

The 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop



外務省
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan



#EvalVisionAsia

**THE 20TH OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA)
EVALUATION WORKSHOP**

**Learning from the ODA Evaluation
Workshops and Japan's Third
Voluntary National Review**

13 November 2025 | 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm

November 13, 2025

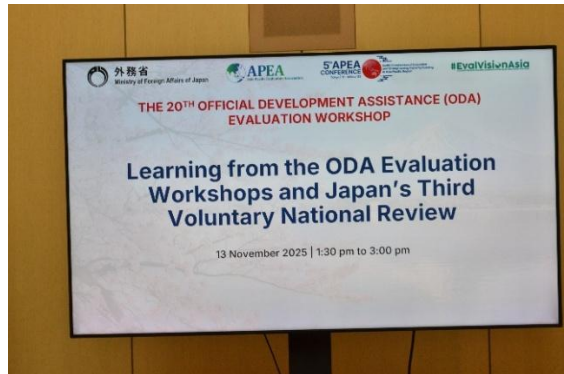
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Photos

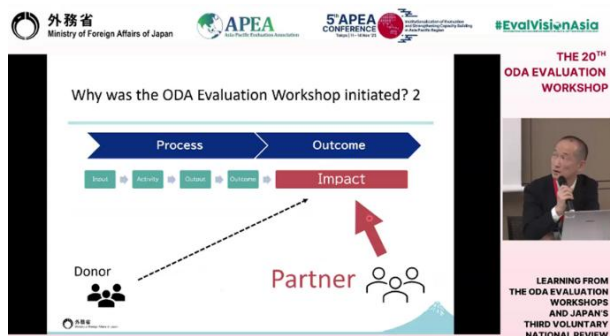
Opening and Introduction

Welcome and Opening Remarks by Co-Hosts



Moderator: Dr. Yatin DIWAKAR, Coordinator, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

Presentation [1] Review of the ODA Evaluation Workshop Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions



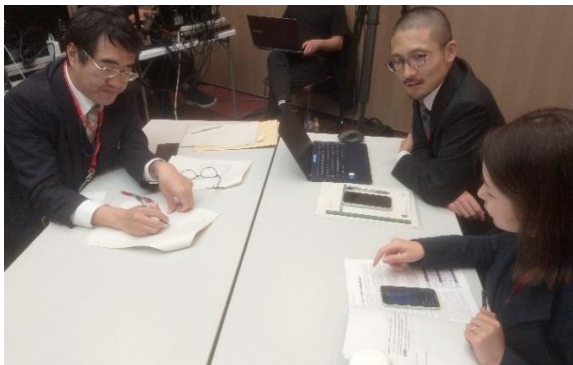
Speaker: Mr. ARAI Kazuhisa, Director of the ODA Evaluation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan

Presentation [2] VNR as a Tool to Achieve the SDGs and to Revitalize Multilateralism



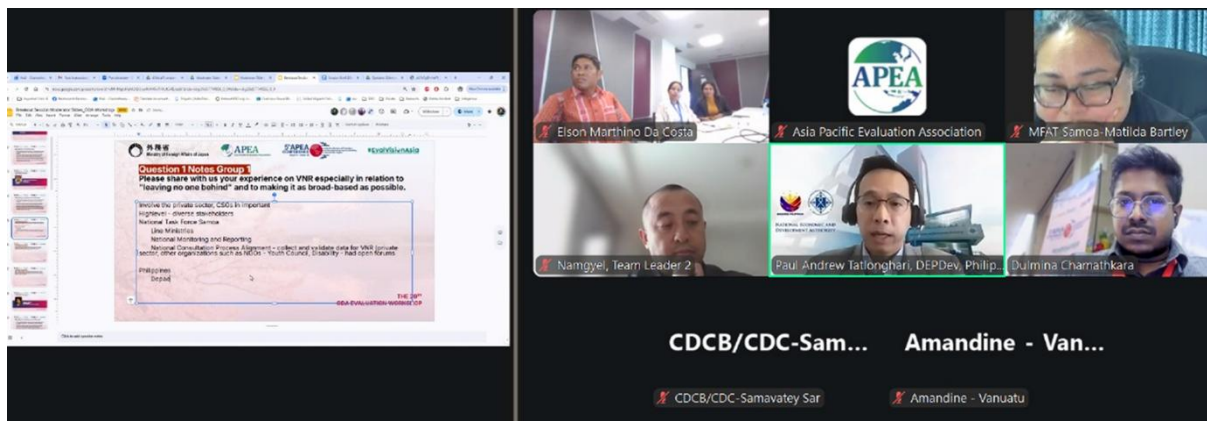
Speaker: Prof. MIWA Atsuko, Professor, School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University

Group Discussions (in-person participants)



Group Discussions (online participants)

Group-1



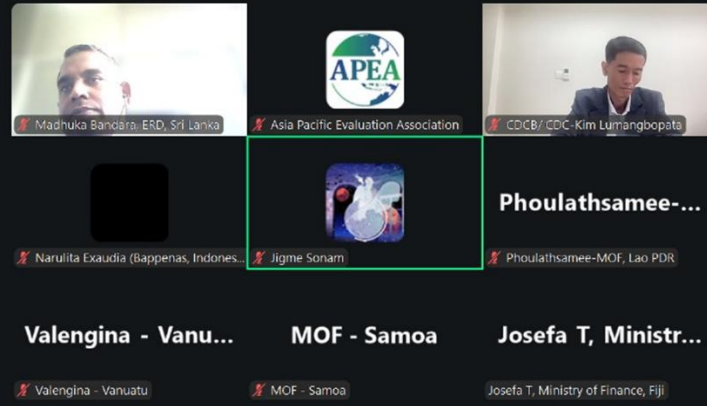
Group-2



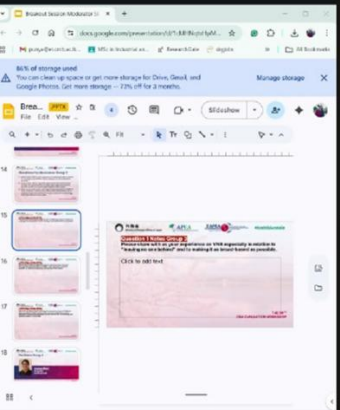
Questions for discussion Group 2

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

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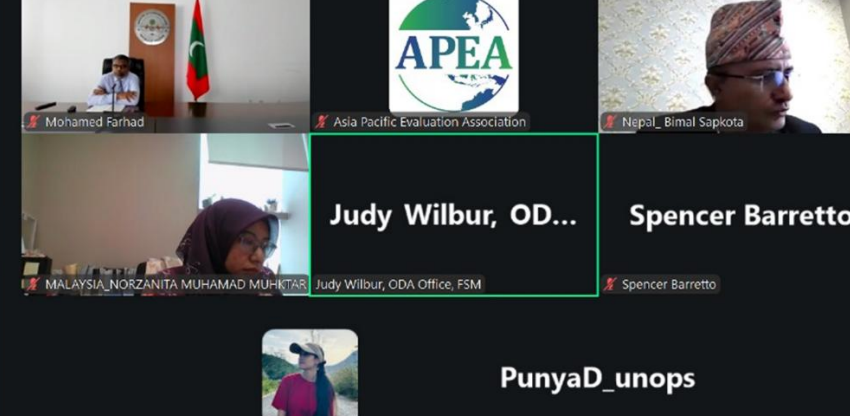
Group-3



Questions for discussion Group 3

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

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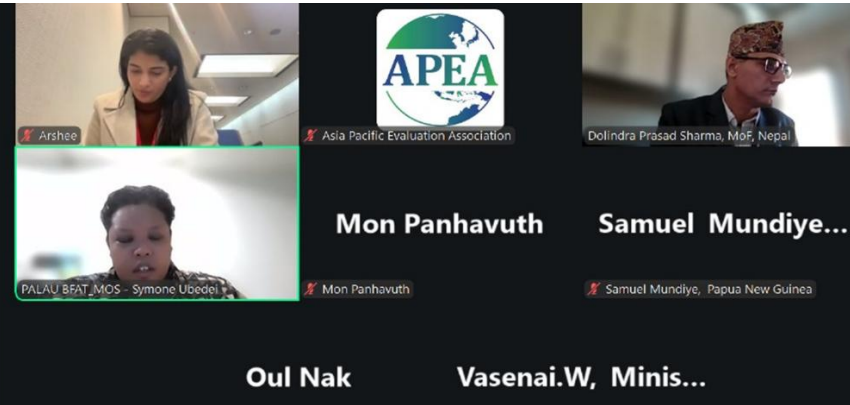
Group-4



