

# れんめんめん...

Ren

Men

Men



Education for Sustainable Development

ESD Practices

by Okayama Municipal Kominkan



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Ren  
Men  
Men

Establishing and Expanding a Human Network and Handing It Down to the Next Generation to Create a New Home Town

“This is the first time for me to raise a child, and I don’t know what to do.”

“Is there any good place where children can play to their heart’s content?”

“A lot of waste has been dumped in the river in my neighborhood, and it stinks. Something must be done.”

If you have a small question and a request, and if you do not do anything about it, nothing will happen. If you share it with someone, however, a circle of sympathy will develop and expand, leading to changes.

Regarding someone’s problem as your own and cooperating to solve the problem --- this type of effort is promoted at Kominkan, Community Learning Centers of Japan.

**“Ren Men Men” is a coined term which means to hand down wisdoms, heritages and values from the past to the present, and to the future.**



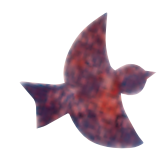


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## What is ESD?

From waking in the morning till going to sleep at night, people are busy working at various tasks using many electric appliances, electronic equipment, and means of transportation. Watching TV or checking the Internet, people find a wide variety of news and information, on topics including accidents, incidents, the economic climate, sport, entertainment, education, the environment, and conflicts. Some people feel that there is a connection between their lives and what is going on in society, while others do not.

On and after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, however, more and more people have been beginning to ask themselves whether it is acceptable to take no action to generate change.

What is important? What kind of society would be ideal?  
Now is perhaps the time for each person to face these questions and review what has been done so far.

The United Nations has declared the period spanning from 2005 to 2014 as the decade of ESD, in order to develop individuals who can solve a wide variety of global problems.  
**ESD stands for Education for Sustainable Development, which fosters individuals who can contribute to the establishment of a sustainable society.**

In Okayama City, the Okayama ESD Project was launched in 2005. Since then, the project has been promoted through a loose network formed by many people in a wide range of positions, including those engaged in schools, civil organizations, companies, and administration.

In the city, there are 37 Kominkan centers, which serve as a daily place for people in communities get together, learn about various themes, and carry out various activities, as well as a local base for them to implement ESD efforts in their junior high school districts.



## Issues to Solve through Cooperation with People All Over the World

The world's climate is changing. Many species are becoming extinct.

Some people in the world are dumping their food, while many children are suffering from shortage of nutrition. Poverty is spreading.

Conflicts are ongoing in many parts of the world. There is a shortage of food and water.

Many young people in the world are unemployed.

Some people might say "It would be totally impossible to solve these problems!" However, the original causes of these large-scale, difficult problems lie in us, as human beings.

There is no doubt that these problems are connected to us through the energy that we consume every day as a matter of course and the items that we eat, purchase, and use every day as a matter of course.

Make that connection more evident and realize sustainable development  
--- this is what the Kominkan in Okayama City strives for.

What activities are promoted by such Kominkan? Now, let's take a look at examples of ESD practices.

If you find them interesting, why not participate yourself?

You cannot learn the significance of the activities promoted by Kominkan from someone else.

If everybody tries such activities, a path to a sustainable society will be created.

### Seven Points of ESD Practices by Okayama Municipal Kominkan

1. Regard a problem as your own, rather than someone else's.
2. Establish a mutual learning relationship, rather than a relationship of teaching and being taught.
3. Review the present from the perspective of the past in order to consider what kind of future would be sustainable.
4. Ensure that those who wish to be engaged in projects can participate from the phases of planning and operation.
5. Empower individuals who can contribute to transforming their communities into sustainable societies.
6. Realize that mere knowledge brings no change to society; take action, even on a small scale, in order to solve problems, and change your behavior.
7. Learn the pleasure of cooperation, which enables the solving of a problem, even if you cannot work on it alone.



# Live in Harmony with Nature



If you pay attention to nature, observe it attentively, and play in it to your heart's content, you will realize that human beings live in nature and live by grace of nature. You will also learn about the laws of nature and a smart way to use them.

