota Tsusho Corporation has obtained WHO’s medical equipment Performance, Quality and Safety (PQS) prequalification for its refrigerated vehicle for vaccines based on Toyota Motor’s Land Cruiser—a first of its kind. The top photo shows a vehicle in use in Ethiopia.
BEYOND TOKYO 2020:
LEADING THE WAY TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

The Tokyo 2020 Games, which reached a safe conclusion even under the difficult circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, made a significant step toward the realization of an inclusive society—one in which everyone respects one another regardless of gender, age, or ability.

It was precisely because the world had been facing great difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic that Japan determined to fulfill its responsibility as host country to hold the Tokyo 2020 Games, even without spectators, and to provide the world with a sense of solidarity and to offer hopes and dreams, especially to children, who hold the future in their hands. Firmly intent on making this happen, many people throughout Japan worked in unison, striving to implement measures for safety and security to ensure that Japan bring the Games to a safe conclusion.

The Tokyo 2020 Games not only moved and inspired many people through sports, but also advanced the Games’ core concept of “Unity in Diversity,” serving to promote the further growth of this movement. The percentage of female...
The role of actuating the concept of “Unity in Diversity” by providing hospitality and supporting athletes and staff from around the world. MIURA Hisashi, who has a hearing impairment, was one of these volunteers. Wanting to contribute in some way to this historic event, he performed reception and maintenance duties, among others, at the residential buildings and fitness center at the Olympic and Paralympic Village. “As I actively offered my own opinions and shared sign-language skills, my teammates also naturally started to communicate more openly, showing their care for one another using both spoken words and sign language. Ultimately, I felt that we made an excellent team, and were able to fulfill our role. It was also unforgettable to have the chance to communicate with players and staff visiting from all around the world using gestures and body language. I’m glad that I was able to support them, even if only in a small way,” says Miura.

Respecting and supporting one another regardless of differences is crucial to the realization of an inclusive society. At this year’s Games, this notion was reiterated to many people throughout the world. Miura says, “The Tokyo 2020 Games offered an opportunity to make great progress in terms of ‘Unity in Diversity.’ I am thankful that I was able to make my personal contribution as a volunteer at the Games, and I believe it is important to continue building up such experiences, not just at the Olympics and Paralympics.”

Each of us embracing diversity will create a vitality that will lead to the realization of a world where everyone can live comfortably. The Tokyo 2020 Games were a sure, significant step in that direction.
At this year’s Tokyo 2020 Games, 5G technology enhanced the viewing experience, while robots assisted operations at various events, entertaining all those involved. Such cutting-edge technologies point to the exciting future that awaits us.
The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games set out to be the most innovative Games ever and bring a positive legacy to future generations. 5G technology and robotics, finely tuned to meet the needs of the Games, expertly demonstrated what the future has in store by providing behind-the-scenes support for the massive event and enhancing the viewing experience.

The increased bandwidth and higher capacity made possible by 5G networks paved the way for a new type of experience for viewers. At a swimming competition venue, for example, 5G’s low latency and AR (augmented reality) technology sent real-time data about contestants and their relative positions to viewers wearing goggle-type devices. The data informed the spectators instantaneously about which swimmers were leading at any moment, letting them cheer on the athletes all the more enthusiastically.

At a golf competition, a “multi-live broadcasting system” allowed spectators with hand-held tablets to watch, in real time, the participating golfers scattered across various holes along the golf course. Although the decision to hold Tokyo 2020 without spectators limited those experiences to a small number of officials, the few who were there could glimpse the future of sports viewing.

Robots also played a remarkable role at Tokyo 2020. HIRUKAWA Hirohisa, a robotics specialist of the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) and leader of the Tokyo 2020 Robot Project, says, “We hoped that this year’s Games would be more than just a showcase for technology. Our aim was to show how useful robots can be.” Robotic support in conducting various events garnered special attention. For instance, Field Support Robots (FSRs) retrieved and transported projectiles at events such as the javelin throw and shot put. The robots could move autonomously, avoiding obstacles and choosing optimal routes, thus saving time and reducing the workload for support personnel. Similarly, the Power Assist Suit, which can relieve wearers of up to 10 kg of a physical burden, played an important part in powerlifting competitions at the Paralympic Games. Support personnel, who wore the suit like a backpack, were able to change the powerlifting plates on barbells with speed and ease. “The staff were incredulous at first, but the suit gained a reputation for being easy to use and reducing fatigue,” recalls ARAI Koji, senior director of the Innovation Promotion Office of the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Because the Games took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, being “safe and secure” was an important theme. Considering its potential concerning avoiding unnecessary human contact, robotic technology thus found itself useful to an unprecedented degree. Hirukawa reflects, “We realized that robots could take over a great many tasks in security, cleaning, and in guiding visitors. From now on, we will be able to reduce needless contact between people by using robots.”