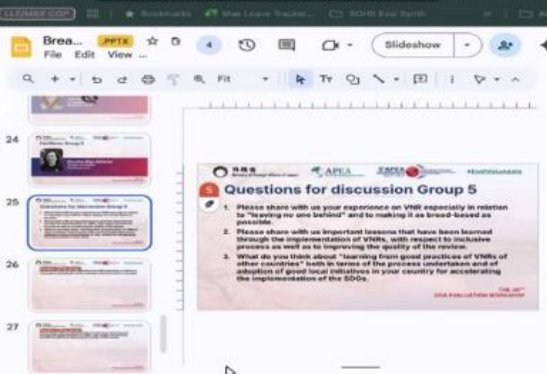
Questions for discussion Group 4

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

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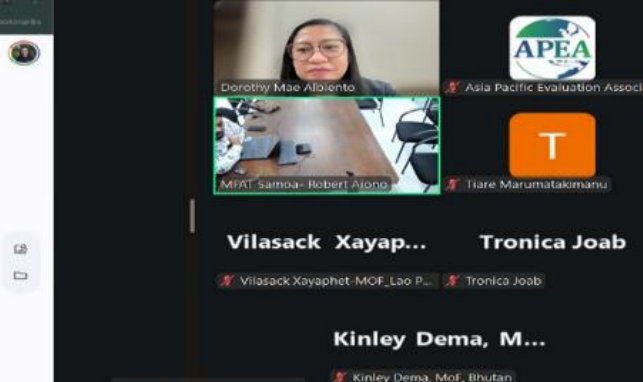
Group-5



Questions for discussion Group 5

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

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Q&A with Audience



Prof. MIWA Atsuko



Mr. ARAI Kazuhisa

Closing Remarks



Dr. ISHIDA Yoko, President of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

Program



The 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop was held in conjunction with the 5th Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA) Conference, that took place between November 11 and 14, 2025 in Tokyo, Japan, co-organized by the Japan Evaluation Association (JES) and Center for Evaluation (Ceval) of Saarland University, Germany.

The APEA Conference has served as an international platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange on evaluation in both academic and practical contexts, convened biennially since 2016. The 5th APEA Conference, themed “Institutionalization of Evaluation and Strengthening Capacity Building in the Asia-Pacific Region,” brought together evaluation administrators, policymakers, practitioners, and others from cooperation agencies, international organizations and national governments not only from the Asia-Pacific region but also from Europe and America, and Africa. Participants exchanged information and engaged in discussions on the current state and challenges of evaluation theory and practice.

The ODA Evaluation Workshop was held as Session 12 in the afternoon of the third day (November 13) of the 5th APEA Conference in a hybrid format combining in-person and online participation, following the program below.

The 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop: Learning from the ODA Evaluation Workshops and Japan’s Third Voluntary National Review	
13:30 – 13:40 (10 min.)	<u>Opening and Introduction</u> Moderator: Yatin Diwakar, Coordinator, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association Co-Facilitator: Ahmad Rijal, Communications Officer, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association
13:40 – 14:00 (20 min.)	<u>Presentation [1]</u> ARAI Kazuhisa, Director, ODA Evaluation Division, Minister’s Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan “Review of the ODA Evaluation Workshop Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions”
14:00 – 14:15 (15 min.)	<u>Presentation [2]</u> MIWA Atsuko, Professor, School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University “Voluntary National Review (VNR) as a Tool to Achieve the SDGs and to Revitalize Multilateralism,”
14:15 – 14:55 (40 min.)	<u>Group Discussion</u> <u>Sharing, Questions and Answers</u>
14:55 – 15:00 (5 min.)	<u>Closing Remarks</u> ISHIDA Yoko, President, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

Workshop Summary

The 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop was held in hybrid mode during the 5th Asia Pacific Evaluation Association Conference in Tokyo, accommodating both in-person and online participants. The workshop brought together two presentations that reflected on Japan's long-standing experiences with ODA evaluation and its recent efforts in reviewing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Following the presentations, participants were divided into separate groups for in-person and online attendees to conduct group discussions. After sharing the content of the discussion and holding a Q&A session, the workshop concluded with a final wrap-up of the entire session.

Presentation [1] Review of the ODA Evaluation Workshop Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions, by ARAI Kazuhisa

Mr. Arai outlined an overview of the 25-year history of the ODA Evaluation Workshop, which has engaged 35 countries since 2001. Drawing on interviews with key leaders involved in Japan's evaluation system, he explained the origins of the workshop and its guiding principle of equal partnership between donor and partner countries. He highlighted the workshop's unique strengths, including its focus on government officials who use evaluation in public administration and its contribution to regional network-building in Asia and the Pacific. He noted that the workshop has evolved to address changing needs—expanding from Japan's ODA to broader policy evaluation topics—and has aligned with global trends such as the 2030 Agenda. The workshop played an important role in the establishment of APEA in 2012 and contributed to strengthening evaluation capacity across the region. Mr. Arai concluded by underscoring Japan's commitment to collaboration.

Presentation [2] Voluntary National Review (VNR) as a Tool to Achieve the SDGs and to Revitalize Multilateralism, by MIWA Atsuko

Prof. Miwa presented Japan's Third VNR, from viewpoints of both a review process and mechanism for the progress of the SDGs and an effective tool for reaffirming the importance of multilateralism. She outlined major progress in the 2025 VNR process, including deeper engagement of the SDGs Promotion Roundtable of the Government of Japan, the first stakeholders meeting to discuss achievement and challenges of the SDGs in Japan, a call for a public comment for the draft VNR for the proper length of time, and the inclusion of an independent chapter dedicated to review by various stakeholders. Civil society also contributed to this process through the SDGs Spotlight Report 2025. She identified lessons and challenges, emphasizing the need to strengthen evidence-based review, address missing global indicators, further broaden stakeholder inclusion, and share transformative local initiatives more widely. In closing, she stressed that VNRs are essential for mutual learning, identifying gaps, and accelerating SDGs implementation, calling on all stakeholders to maximize the value of the VNR process to secure a sustainable future.

Group Discussion

During the group discussion, the 31 online participants were divided into 5 groups, and the 24 in-person participants were divided into 4 groups. They then discussed the following three questions:

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible;
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review; and
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

Sharing

After approximately 30 minutes of group discussion, all participants used the online tool “Mentimeter” to conduct an interactive presentation. This allowed them to grasp the flow of the discussion involving both in-person and online participants and share the content.

In the Mentimeter result, responses to the first question highlighted wide variation in VNR experience across countries: some participants shared concrete practices such as Nepal’s consultation with youth and Bhutan’s linkage of VNRs to the Gross National Happiness framework, while others noted that VNRs remain unfamiliar to citizens and that stakeholder engagement is still limited in practice. For the second question, Mentimeter responses reinforced that inclusive stakeholder consultation improves both legitimacy and quality of VNRs, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. Participants stressed the need for sustained consultations rather than one-off engagements, stronger feedback mechanisms, improved data systems, and trust-building between governments and civil society. Responses to the third question showed broad agreement that learning from other countries’ VNR practices is valuable, provided lessons are adapted to national contexts rather than replicated mechanically. Several responses emphasized that VNRs should be viewed not merely as reporting exercises but as ongoing learning journeys that strengthen national ownership and accelerate SDGs implementation.

Q&A

During the Q&A session, participants raised questions to both presenters.

- A participant asked Prof. Miwa about missing global indicators of the SDGs and limited NGO involvement in Japan’s VNR. Prof. Miwa noted that several global indicators remain missing due to the lack of nationally agreed-upon definitions of those indicators in Japan. OECD indicators have been used as proxy in such cases. Despite repeated requests and advocacy by NGOs and CSOs regarding the necessity and demand for data preparation, addressing these gaps ultimately requires political decision-making. She also explained that some groups that consist of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) of the United Nations such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and farmers are not yet represented in the SDGs Roundtable.
- Question to Mr. Arai focused on why Asia still lags in evaluation institutionalization and use of evaluation, despite Japan’s long-standing efforts through initiatives such as the ODA Evaluation Workshop and the establishment of APEA. Mr. Arai responded that progress is gradual and emphasized the importance of persistence and demonstrating the usefulness of evaluation. He also noted that while the goal is for evaluation to become “business as usual,” progress is incremental and requires sustained effort. In addition to Mr. Arai’s response, another participant said that regional performance might reflect the wide variation among Asian countries.

Closing Remarks by ISHIDA Yoko

In the closing summary, Dr. Ishida reflected on nearly 25 years of Japan's ODA evaluation initiatives, highlighting their contribution to mutual learning, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making. Concluding on behalf of APEA, she expressed appreciation to MOFA of Japan, the speakers, and all partners for their long-standing collaboration, and encouraged continued joint efforts to strengthen evaluation culture and support sustainable development across the region.