## Our ESD Practices



## Come on, *Kawa-gaki!*

### *Kawa-gaki* 2013 – Why Not Play in a River?

More than 10 years have passed since the workshop named “Come on, *Kawa-gaki* (river kids)!” was first launched. At this workshop, children who have never played in a river watch fish leaping in their hands, their eyes brightening. Over these 10 years, former *Kawa-gaki* have grown up and now serve as *Ou-kawa-gaki* (big river kids).

In summer, surrounded by fish, insects, and water plants, they fully enjoy playing in rivers, and then go back to their regular lives. Beside such *Kawa-gaki* are *Ou-kawa-gaki*, who always watch over the *Kawa-gaki*. The *Ou-kawa-gaki* make rafts together with the *Kawa-gaki*, go down the river with them, and help them with many other things that would be too difficult for the *Kawa-gaki* to try alone. While sharing the pleasure of playing in the river, the *Ou-kawa-gaki* instruct the *Kawa-gaki* about how to interact with the river safely without forgetting to show respect to the river. For example, after finding fish around a stone in the river and removing the stone, the *Ou-kawa-gaki* tell the *Kawa-gaki* to return the stone to the original position.

Currently, agricultural land is diminishing, and the role of rivers is changing, leading people's interest in rivers to wane. However, a river is still home to many rare species, such as freshwater fish and fireflies. Through this workshop, the Takashima Kominkan will continue to provide an opportunity for children to play in a river, thereby promoting river protection efforts together with children.



Takashima Kominkan p42 map21





# Satoyama/Satoumi Activities

## Sannan Satoyama Activities

Featuring *Satoyama* (a semi-natural area that coexists with a nearby populated area) and *Satoumi* (a section of ocean that coexists with a nearby populated area), our area boasts a rich nature.

At the Sannan Kominkan, we hold five events a year mainly for children and their parents. We provide opportunities for children to enjoy many experiences in the mountains and by the sea, thereby training them both physically and mentally. Examples of the event programs are as follows:

- Making salt from seawater, and making and eating a rice ball using that salt
- Making and playing with a bamboo-copter
- Making a cake using bamboo
- Planting shiitake mushroom spores onto a log, harvesting the shiitake mushrooms, and cooking and eating tempura made from the mushrooms along with wild grasses
- Hiking on a mountain trail
- Playing in a tree house

Thus, a wide variety of events are held according to season.

Nature fosters, develops, and trains human beings. Through *Satoyama/Satoumi* Dash Village, we aim to help children obtain the wisdom to make their lives even better through the dynamic power of nature, and experience the excitement of living in nature. We also strive to ensure that such wisdom and excitement are spread from children to their parents, and even to other families.



Sannan Kominkan p42 map 15

## Learn about Nature

### KEEP! Kyoyama

#### Kyoyama ESD Environmental Project (Okayama KEEP)



Since 2004, at the Kyoyama Kominkan, we have been promoting ESD efforts, respecting the perspectives of children but trying to involve all generations in our area. We aim to ensure that all the people in the local area identify, share, and work on problems occurring in the area. At the same time, we strive to develop individuals who can play a major role in making the community even better.

We conduct waterfront environmental research in early summer and autumn in order to check the situation of species, the water quality, and the water amount. This serves as a good opportunity for local residents to consider the connection between nature and their daily lives. The research has diversified into a wide variety of efforts, such as proposing and realizing the construction of *A Path of Greenery and Clear Water*, filming a movie titled *Irrigation Water Developing the Community*, and restoring the tradition of a water deity festival and the Hassaku dance for the first time in half a century.

By providing opportunities to experience and enjoy many forms of the community's traditional culture and customs handed down over the generations, we strive to pass them on to the next generation.



Kyoyama Kominkan p42 map 7



# Don't You Want to See Fireflies Dancing in Abandon?

## Fireflies Observation Event

These events began as an occasion to enjoy watching fireflies. It was reported that fireflies inhabited a certain area of Tsudaka, and they were observed mainly on the mountainside. Amidst this situation, more and more people began to consider improving the community environment so that the dancing of fireflies in abandon could be observed in all areas of Tsudaka. As a result, study meetings began to be held where people learned about the lives of fireflies.