Tokyo 2020 illustrated a fast-approaching future characterized by advanced technologies such as 5G and robotics. Japanese technology continues to evolve and will support efforts toward a more productive lifestyle.
Paralympian, he had just broken the 30-second barrier for the first time, setting a personal best on the big stage, while participating in a heat of the men’s 50 m freestyle S9 (physical impairment class) at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games on August 29.

There were several Japanese people among those cheering Hermosa on: faculty and researchers from Nippon Sport Science University. As an institution that began undertaking projects for the Japan Sports Agency in 2017, the university helped paralympians from all around the world reach this year’s Paralympic Games highlighted intense athletic competition among 162 participating delegations, six of which made their first Paralympic appearance with support from a Japanese University.

When Rodrigo Hermosa saw his time on the electronic scoreboard—29.72 seconds—he unleashed a roar and pumped his fist. As Paraguay’s first ever Paralympian, he had just broken the 30-second barrier for the first time, setting a personal best on the big stage, while participating in a heat of the men’s 50 m freestyle S9 (physical impairment class) at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games on August 29.

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Rodrigo Hermosa became Paraguay’s first Paralympian. Swimming helped him grow mentally. Recently, he has been spreading his message among people with disabilities in his country.
provides a wide range of assistance tailored to each country’s situation. Its support has reached a total of 43 countries, six of which made their first-ever Paralympic appearances this year: Paraguay, Bhutan, the Maldives, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Guyana.

Many countries, like Hermosa’s, face difficulties in sending delegations to the Paralympics due to small numbers of athletes, and in some cases, weak committee-management capabilities—a National Paralympic Committee is a requirement for participation in the Paralympics. Therefore, the university assigns staff to various regions and

ITO Masamitsu, a professor at Nippon Sport Science University who runs the support program, met Hermosa in Paraguay in 2018. At the time, Hermosa was only 14 years old. Born without his right arm below the elbow, he was an inexperienced swimmer and wasn’t ready to be an athlete. However, after joining a camp organized by the university and appearing in an international competition, he began receiving domestic media coverage. That planted the seed of Hermosa’s identity as an athlete.

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The goal of Nippon Sport Science University is for those athletic endeavors to continue after their support concludes. To that end, it is essential to change attitudes on the local level. As Professor Ito says, “If they’re happy with just making an appearance at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, then there’s no point. To connect with what comes next, we’ve engaged in numerous discussions with athletes, coaches, and National Paralympic Committee members about the purpose of sending someone to the Paralympics. Thus, we shared the bigger goal of ‘building a society where people with disabilities can live comfortably’ with them. I do believe that they will make further progress toward making that happen.”

Hermosa said, “For many people in Paraguay, these Paralympics were the first ones that they had ever watched. After I returned home, I heard people say things like, ‘I was impressed to see athletes with all sorts of disabilities playing sports so intensively.’ Looking ahead I want to achieve even better results in international competitions.” His future performance will no doubt embolden people with disabilities. The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games were a precious step forward, influencing attitudes toward the creation of an inclusive society.
The Joy of Going Out

Barrier-free accessibility is crucial to realizing an inclusive society. In attempting to achieve that goal, innovative products and services are being launched one after another. How do their developers envision a barrier-free future?

One of the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “Leave No One Behind.” In Japan, where various efforts have been made to realize that principle, many products and services are being developed to help people with disabilities move around the city freely.

One of those is Ashirase, a navigation system for the visually impaired. Attached to the user’s shoes and linked to a smartphone application, the small device instructs the user where to go via vibrations. A former engineer at Honda Motor Co., Ltd., CHINO Wataru founded Ashirase Inc.—the first venture company to emerge from Honda—to develop the system. He has also participated in demonstration tests using the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS), an original Japanese satellite positioning system.

Through numerous interviews with the visually impaired, Chino learned that they live their lives by making full use of all their senses other than sight. The aim of Ashirase is thus to support visually-impaired people as they walk by providing navigation from their feet, without interfering with the use of their senses. By ensuring an environment where individuals can pay close attention to their surroundings, even visually-impaired people will be able to walk outside safely on their own.