** For the detail, please refer to the "[Annex-3 Record of Discussion](#)."*

Abstract of Presentations **(in order of the presentations)**

【Presentation】

[1] Review of the ODA Evaluation Workshop Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

ARAI Kazuhisa, Director of the ODA Evaluation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

This presentation provided an overview of the 25-year history, evolution, and contributions of Japan's ODA Evaluation Workshop, which has been held annually since 2001 and has engaged 35 countries and more than 700 participants. Mr. Arai framed the presentation around video interviews with four senior leaders involved in Japan's ODA evaluation system and shared the background, development and outcomes of the workshop, highlighting the workshop's long-standing link with the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA).

The presentation first revisited the origins of the workshop. The first workshop was launched in 2001 coinciding with the establishment of the Japan Evaluation Society (2000) and the enactment of the Government Policy Evaluation Act (2001). At that time, evaluation was still emerging in Japan, but ODA evaluation was comparatively advanced in terms of system development and implementation. The workshop was therefore initiated to strengthen evaluation capacity in partner countries and to promote shared learning. The key principle of the workshop was maintaining equal partnerships between donor and partner countries.

The presentation then highlighted the unique features and strengths of Japan's ODA Evaluation Workshop. The workshop targets government officials responsible for conducting or using evaluation results, many of whom are not evaluation specialists, thereby engaging both producers and users of evaluation. The workshop has also played a significant role in building networks among evaluation stakeholders from public and private sectors. A notable milestone was the 2016 Vietnam workshop, co-hosted with the UN and integrated into the first international APEA Conference, which contributed to APEA's further development.

Initially, workshop participants were interested primarily in Japan's ODA evaluation. However, their focus gradually expanded to include cooperation by other donor agencies and evaluation systems in partner countries. The presentation also addressed how the workshop has responded to global trends in development cooperation. Aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was highlighted with particular emphasis on follow-up and review, strengthening statistical systems, and building evaluation capacity. The diplomatic significance of the workshop was also discussed noting that Japan's leadership has supported evaluation capacity building in the Asia-Pacific region through training, expert deployment, and multi-stakeholder participation.

The workshop strengthened administrative evaluation systems, enhanced transparency and accountability of Japan's ODA, and contributed to a broader evaluation culture that supports democratic governance. The workshop acted as an incubator for cross-country connections and system development, making APEA itself a significant impact of Japan's long-term commitment. Japan's evaluation framework also provided a model for countries seeking to establish their own systems.

The presentation was concluded by noting EvalNet's recent announcement of the [international joint evaluation](#)¹ on COVID-19 measures, to which Japan contributed.

[2] VNR as a Tool to Achieve the SDGs and to Revitalize Multilateralism

MIWA Atsuko, Professor, School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University; Co-Chair, Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (SDGs Japan); Member, Roundtable for Promotion of the SDGs of the Government of Japan

This presentation outlined Japan's experience with its Third Voluntary National Review (VNR) and highlighted how VNRs served both as mechanisms for reviewing SDGs progress and as instruments for strengthening multilateralism. The purpose of VNRs, mandated under Paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda, and the role of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) as the global platform for SDGs follow-up and review was explained thoroughly.

Then four key areas of progress in Japan's 2025 VNR were presented. First, the Roundtable for Promotion of the SDGs played a deeper and more substantive role. It was instrumental in compiling an independent chapter of review in the VNR by different stakeholders. Second, MOFA of Japan convened the first national stakeholder meeting for the VNR through an open call, enabling wide participation both in-person and online, including four thematic breakout sessions moderated by SDGs Japan, a civil society organization. Third, the draft VNR underwent a one-month public comment process, and several comments were incorporated into the final report. Fourth, the firm political commitment of the Government of Japan was demonstrated through these inclusive processes, that culminated an inclusion of an independent chapter of stakeholders review. Civil society also contributed through the SDGs Spotlight Report 2025, which consolidated assessments by NGOs/CSOs and facilitated constructive dialogue with relevant ministries.

Also, several lessons and challenges, including the need to strengthen evidence-based review, address missing global indicators, and ensure robust assessment of key initiatives such as marine plastic reduction and assistance to survivors of gender-based violence were highlighted in the presentation. Then the importance of broadening stakeholders' participation was emphasized noting that some stakeholders that consist of the United Nations Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) remain outside the roundtable in Japan.

In conclusion, the presentation highlighted that VNRs are essential tools for accelerating SDGs implementation as well as for revitalizing multilateralism. By enabling countries to learn from each other, identify gaps, and reaffirm commitment to sustainable development, VNRs and the HLPF would play a pivotal role in supporting collective progress that leads to the sustainable development globally.

¹ OECD (2025). Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/strategic-joint-evaluation-of-the-collective-international-development-and-humanitarian-assistance-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic_680e2786-en.html

Profiles of Moderators and Speakers

(in order of presentation)

Moderator:

Yatin Diwakar, Ph.D, Coordinator of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA)

Yatin Diwakar is an evaluator and researcher focusing on Institutionalisation of Evaluation at country level. He has been actively involved in the promoting National Evaluation Policy Systems (NEPS) theme group of the Asia Pacific Regional Evaluation Strategy (APRES) since its inception in 2020. Yatin believes in strengthening the evaluation systems through a stronger social demand, and thus works on awareness and capacity development. He currently also serves as coordinator of APEA and core group member of Evaluation Community of India (ECOI).

Co-Facilitator:

Ahmad Syaifur Rijal, Communications Officer of APEA

Ahmad Rijal is the Communication Officer at APEA. With over six years of experience in the NGO sector, he has contributed to initiatives in community literacy, cooperative and small and medium enterprise (SME) empowerment, disaster relief, and child protection. Throughout his career, Ahmad has held various roles, including Facilitator, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, and Communication Specialist. As APEA's Communication Officer, he led the communication campaign and designed all materials for the 4th and 5th APEA Conferences. He also supports NEPS theme group under APRES, contributing to the mapping of evaluation policies across the Asia-Pacific region.

Speakers:

[1] ARAI Kazuhisa, Director of ODA Evaluation Division, Minister's Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan

Arai Kazuhisa has been the director of the ODA Evaluation Division at MOFA of Japan since February 2024. Before that, he worked for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for about 30 years. He had worked on and supported projects on the ground, been stationed in Nepal and Afghanistan, and worked in evaluation as the head of JICA's Evaluation Department. Based on his experience, he focuses on building bridges between those who evaluate and those who are evaluated, and between those who help and those who are helped. He struggles with a world that doesn't go the way he wants it to.

[2] MIWA Atsuko, Professor of School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan

Formerly an officer at the International Division of the Japanese Red Cross Society, a Programme Officer at the Bangkok Office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UN Women currently), and a researcher at Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute, she has extensive experience on working for programs for gender equality and the empowerment of women especially in Asia and the Pacific, and has been researching and writing in the field of gender, development, and human rights for years. Her publications include "Engendering the Judiciary – Lessons from the Philippines" in Shultz U. et al. (ed.) *Gender and Judging* (2013) Hart Publishing Ltd. Besides teaching at Kwansei Gakuin

University, she serves as Director of the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center in Osaka, and Co-Chair of Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs. She holds an MA in Gender and Development of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK.

Closing Remarks:

ISHIDA Yoko, President of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

After having worked as an international cooperation consultant for 25 years, joined Hiroshima University in October 2015. When she worked as a consultant, she joined various policy-, program- and project-level evaluations of MOFA, JICA, local governments, NGOs etc. Currently, as a professor at Hiroshima University and as an advisor of Japan Evaluation Society (JES), she is engaged in capacity development of younger generations in Japan and in developing countries. She is also a member of the Administrative Evaluation Advisory Group of MOFA, Japan.

Group Discussion Facilitators (online):

Group 1: Dulmina Chamathkara, Co-Founder of EvalYouth Asia

Dulmina Chamathkara is a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, currently employed at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Sri Lanka Representation. He is a co-founder and former co-lead of EvalYouth Asia, a network that supports emerging evaluators. As a volunteer with EvalIndigenous, his work extends into the field of Indigenous evaluations, where he has been actively involved as a researcher and evaluator, promoting inclusive evaluation methods and the decolonization of research. He also co-authored the “Toolkit for Indigenous Evaluation in the Asia-Pacific Region”, a publication by APEA that serves as a guide for culturally relevant and inclusive evaluations. Dulmina' holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, and an MSc in Environmental Management from the University of Moratuwa.

Group 2: Jigme Sonam, Board Member of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

Jigme Sonam is a Young and Emerging Evaluator from Bhutan, currently working as an Assistant Environment Officer at Bhutan Power Corporation Limited. Jigme Sonam has been an active member within both the Evaluation Association of Bhutan as well as EvalYouth Bhutan. He has participated in numerous workshops and activities conducted by EAB and EvalYouth Bhutan and has also assisted with some as a co-leader. In 2024, he joined as a member of the Board of Directors of EAB and is working towards promoting evaluation activities within the country. As a member of APEA Board of Directors, Jigme Sonam is committed to promoting the importance of evaluation and supporting the growth and development of the evaluation community in the region. Jigme Sonam brings valuable experience from his previous role at a private Environmental Consultancy firm (Phuensum Consultancy Firm) in Bhutan as a researcher.