Since the observation target was fireflies, an observation event started in the evening, enabling participants to discover how the appearance of the stars in the sky varied depending on the area, due to the lighting in urban areas. Subsequently, such participants realized that in areas where stars were difficult to see, fireflies were also difficult to spot, which expanded their interest in fireflies into that in the night sky. This was how an astronomical observation event was created. To participate in this observation event, no astronomical knowledge is necessary. Together with their neighbors, participants can enjoy observing planets in a very casual atmosphere.



Tsudaka Kominkan p42 map 25

# Restore Nature and Tales of the Community

## Fireflies Observation by Children at Noto River Irrigation Water



At the Kozai Kominkan, we have taken our first step toward community development, by learning from the works by Joji Tsubota, a children's literature writer born in Okayama in the Meiji Era.

Many of his works describe the rich nature of his hometown, where he used to play in a river. At an interview that he gave in his late years, he said that he had learned a lot from playing in the irrigation water of the Noto River and Mt. Yasaka.

Based on the works of Joji Tsubota, we have expanded our seminar themes from the "literature of Tsubota" to "Noto River creatures described in his works," and then to "the Noto River described in his works and the present condition of the river."

In river research, while writing down on a map the aquatic lives that they observe, participants are surprised with one unexpected discovery. Certainly, the streets today, including those along the river, are considerably different from those in the days of Tsubota's works. According to the results of the firefly observation and fish research, however, an unexpectedly wide range of creatures is found to

Photo provided by the *Sanyo Shimbun*

live in our area, helping children today grow up in a rich environment.

Our community will experience many changes over the coming 10, 20 or many more years. By continuing dialogues with local residents, schools, business proprietors in shopping streets, and companies, we have just taken our first step toward community development to ensure that many more people want to live and continue living in our area.

Kozai Kominkan p42 map 10





# Restore the Rich Natural Environment

## Hand Down Our River and Irrigation to Children

### Water and Greenery Project



Almost all the land on the seaside of Okayama City is the result of reclamation work for agricultural use. Regardless of the period, the most serious concern in agriculture is how to secure water. The river in our area has long played an important role as a supply source for irrigation water. With the progress of the development of agricultural land for housing, however, the area of rice and vegetable fields has been diminishing, making the connection between the water and people less close. As a result, people's interest in the river and irrigation is waning.



Has the time come for the role of the river and irrigation to end? Based on this question, the Water and Greenery Project was launched. The project originally consisted of water quality research, creatures research, visitation to the river source, and a stroll along the river in order to identify river conditions. These activities have developed into a river clean-up effort. The waste gathered from the river is sorted out, and the results are recorded in order to check a wide variety of changes over time. The waste tells you a lot, including changes in economics, politics, society, and people's ethics.

At the Tomiyama Kominkan, we strive to make the project even more significant to ensure that children will remember the river at every important point in their lives.

[Tomiyama Kominkan p42 map26](#)



## Hope for Children to Become *Otchan*

As a boy, I used to play with insects. When I was a nursery school child, I participated in a nature exploration program held by the Saidaiji Kominkan. I learned a lot from an instructor with an extensive knowledge of insects. The instructor was called *Otchan* by the children. (Meaning a "middle-aged man" in Japanese, the word *otchan* is often used by children in an affectionate way.)

After graduating from university, I received tourist guide training on Yakushima Island. Realizing that I was not suited to that occupation, however, I returned home. It was that time when the *otchan* and a staff member of the Saidaiji Kominkan asked and almost "forced" me [laughs] to serve as an instructor for a nature exploration program. Now, as a new *otchan*, I'm engaged in the program. Honestly speaking, I don't like to be called "instructor," but I'm happy that I can see children feeling moved to touch a wide variety of insects, plants, and other creatures.

I would like to stimulate children's interest. In addition, since each child has his/her own unique perspective, they can learn a lot from each other by sharing their perspectives. Considering that older children have more knowledge and experience, I feel that it would be good if such children were provided opportunities to act as child leaders. Moreover, I hope that these children will become the next generation of *otchan* as well as I have done. Each child has his/her own interest. I hope that the children will respect what they have learned from the nature observation program, including their ties with friends and nature through this program, and that they will continue pursue their interest.

**Mr. Shigeru Omori**, involved in activities at the Saidaiji Kominkan