Chino says, “Walking is the basis of mobility. I hope to support the independence of the
visually impaired by providing them with the freedom and safety of walking using technology.” He is developing the product rapidly for commercial launch in 2022, with an eye to eventually deploying it overseas.

In the same vein, WheeLog! is an application based on the experience of its developer, ODA Yuriko, who was diagnosed with the intractable disease of “distal myopathy” in her early 20s. It is the world’s first app that uses maps to record and share the routes that users have taken with their wheelchairs, allowing other users to see wheelchair-accessible routes at a glance, even in cities they have never been to before. In addition, various types of barrier-free-related information, such as the location of wheelchair-accessible restrooms, elevators, and ramps, is collected through user posts to support wheelchair users in their active outings.

At the beginning of her wheelchair life, Oda thought it would no longer be possible to go out like she used to. However, when she later learned that there was a barrier-free beach near to her home, she realized the importance of sharing information broadly with everyone, which gave her the idea for the map app. “The barrier-free environment is rapidly improving in Japan, making it more important for everyone to gather information and use it together.”

Oda has come to realize that even people with disabilities can help others by sharing information and having others use it through WheeLog!. She continues to take on the challenge of solving social issues using the power of information toward the realization of Goal 11 of the SDGs, Sustainable Cities and Communities.

One element of an inclusive society is an environment in which people with visual impairments and those in wheelchairs can go out on their own without having to give anything up. Aiming to realize such a society, the barrier-free movement is gaining momentum, driven by passion and innovative ideas.
DISCOVERING THE UNKNOWN JAPAN WITH ISABELLA BIRD

The female English traveler Isabella Bird traveled Japan in the second half of the 19th century, penning a travelogue on the country’s hitherto unknown culture and natural features. What was the real Japan she observed and why does it enthrall the reader still to this day?

Travel remains difficult as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, but the world of exploration and adventure can still be experienced via the pages of a travelogue. A high-quality travelogue offers the reader information about a land’s allure that is not available through daily news sources or regular guidebooks. Isabella Bird was a pioneer of such travelogues about Japan, having first visited from her home country of England in 1878.

At the time of this visit, Japan had already been exposed to the outside world for more than two decades (having ended its more than two-century policy of isolation in 1854), and Western culture was rapidly entering and transforming the country. In the “interior,” however, the culture had remained largely unchanged. In response to a request by the British consul-general in Japan, Harry Parkes, who wanted to show the world the real Japan, Bird embarked upon a roughly seven-month journey covering more than 4,500 km, traveling north from her base in Tokyo to Hokkaido, then west through the Kansai region to Ise Shrine. Her two-volume, 800-page travelogue, Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: An Account of Travels in the Interior Including Visits to the Aborigines of Yezo and the Shrines of Nikkō and Isé, was published in 1880, and is filled with invaluable stories from her traveling experiences.

Bird recorded extensive accounts of the indigenous Ainu settlements at Biratori in Hokkaido, one of the major Ainu centers, detailing everything from daily life to familial relationships and religious beliefs. Meanwhile, at Ise Shrine and at Nishi-Hongwanji Temple in Kyoto, she wrote in detail about the buildings’ interiors, which were known to very few people, even among the Japanese. “These special experiences were possible thanks to Parkes enlisting the support of the Japanese government and making thorough preparations,” says KANASAKA Kiyonori, professor emeritus at Kyoto University, who in 2020 published the highly acclaimed reprint Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: Revisiting Isabella Bird. Due to Bird’s visually illustrative portrayals formed from her keen powers of observation and her unparalleled meticulous accounts—often based on the research available at the time—her work still serves as a valuable resource for understanding what Japan was like in the late
19th century.

Bird vividly described customs and cultural practices that she experienced through encounters on her travels. With the cooperation of locals, she had the rare opportunity to attend a wedding and a funeral and to have children show her traditional games. In her lively depictions of the various people she interacted with, Bird clearly presented Japanese values such as *omotenashi* (the spirit of hospitality) and Japanese politeness. In an account of her stay in Tenoko, Yamagata Prefecture, she wrote: “When the women of the house saw that I felt the heat they gracefully produced fans and fanned me for a whole hour. On asking the charge, they refused to make any, and would not receive anything... I told them truly that I should remember them as long as I remember Japan, and went on, much touched by their kindness.”