Group 3: Punya Lakmini, Co-Leader, EvalYouth Sri Lanka

Punya Lakmini is a Young and Emerging Evaluator, serving as the Co-Leader of EvalYouth Sri Lanka and a member of EvalYouth Asia. She currently works at the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) as a Programme Management Senior Assistant. Punya holds a Bachelor's degree in Science from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and has also completed an Advanced Certificate Course in Monitoring and Evaluation from the same university.

Group 4: Arshee Rizvi, Lead-Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning of Development Intelligence Unit (DIU)

Arshee Rizvi is an AI and Data Science Leader committed to harnessing technology for social good. She is the Lead – Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning at the Development Intelligence Unit (DIU), where she drives innovations at the nexus of AI, policy, and rural development. Earlier, she headed the Data Team at Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) Madras. She also completed the International Programme for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Her work spans AI/ML applications for rural development, women's empowerment, and evidence-based policymaking. Recognized internationally, she has been invited as a speaker by UNFPA and has presented her research at more than seven international conferences. As Co-Leader of EvalYouth India, she champions youth leadership in evaluation and promotes the integration of AI into monitoring, evaluation, and learning globally.

Group 5: Dorothy Mae Albiento, Research Officer of Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP)

Dorothy Mae is a research Officer at ALNAP. She has more than a decade of experience in research, monitoring and evaluation, and project implementation and management in the humanitarian and development sector in the Philippines. She also worked as an evaluation and research consultant for local and international non-profit organizations focusing on child protection, gender, economic development, and disaster response and management. She has academic background in psychology, development studies, public management, and evaluation.

Voices of the Participants

Following the closure of the workshop, comments and feedback were collected from the participants through a post-event questionnaire. Feedback survey was collected until December 12, 2025 and a total of 19 participants filled out the questionnaire and shared their feedback and suggestions.

Overall Satisfaction was Excellent

In terms of overall satisfaction rate, as you can see in Figure 1, 52.6% of the respondents rated the Workshop as "Excellent" and 47.4% rated as "Good", meaning that all of responses were at least "Good. Figure 2 shows 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop content has improved their knowledge and understanding, and 95% found the ODA Evaluation Workshop 2025 useful for their current and future work. Accordingly, all respondents indicated that they would recommend the ODA Evaluation Workshop to others.

Figure 1: How would you rate the workshop?

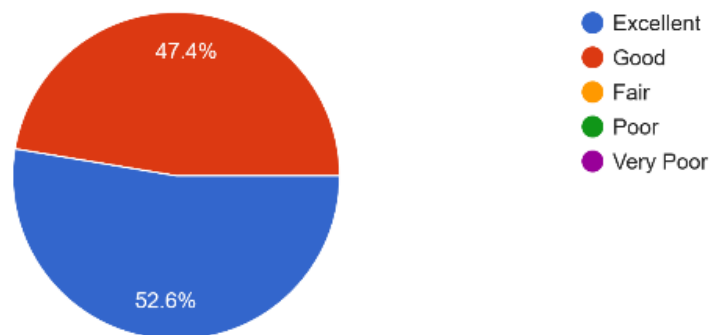
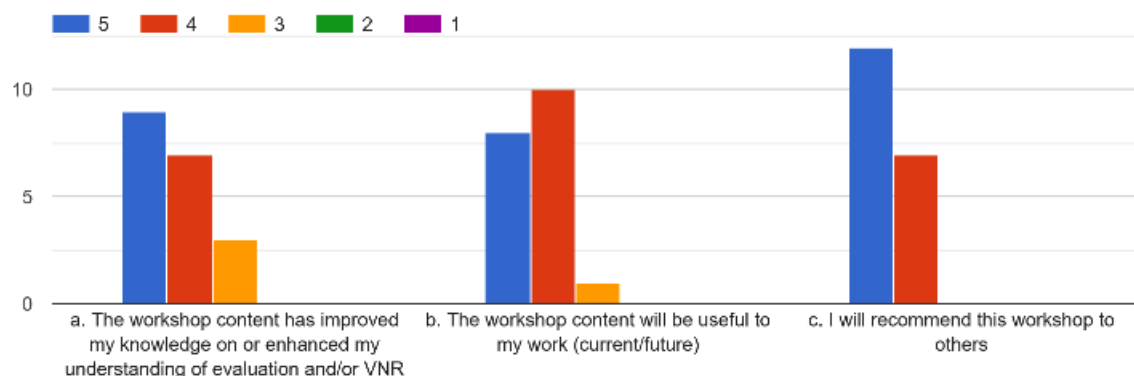


Figure 2: Please indicate your level of agreement (Scale 1 to 5) on each item below about the 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop

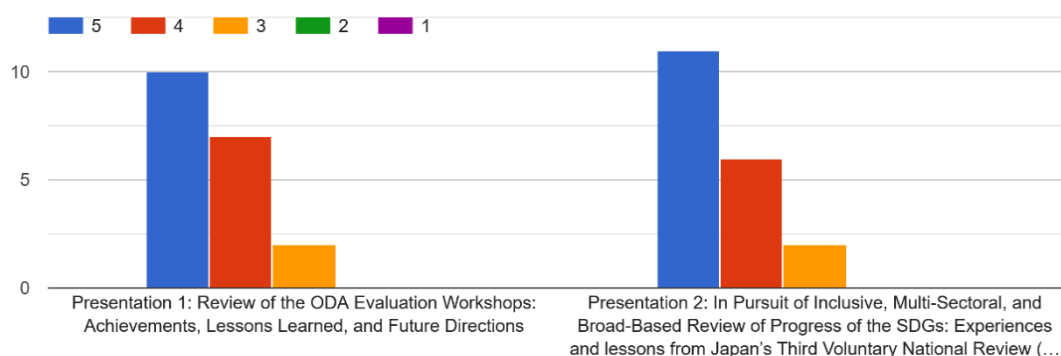
**5=Strongly agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree;
2=Disagree; 1=Strongly disagree**



Both Presentations Were Useful

As shown in Figure 3, most participants who completed the feedback questionnaire rated both sessions of the workshop as useful, with almost the same overall ratings.

Figure 3: Which presentation was more interest to you? Please rate the usefulness of respective presentations, 5 as the most useful.



When asked about the most valuable lesson or topic, responses highlighted several points. Overall, the most valuable lessons related to strengthening national evaluation systems, understanding Japan's ODA evaluation processes, and recognizing the role of evaluation as a continuous, learning-oriented tool rather than a one-off control mechanism. Many responses highlighted the importance of using evaluation results to inform decision-making, policy design, and course correction, as well as linking evaluation more closely to SDG achievement.

The breakout group discussions and peer exchanges were frequently cited as particularly valuable, as they allowed participants to learn directly from other countries' experiences with ODA evaluation and VNRs, assess where their own systems stand, and identify good practices for improvement. Some respondents noted that this was their first exposure to VNR processes at an international level and appreciated gaining a clearer understanding of how VNRs are established and implemented. Participants also emphasized lessons around inclusive and country-led evaluation, including the importance of equal partnerships between donors and partner countries, broad stakeholder engagement.

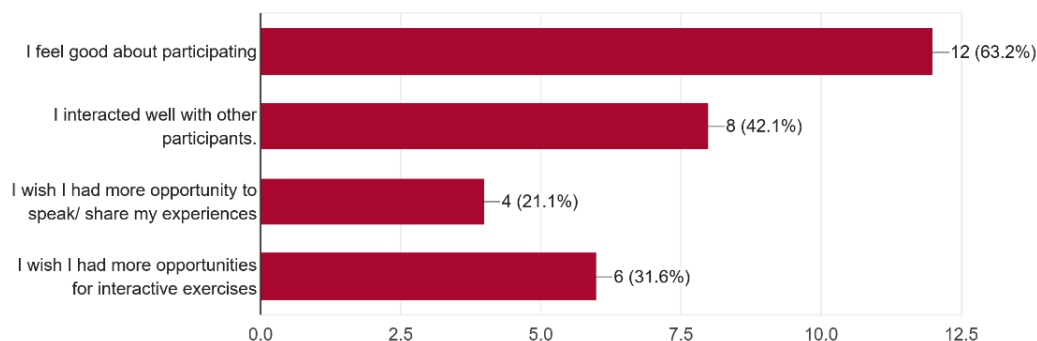
Participation and Interaction

As in the Figure 4, in terms of participation and interaction, 63.2% of respondents indicated that they felt good about participating, while 42.1% reported that they interacted well with other participants. At the same time, 31.6% expressed a wish for more opportunities for interactive exercises, and 21.1% wished for more opportunities to speak and share their experiences.

Several virtual participants highlighted challenges such as limited group sizes, difficulty in opening microphones, and reliance on chat functions, which constrained discussion. These concerns are directly linked to the fact that most of the feedback survey responses are from online participants whose interaction was more dependent on online meeting platform. Participants also suggested extending the time for interactive exercises, expanding country sharing sessions, and incorporating case study-based discussions.

While some respondents felt the session was conducted well overall, there was broad agreement that increased time, in-person formats, and direct participation of practitioners involved in VNR processes would further strengthen interactivity and participation.

Figure 4: The workshop is designed to be a participatory interactive event, not like seminar, lecture type of event. How was your participation/interaction? Tick all that apply and give us your idea.



When asked about how participants apply the knowledge and experiences from the Workshop, many emphasized adopting more inclusive and participatory approaches, ensuring that consultations with key stakeholders, particularly beneficiaries are systematically integrated into planning, monitoring, and review processes.

Several responses noted plans to embed VNR processes more formally into national planning frameworks, including closer coordination with ministries of finance and planning agencies. Participants working with donor coordination and development finance reported that the workshop enhanced their understanding of ODA policies and evaluation requirements, supporting more effective communication with development partners. Some also planned to share workshop materials and key insights with colleagues and teams, use the lessons to identify gaps in previous VNRs, and apply good practices from Japan and other countries to strengthen future VNR cycles.

Aspects to Consider in the Future

Feedback survey respondents suggested several ways to enhance the participatory and interactive nature of future workshops.

Modalities:

Many emphasized the value of in-person or hybrid formats, noting that face-to-face settings would allow deeper interaction, richer experience sharing, and more inclusive group discussions—particularly for participants from small island and remote contexts. While the virtual format was appreciated for accessibility, some participants faced technical constraints, such as limited microphone access or small discussion groups, which restricted interaction. Participants also recommended extending interactive exercise sessions, allocating more time for country-level sharing, and incorporating practical case studies to encourage active engagement. Several respondents suggested involving practitioners directly responsible for VNR processes to deepen discussions.

Subjects:

When asked about the topics they would like to see in future workshops, a wide range of topics for future workshops, reflecting **strong interest in both technical advancement and practical application of ODA evaluation** were proposed. Majority of the topics was the use of digital tools, data analytics, and emerging technologies, including AI, to strengthen ODA monitoring, evaluation, and SDGs/VNR reporting, particularly in contexts with fragmented data systems.

Many respondents also emphasized strengthening **results-based management, impact measurement, and policy-level evaluation**, including evaluation of ongoing projects, pre-loan assessments, and foreign resource-funded programs.

Another major area of interest focused on **inclusive, context-sensitive evaluation approaches, such as indigenous evaluation, community-driven and locally led development, safeguarding in evaluation, and adapting evaluation tools to small island and low-capacity contexts**. Several respondents called for deeper exploration of thematic priorities, including climate action and resilience, climate finance, green growth, transparency in ODA, and alignment of ODA with national development priorities and the SDGs.

Annex 1: List of Participants

Country	Organization	Title	Name
Representatives of Co-Hosts			
Japan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA)	Director of the ODA Evaluation Division	Mr. ARAI Kazuhisa
APEA	Asia Pacific Evaluation Association	President	Dr. ISHIDA Yoko
Presentaters			
Japan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA)	Director of the ODA Evaluation Division	Mr. ARAI Kazuhisa
Japan	Kwansei Gakuin University	Professor, School of Policy Studies	Prof. MIWA Atsuko
In-person Participants			
Bhutan	Evaluation Association of Bhutan	Chairperson	Phuntsho Choden
Canada	The University of Tokyo	Lecturer	Yu Maemura
Costa Rica	EvalIndigenous Latin America	Co-Chair	Raquel Herrera
Nepal	Practical Action	Lead-Monitoring Evaluation and Learning	Bhim Shreshtha
Nepal	Asia Pacific Evaluation Association	Vice President	Jhank Narayan Shreshta
Nepal	Federal Parliament of Nepal	Former Member of Parliament/Chair of Parliamentary Committee	Prakash Pantha
Nepal	Asia Pacific Parliamentarians Forum For Evaluation	Executive Committee Member	Ramesh Paudyal
Nepal	Calls Over Ridges Nepal	Founder/President	Sang Doma Sherpa
Philippines	Save the Children Philippines	MEAL Manager (Visayas)	Philip Ariane C Oledan
Sri Lanka	EvalYouth Sri Lanka	Co-Leader	Punya Lakmini
Japan	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications	Deputy Director	ARAI Hiroshi
Japan	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication	Section Chief	NUMAJIRI Naoki
Japan	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication	Section Chief	TANIGUCHI Kinuka
Japan	Kwansei Gakuin University	Professor of Integrated Center of UN and Foreign Affairs Studies	NISHINO Keiko
Japan	Kobe Gakuin University	Associate Professor	HASHIMOTO Keita
Japan	Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)	Senior Advisor	MASAKI Tomoya
Japan	The Sasakawa Peace Foundation	Senior Program Officer	TAKAZAWA Yoko

Japan	Japan Evaluation Society	Member	IGARASHI Masahiro
Japan	Japan Evaluation Society	Chairperson of International Exchange Committee	KONO Setsu
Japan	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	Area Humanitarian Specialist	OCHIAI Jun
Japan	International Development Center of Japan	President	MUTA Hiromitsu
Japan	International Development Center of Japan, Inc.	Senior Researcher	SAKUMA Miho
Japan	International Development Center of Japan, Inc.	Senior Researcher / Evaluation Department	SUEYOSHI Yukiko
Japan	OPMAC Corporation	Principal Consultant	KOBAYASHI Nobuyuki
Online Participants			
Bhutan	Ministry of Finance	Program Coordinator, Development Coordination and Debt Management Division/ Department of Macro-Fiscal and Development Finance	Kinley Dema
Bhutan	Ministry of Finance	Chief Program Officer, Development Coordination and Debt Management Division/ Department of Macro-Fiscal and Development Finance	Namgyel Dorjee
Cambodia	Council for the Development of Cambodia	Director, Department of Cooperation with Financial Institutions and International Funds	Oul Nak
Cambodia	The Cambodian Development Cooperation Board of the Council for the Development of Cambodia	Aid Coordination Officer, Bilateral Cooperation with Countries of Asia-Pacific Region	Mon Panhavuth
Fiji	Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics	Senior Policy Analyst, Budget and International Cooperation Division	Josefa Kotoinakodu Takalaivuna
Fiji	Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics	Policy Analyst, Budget and International Cooperation Division	Vasenai Vakacolate Watiraveli
Indonesia	Ministry of National Development Planning	Junior Planner, Foreign Financing and Grants	Narulita Christina Exaudia
Indonesia	Ministry of National Development Planning	Staff, Foreign Financing and Grants	Niken Nuraini Nissa
Laos	Ministry of Finance	Director of Division, International Finance and Cooperation Department	Vilasack Xayaphet
Laos	Ministry of Finance	Deputy Director, ODA Management Division, International Finance and	Phoulathsamee Haksinh

		Cooperation Department	
Malaysia	Ministry of Economy	Principal Assistant Director, Bilateral Unit, International Cooperation Division	Norhaslinda Binti Mat Isa
Malaysia	Ministry of Economy	Assistant Director, Bilateral Unit, International Cooperation Division	Norzanita Binti Muhamad Muhktar
Maldives	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Deputy Minister, Economic Cooperation Department	Mohamed Farhad
Micronesia	FSM National Government	Program Manager, Overseas Development Assistance	Tronica Joab
Micronesia	FSM National Government	Data Specialist, FSM ODA Office	Judy J. Wilbur
Nepal	Ministry of Finance	Under Secretary, Foreign Aid Co-ordination Division	Bimal Sapkota
Nepal	Ministry of Finance	Under Secretary, Foreign Aid Co-ordination Division	Dolindra Prasad Sharma
Palau	Ministry of State	Chief of the Division of Asia Pacific, Bureau of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Symone Esichang Ubedei
Papua New Guinea	Department of National Planning and Monitoring	Graduate Trainee, Development Cooperation and Management Division	Samuel Mundiye
Philippines	Department of Economy, Planning, and Development	Economic Development Specialist II, Monitoring and Evaluation Staff	Spencer Barretto
Samoa	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Senior Foreign Service Officer, International Relations Division	Tiare Marumatakimanu
Samoa	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Deputy CEO, Regional Division	Matilda Patsy Bartley
Samoa	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Principal Foreign Service Officer, Regional Relations Division	Robert Niko Aiono
Samoa	Ministry of Finance	Principal, Aid Coordination & Management Division	Danielle Asenati Li'O
Sri Lanka	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development	Director, Department of External Resources	Madhuka Pavithra Bandara Amarakoon Lansakara Kulathunga Mudiyanse
Timor-Leste	Ministry of Finance	Official, National Directorate of Effectiveness Management and Mobilization of External Aid	Joana Gusmão Belo
Timor-Leste	Ministry of Finance	Official, National Directorate of Aid Effectiveness External Assistance	Leonita Calcona Cruz
Timor-Leste	Ministry of Finance	Chief of Department, Planning Division	Jose Fátima Da Cruz