The appeal of Japan that Bird repeatedly described throughout her writings can be felt as strongly now as it could then, whether it be at the stately Nikko Toshogu Shrine or Hokkaido’s Usu Bay with its beautiful scenery. Professor Kanasaka says, “From nature to people, society, and culture, Bird richly depicted the distinctive and inherent qualities she perceived in her observations. That is the most captivating thing about her travelogue.” What better way to experience Japan from afar than to delve into Bird’s travel writings?

“Usu is a dream of beauty and peace...... In the exquisite inlet where I spent the night, trees and trailers drooped into the water and were mirrored in it, their green, heavy shadows lying sharp against the sunset gold and pink of the rest of the bay.”
Riding along one of the rivers that flows beside the city of Kanazawa, the woman on the bicycle is reminded of a city in her faraway homeland. The downtown area demarcated by rivers on both sides, the rainy weather, the copious art and culture, and so forth... Given that Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture and Ghent in Belgium—both ancient cities with centuries of history—have much in common, the two have formed a sister-city relationship.

Rani Verellen has been working as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) for the JET Programme at the Kanazawa City Office since the summer of 2019. Born and raised in Belgium, a country with three official languages, she first took an interest in the Japanese language—which is completely different from the Germanic and Romance languages—after watching anime. Verellen then decided to enroll in Japanese classes at university and spent a year studying in Fukuoka, located in western Japan. Propelled by the

Before joining JET, Rani Verellen was already familiar with many elements of Japanese culture. Here, she performs the tea ceremony. "I've come to realize that the tea ceremony, Japanese archery, and calligraphy are all based on the spirit of Zen." 

RANI VERELLEN
Born in Antwerp, Belgium. Majored in the Japanese language at university out of an interest in Japan born from anime. After studying for one year in Fukuoka, she applied to the JET Programme, which assigned her to Kanazawa in 2019. She continues to work as a CIR there today.
idea of building a career through her language skills, she was drawn to the JET Programme and the opportunity that it offered to network with JET alumni who now work in many different fields around the world.

As a CIR, Verellen’s primary duties include fostering cultural exchange and the sister-city relationship between Kanazawa and Ghent, along with making Kanazawa “linguistically barrier-free” for tourists visiting the city from elsewhere in Japan and abroad. Walking around famous sightseeing spots and cultural facilities in the city, she uses her international perspective to suggest ways to make touring Kanazawa more enjoyable for foreign visitors, such as installing signs with text in foreign languages and pictograms. Verellen said, “It’s sad we couldn’t welcome visitors during exciting times like Kanazawa Jazz Street and the Kanazawa Marathon because of COVID-19. I’ll be happy once the pandemic is under control and the tourists come back.” In the meantime, she helps the many international students at the city’s universities by translating important government documents on city life into other languages and providing convenient access with QR codes, thereby offering them peace of mind during their stay in the city.

In Kanazawa, the sea and the mountains are only a short distance away from the city, while historical cityscapes can be found along the narrow streets that branch off from the main avenues. Close to Kenrokuen Garden, where visitors can take in the beauty of a traditional Japanese garden, is the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, one of Japan’s leading modern art museums. Verellen said, “One of Kanazawa’s charms is that it brings together the city and nature, past and present.”

While studying in Fukuoka, Verellen engaged in Japanese archery and the tea ceremony. Ten, a being assigned to Kanazawa, she started learning calligraphy and seal engraving. She has also come to take an interest in the traditional Kanazawa crafts of Kutani ware, Kanazawa lacquerware, and Kaga Yuzen silk dyeing. While eagerly studying various aspects of Japanese culture, Verellen has also come to better appreciate the music, cuisine, and festival culture of her home country of Belgium. “I think a fusion of Japanese and Belgium cultures would be fascinating. I hope my work can help connect our two cultures.”

ABOUT THE JAPAN EXCHANGE AND TEACHING (JET) PROGRAMME

The JET Programme began in 1987 with the goal of promoting grassroots international exchange between Japan and other nations, and is now one of the world’s largest international exchange programs. In 2019, the JET Programme welcomed 5,761 participants, and there are currently more than 70,000 alumni from 75 countries living in all parts of the world.

The JET Programme official website >> http://jetprogramme.org/en/
JapanGov (https://www.japan.go.jp) is your digital gateway to Japan. Visit the website and find out more.

JapanGov, the official portal of the Government of Japan, provides a wealth of information regarding various issues that Japan is tackling, and also directs you to the sites of relevant ministries and agencies. It introduces important policies that the government is addressing, such as economic growth, innovative technology, and diversity, among others, with many videos and infographics.

You’ll also find the official web magazine “KIZUNA ” (https://www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/).

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