Vanuatu	Prime Minister's Office	Senior Aid Coordination Officer Multilateral , Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Aid Coordination	Amandine Jeanne Harrison
Vanuatu	Prime Minister's Office	Senior Database Officer, Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Aid Coordination	Rosina Banvuhavuha
Viet Nam	Ministry of Finance	Head of Division, Debt Management and Foreign Economic Relations	Ha Thu Nguyen
Moderator/Facilitators			
Bhutan	Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA)	Board Member	Jigme Sonam
India	Development Intelligence Unit (DIU)	Lead, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning	Arshee Rizvi
India	Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA)	Coordinator	Dr. Yatin Diwakar
Indonesia	Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA)	Communications Officer	Ahmad Syaifur Rijal
Philippines	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP)	Research Officer	Dorothy Mae Albiento
Sri Lanka	EvalYouth Asia	Co-Founder	Dulmina Chamathkara,
Sri Lanka	EvalYouth Sri Lanka	Co-Leader	Punya Lakmini

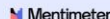
Annex 2: Mentimeter Engagement Result

The responses submitted by participants to the group discussion questions via the Mentimeter are shown in the table below (*More details are shown in [Annex 3: Record of Discussion](#)*).



Q1: Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible?

none	Nepal is doing good with it, so far 3 vnr reports prepared, consulted 900 youths in the third report	This was my first time to learn about VNR concept. The concept is important.	VNR is not common among the citizens.
The stakeholders consultant was widely done in the case of nepal	VNR related to GNH.	I did not know VNR until today	VNR 2024 was in website, government make a report but have limited engagement of other development stakeholder in the process
It is important to push for transparency and this is one of the ways we can do this and still attain the "leaving no one behind"	Use of national statistics allows government to hide disparities.	Participatory engagement in planning, prioritization and implementation	



Q2: Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process and quality.

Inclusivity helps progress the work for countries with little resource. It will help tremendously	Learned from Bhutan experience, they are carbon negative country, talked on gross national happiness	reports need to be interesting	Involvement of many youth in Nepal.
- inclusive involvement from all stakeholders need to be ensured - feedback mechanism should be there with wider circulation	Japan has successfully made "SDG" a part of colloquial discourse	Limited participation of citizens	It seems like not many stakeholders notice about the procedures of VNR, especially general citizens and CSOs.

Stakeholder consultations must be inclusive and decentralised Civil society engagement strengthens legitimacy and evidence

Since participation of citizens is limited, transparency of the process and results is particularly important.

Extensive consultation

Remarkable progress on access of electricity partnering with public and private sector engagement

We are underreporting Include all stakeholders

building trust between GO and stakeholders especially CSOs is key to inclusive process.

In my work on the Satu Data Indonesia initiative, we also focus on ensuring that data systems are interoperable and inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind in evidence-based policy

To be proactive with researching and patience with report reading and taking a good leading.

involvement of youth is a good practice in Nepal

Co-creation of evaluation models. How can we be more inclusive especially to children and other marginalized groups in respective countries.

Inclusive consultation is important but so is data collection and data verification. One of the critical elements in writing the report also relies on good data analysis and understanding

1. Data gaps remain a challenge for the government 2. Collaboration with NGOs, development partners and private sector 3. Inclusive planning support such as consultations that align with NSDP

1. Challenge for government is the data gap. 2. Collaboration with NGO 3. Planning Support (Regarding to NSDP)

Mentimeter

Q3: What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries"?

Extensive engagement

Bhutan's experiences was impressive to us

Useful

It is important to learn from the best practices.

It gives us a scope of what to expect and or prepares us for the next steps. It also helps small island states adjust it and tailor it for a fit for purpose.

I support it as long as it is not an unnecessary burden

Multi stakeholder involvement for review process.

Digital platforms but also having quality data on those digital systems to inform decisions of government

Can provide models for inclusive process Can provide good practice case studies of local initiatives Helps with benchmarking and comparative indicators

Useful and important

It's a good opportunity but again not many stakeholders, who actually implement development work isn't aware of VNRs unfortunately

By learning from the good practices of other countries, we hope to enhance our approach to the VNR and foster mutual learning toward achieving the SDGs.

I hope there is much space for ODAs in contributing in this regard.

By learning from the good practices of other countries, we hope to enhance our approach to the VNR and foster mutual learning toward achieving the SDGs.

By learning from the good practices of other countries, we hope to enhance our approach to the VNR and foster mutual learning toward achieving the SDGs.

It's helpful, as we learned innovations which we can adopt

Its valuable to hear what works for others.

Sluggish progress on anemia among pregnant women and death children below 5 years. It is a learning process, local innovation adoption, and peer exchange and learning

Great reminder that VNR is not just a reporting exercise, but a learning journey

If the context is similar, it will be worked but it seems difficult in general.

Learning from good practices is a great thing but we shouldn't implement it directly without understanding the context to another country.

1. Observing how other countries conduct their VNRs help improve Malaysia's own review process. 2. adopt best practices in inclusivity 3. Learning other countries showcase innovative project

Annex 3: Record of Discussions

Learning from the ODA Evaluation Workshops and Japan's Third Voluntary National Review

Opening and Introduction:

The 20th ODA Evaluation Workshop was opened by moderator Dr. Yatin Diwakar, Coordinator, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association. He welcomed participants and shared housekeeping notes before introducing the session.

Dr. Diwakar explained that this year's workshop focuses on learning from two decades of ODA Evaluation Workshops and from Japan's Third Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the SDGs. Noting that this is the 20th, he highlighted that the session would look back on past achievements and consider opportunities for future collaboration between Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. He also introduced the session's features about a discussion on Japan's third VNR, engaging a wide range of stakeholders to share knowledge and experience with participants and an international audience. The aim is to contribute to fostering an evaluation culture and inclusive reviews of progress towards the SDGs.

Following the introduction, the moderator presented the session facilitator and speakers and invited the first speaker, Mr. ARAI Kazuhisa, Director of the ODA Evaluation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan.

Presentation 1

“Review of the ODA Evaluation Workshop Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions”

By ARAI Kazuhisa, Director of the ODA Evaluation Division at the MOFA of Japan

Mr. Arai first extended a warm welcome to all the online and in-person participants. Then he presented a comprehensive reflection on the history and evolution of the ODA Evaluation Workshop, which has been held annually since 2001, engaging 35 countries and over 700 participants. He emphasized the significance of this long-standing initiative and its deep connection with APEA. To frame the reflection, Mr. Arai introduced a video featuring interviews with four individuals who have played key leadership roles in Japan's ODA evaluation and the workshop's development. He reiterated the core message shared in the video: “Let's create the future together”. Before starting the presentation, he introduced the four contributors to his presentation, all former chairs, co-chairs, or facilitators of the workshop as follows:

- I. Dr. MUTA Hiromitsu – President, International Development Center of Japan; Professor Emeritus, Tokyo Institute of Technology
- II. Dr. HIRONO Ryokichi – Professor Emeritus, Seikei University; inaugural President of the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association
- III. Dr. ISHIDA Yoko – Specially Appointed Professor, Hiroshima University; former President of the Japan Evaluation Society; President of APEA since 2024

IV. Mr. MURAOKA Keiichi – Former Director, ODA Evaluation Division, MOFA Japan; former Vice Chair, OECD-DAC EvalNet

Mr. Arai structured his presentation around the key themes emerging from the interviews, and added his explanations in between the interview records and his presentation slides.

Why was the ODA Evaluation Workshop initiated?

By sharing the insights from Dr. Muta's video interview played on the screen, it was explained that the first workshop in 2001 coincided with growing attention to evaluation in Japan, including the establishment of the Japan Evaluation Society in 2000 and the enactment of the Government Policy Evaluation Act in 2001. Although evaluation was still developing at the time, ODA evaluation was comparatively advanced. The need to strengthen evaluation capacity in partner countries who were well positioned to observe long-term outcomes was a key driver for launching the workshop. Mr. Arai underscored that these early years marked Japan's strong effort to promote evaluation. Also, he emphasized that capacity building for partner countries was considered essential, and the workshop was launched as a platform for shared learning and strengthening national evaluation systems

What is the key principle of the workshop?

Dr. Hirono stated that the workshop's guiding principle has always been the value of an equal relationship between donor and partner countries. Even if one provides assistance and the other receives it, he stressed that evaluation must be conducted without hierarchy. Mutual respect, open dialogue, and equality were fundamental considerations in the workshop's design and facilitation. Reflecting on what Dr. Hirono said, Mr. Arai highlighted that this principle remains the workshop's foundation: equal partnership, mutual respect, and cooperation

What are the unique features and strengths of Japan's ODA Evaluation Workshop?

In the video, Mr. Muraoka highlighted that a key strength of the workshop is its focus on government officials in developing countries who are responsible for conducting, managing, or using evaluation—many of whom are not evaluation experts. By engaging both users and producers of evaluation, the workshop broadened its reach and ensured that evaluation could better inform public administration. He added that the workshop has also been instrumental in building networks among evaluation stakeholders across public and private sectors. A notable milestone was the 2016 workshop in Vietnam, co-hosted with the UN and integrated into the first international APEA conference, a highly successful event that helped strengthen APEA's development.

Mr. Arai emphasized these points, noting that the workshop's broad and inclusive target group, its role in network-building, and its contribution to regional conference development are central strengths. He expressed confidence that such success can be replicated again

How has the role of ODA Evaluation Workshops evolved?

In the video interview, Dr. Muta explained that the workshop's strength lies in how its focus has broadened over time. While early discussions centered on Japan's ODA, the workshop gradually expanded to include aid from other donors and partner countries' own policy evaluation systems. Because ODA is only one part of government administration in developing countries, many participants became increasingly interested in building their national evaluation frameworks and developing evaluation professionals. Mr. Arai added that through repeated workshops, partner countries began taking greater ownership, shifting attention from Japan's ODA toward their own evaluation systems and capacity development.

How has ODA Evaluation Workshop responded to international trends in international cooperation and participant needs?

Insights from Mr. Muraoka noted that the workshop has actively responded to global developments, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes follow-up, review, statistical strengthening, and evaluation capacity building. The workshop aligned its themes with these priorities by offering timely sessions on SDGs evaluations.

Mr. Arai added on that and highlighted that SDG 17 specifically calls for strengthening statistical systems and evaluation capacity, reinforcing the workshop's relevance and alignment with international expectations.

What is the diplomatic significance of conducting ODA Evaluation Workshop?

The interviewees highlighted that Japan's leadership in the workshop contributed to evaluation capacity building across the Asia-Pacific region. Japanese experts were dispatched to partner countries, workshops included participants from bilateral aid agencies, and long-term peer networks were established. This strengthened administrative evaluation systems and enhanced the quality of development cooperation. They also noted that the workshop improved transparency and accountability in Japan's own ODA and nurtured a culture of evaluation—an important foundation for democratic governance. Mr. Arai emphasized that the workshop not only promoted capacity development but also improved Japan's diplomatic relationships through sustained engagement, knowledge exchange, and professional collaboration.

Japan's role in the establishment of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA):

Through interviews with Dr. Ishida and Dr. Muta, it was explained that the ODA Evaluation Workshop played a critical role in creating the ecosystem that led to APEA's formation in 2012. The workshop nurtured evaluation professionals, strengthened regional networks, and cultivated shared understanding of evaluation practices. They described APEA as one of the most significant impacts of Japan's sustained commitment to evaluation capacity building. Mr. Arai highlighted the link of APEA establishment and emphasized that the workshop served as an incubator for developing evaluation systems and building cross-country connections. Japan's continued support played an essential role in APEA's growth, making APEA itself a key impact of the workshop initiative.

APEA's Perspective on Co-Hosting the Workshop:

Dr. Ishida's interview shared that co-hosting the workshop with Japan elevated APEA's visibility and helped it build connections with government officials across Asia-Pacific. These connections supported the expansion of national evaluation networks, knowledge sharing among VOPEs, and the gradual institutionalization of evaluation systems. She added that Japan's legal framework for evaluation inspired many countries seeking to create their own systems. Mr. Arai added that co-hosting created a mutually reinforcing cycle: stronger networks led to stronger institutions, which in turn expanded the regional evaluation community.

Potential areas of collaboration between Japan and APEA in development cooperation evaluation:

In her interview, Dr. Ishida suggested moving toward co-creation models in which partner governments take the lead in designing and implementing evaluations, supported by diverse groups including young evaluators, civil society, and VOPEs. She stressed the importance of integrating gender, minority perspectives, environmental concerns, and disability inclusion. She also noted the potential for joint training or certification programs. Mr. Arai highlighted the key approach and agreed that co-creation and inclusion represent promising directions for future development cooperation and evaluation collaboration.

Recent Highlight & Closing of the Presentation:

Mr. Arai concluded by highlighting EvalNet's recent announcement of an international joint evaluation on COVID-19 measures, to which Japan contributed its findings. He encouraged participants to review the evaluation and noted that such initiatives reflect the type of global collaboration the workshop has long aimed to foster.

He closed his slides with the key message to all partners: "Let's create the future together through evaluation." encouraging participants to co-create through evaluation.

Presentation 2

"VNR as a Tool to Achieve the SDGs and to Revitalize Multilateralism"

By MIWA Atsuko

Professor, School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University; Co-Chair, Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (SDGs Japan); Member, Roundtable for Promotion of the SDGs of the Government of Japan

Prof. Miwa presented Japan's experience with its Third Voluntary National Review (VNR), highlighting how VNRs function as both a review mechanism of the SDGs and an instrument to revitalize and strengthen multilateralism. She began by briefly outlining the purpose of VNRs, which are mandated in Paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda, and the role of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) as the global platform for SDG follow up and review.

Turning to Japan's Third VNR of 2025, she highlighted 4 areas of notable progress. First, the Roundtable for Promotion of the SDGs of the Government of Japan, established in 2016, played a substantially deeper role in shaping both the process and content of the review. Close consultations were held with roundtable members regarding the process including how the stakeholder meeting mentioned below should be held, which demonstrated strengthened government-stakeholder partnership. Through this process, breakout thematic sessions as well as accessibility for persons with disabilities were materialized. Second, the first-ever official stakeholder meeting for the VNR was convened by the MOFA of Japan through an open call, enabling broad participation both in person and online. Four thematic breakout sessions were conducted for in-depth discussion, that was moderated and reported by members of SDGs Japan, an NGO working for achievement of the SDGs. Third, the draft VNR was released for a one-month public comment, and several comments were incorporated into the final document, a practice that is not always common in Japan. Reflected comments include achievement Universal Health Coverage, mainstreaming of human rights and gender equality, and recognition and dissemination of local good practices. Fourth, the Government of Japan's firm political commitment to the SDGs was evident through these processes, including the inclusion of an independent chapter for stakeholder review (Chapter 6). Civil society also contributed through the publication of SDGs Spotlight Report 2025, which consolidated NGO assessments of all the 17 goals. Constructive dialogue between ministries and civil society helped resolve information gaps and strengthen mutual understanding and partnership.

Prof. Miwa then outlined key lessons and remaining challenges as follows: evidence-based review should be further strengthened, especially regarding missing global indicators and the need to assess major initiatives such as marine plastic reduction and assistance to survivors of gender-based violence with robust data and progress. She also stressed the importance of expanding stakeholder engagement, noting that some stakeholders that consist of the UN

MGoS (Major Groups and other Stakeholders) remain outside the roundtable. Additionally, transformative local initiatives should be more widely shared and replicated as good practices.

In conclusion, she highlighted that VNRs are critical tools for accelerating SDGs progress and revitalizing multilateralism. The SDGs address deeply interconnected challenges that require strong collective commitment. VNRs and the HLPF enable member states to learn from each other, identify remaining gaps, and reaffirm their dedication to a sustainable future. Despite global challenges that we are facing, she emphasized that without strengthened multilateral efforts, the SDGs cannot be achieved and a sustainable future will be in jeopardy. She closed by urging all stakeholders to make the most of VNR processes to advance the SDGs and safeguard a sustainable future.

Group Discussions

Participants were divided into groups and discussed on the questions:

1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.
2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.
3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

Question 1. Please share with us your experience on VNR especially in relation to "leaving no one behind" and to making it as broad-based as possible.

Participants shared practical experiences on how their countries ensured that the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process was inclusive, broad-based, and aligned with the principle of "leaving no one behind." Across the region, countries emphasized multi-stakeholder engagement, reaching vulnerable groups, and strengthening data systems.

Several countries highlighted institutional approaches that ensured broad participation:

- Samoa described its National Task Force led process involving line ministries, the private sector, CSOs, youth groups, and disability organizations. Open forums and national consultations were used to collect and validate data for its 3rd VNR (2024).
- Philippines followed the "ABCD method," emphasizing capacity building, national and local consultations, and engagement with private sector and local government units.
- Timor-Leste's VNR was led by the Prime Minister's Office, bringing together private sector actors, vulnerable groups, religious communities, development partners, and the UN.
- Malaysia relied on strong institutional structures, including the National SDG Council and Steering Committee, and actively engaged academia and research institutions.
- Bhutan involved local governments, CSOs, and the private sector, continuing its tradition of holistic development grounded in the GNH philosophy.
- Nepal stressed the inclusion of indigenous communities and persons with disabilities through both local and national monitoring mechanisms.

Different countries also emphasized the importance of ensuring participation from remote and marginalized communities:

- Micronesia, with its four state governments plus the national government, planned extensive outreach to consult communities across remote islands.
- Timor-Leste highlighted engagement with vulnerable groups and communities affected by shocks such as COVID-19.
- FSM (Micronesia) underscored the need to use comprehensive data and understand local contexts to ensure meaningful inclusion.

Also, as for the evidence for “Leaving No One Behind”, participants were the importance of accurate, disaggregated data as identifying vulnerable groups requires granular, community-level data. Also, strong coordination across ministries and partners is essential to overcome data gaps. Bhutan and Cambodia emphasized the value of improving indicator coverage and expanding data availability; Cambodia increased its indicators from 148 in its previous VNR to 193 in the latest one, achieving a 72% reporting rate (up from 48%).

Question 2. Please share with us important lessons that have been learned through the implementation of VNRs, with respect to inclusive process as well as to improving the quality of the review.

- Indonesian experience stressed the importance of engaging stakeholders early and consistently throughout the process. They also highlighted the need for reliable, up-to-date, and properly validated data, supported by strong coordination between ministries and departments.
- Samoa experience noted that inclusiveness from the start helps produce a more accurate national snapshot and recommended providing briefings so stakeholders understand the relevance of the VNR.
- Micronesia experience highlighted that many communities are unfamiliar with the SDGs and VNR, making awareness-raising and simplified communication essential. Also, community-level awareness and capacity must be built so that local realities are accurately captured.
- Bhutan experience emphasized that consultations should be sustained, not one-off events, and should leverage existing structures to avoid token participation. Bhutan stressed understanding local contexts, cultural systems, and community realities to ensure meaningful inclusion.
- Fiji experience shared difficulties related to territorial data ownership and limited data-sharing across sectors. Clear political commitment and direction from the government are necessary to ensure agencies provide data in a timely and complete manner. Without clear whole-of-government commitment, data provision and cross-sector participation become fragmented.
- Malaysia emphasized strengthening databases and ensuring continuity in data monitoring between VNR cycles. Samoa and Malaysia noted that robust data management is essential for capturing national progress and identifying gaps.
- Cambodia observed that while public sector capacity is strong, private sector actors require more training and engagement to contribute meaningfully to the VNR.
- Indonesia and Malaysia highlighted that well-functioning coordination across ministries, local governments, and partners directly improves the quality and credibility of the review.
- Using these locally grounded approaches not only strengthens ownership but also ensures the VNR genuinely reflects progress and challenges.

Question 3. What do you think about "learning from good practices of VNRs of other countries" both in terms of the process undertaken and of adoption of good local initiatives in your country for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

Cambodia highlighted the importance of adapting international good practices to local contexts by building on existing national mechanisms. As contexts evolve, learning from peer countries—combined with support from development partners—can be applied using a “triangular cooperation” approach.

Another participant shared that lessons from other countries have encouraged the use of digital platforms to strengthen data collection and reporting, especially in remote areas. They also emphasized the value of capacity building for local evaluators, citizen-led monitoring, and bottom-up approaches that give communities a stronger role in shaping SDGs reviews and implementation.

Micronesia shared that VNR is a learning journey not just an exercise, allows to see what is possible.

Sharing

After the group discussion, participants are asked to share their discussion experience using the Mentimeter, through entering menti.com and entering the code shared on the screen. In the responses collected through Mentimeter, participants noted wide variation in countries’ VNR experiences, with some highlighting good practices—such as youth consultations in Nepal and Bhutan’s linkage of VNRs to the Gross National Happiness framework—while others observed limited public awareness and stakeholder engagement. Across responses, transparency, participatory processes, and the use of disaggregated data were emphasized as essential for ensuring leaving no one behind. Participants also stressed that inclusive and sustained stakeholder consultation improves both the legitimacy and quality of VNRs, pointing to recurring challenges such as data gaps, limited citizen participation, and weak feedback mechanisms. The actual Mentimeter engagement result can be found from Annex 2.

Q&A

A participant from Japan asked two questions to Prof. Miwa in relation to the findings of the VNR; 1) Reasons and background of the lack of several global indicators in the VNR of Japan, and 2) Additional and more specific information on the current weakness of the involvement of the NGOs. He also expressed his gratitude and shared his opinion saying the presentations were informative and very helpful.

Prof. Miwa responded that the absence of certain global indicators in Japan’s VNR is largely due to policy and political factors. She explained that, for example, Japan does not have an official definition of poverty and has been using proxy data from OECD indicators. Though NGOs/CSOs have been advocating for introduction of the official definition and effective policies and programs to support those in poverty for many years, it has not been successful. She mentioned that addressing these gaps will require political commitment and decision-making. Regarding NGO involvement, she noted that several key stakeholders that consist of the UN MGoS (Major Groups and other Stakeholders) —such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and farmers—are still not represented in the SDGs Roundtable, though civil society has repeatedly requested their inclusion. Further efforts are needed to ensure broader and more equitable stakeholder participation.

Next participant directed a question to Mr. Arai, noting that despite Japan's long-standing efforts to promote evaluation, national ownership, and regional capacity building including through initiatives such as the ODA Evaluation Workshop and the establishment of APEA, Asia still lags behind other regions in institutionalizing and using evaluation, as highlighted by Professor Reinhold Stockmann in the inaugural session. He asked why, despite decades of effort, the region remains behind, and what could have been done differently to enable Asia to catch up. He also clarified whether continuing "business as usual" is sufficient, or whether a change in direction is needed to advance evaluation institutionalization in the region.

Mr. Arai responded that he and his colleagues face it every day. He said that ideally, using and respecting evaluation should be "business as usual," but the current situation is still far from that. Even so, he emphasized the importance of not giving up. He shared that within his own organization, the situation has improved little by little through daily effort and continuous discussion even "fights" with colleagues. He noted that change has been possible because they consistently try to show the usefulness of evaluation, especially by clarifying facts and evidence. While he could not give a clear or complete answer to such a large issue, he stressed that the key principle is to keep trying and to demonstrate the value of evaluation step by step.

Another participant from Bhutan, shared her clarification on the question, noting that Professor Stockmann's assessment referred to Asia as a whole, not Japan specifically. She explained that Asia consists of many countries, and while Japan is progressing well and is at a high level in terms of evaluation, several other countries in the region have weak evaluation systems and limited evaluation culture. As a result, when viewed collectively, Asia appears to be lagging not because Japan is not performing, but because other countries face significant challenges.

Dr. Ishida responded that the question raised is indeed a critical one, and she herself does not have a clear answer. She noted that, as mentioned by Dr. YAMAYA Kiyoshi in another session in the 5th APEA Conference, Japan has both ODA evaluations led by MOFA and national administrative or policy evaluations conducted by the government—two very different systems. She suggested that Dr. Reinhard Stockmann's survey that was presented as the Keynote session of the 5th APEA Conference likely focused on national administrative evaluations, not ODA evaluation. Japan's ODA evaluations are more internationally oriented, aligned with global standards, and supported by long experience, which may explain the contrast. However, she acknowledged that although Japan has an evaluation law and an institutionalized system, the involvement of citizens and the actual use of evaluation results remain behind compared to other countries. She reflected that since evaluation methodologies largely originate from Western countries, Japan and other Asian or African countries must think about how to localize these concepts and apply them more effectively.

Closing Remarks

By ISHIDA Yoko, President of Asia Pacific Evaluation Association

In the closing summary, Dr. Ishida highlighted that the session provided an opportunity to look back on nearly 25 years of Japan's ODA evaluation initiatives. She shared the presentation's summary noting that Mr. Arai reminded participants how the workshops have evolved as platforms for mutual learning, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making, an enduring contribution from Japan to the global evaluation community. She also emphasized that Professor Atsuko's presentation on Japan's third VNR demonstrated how evaluation and review processes can become more inclusive and transformative.

She concluded that the exchange of experiences both in person and online was fruitful and valuable. On behalf of APEA, she expressed gratitude to MOFA of Japan, the speakers, and all partners for their long-standing collaboration, and expressed hope for continued joint efforts to strengthen evaluation culture and support sustainable development. She ended the session conveying her gratitude to everyone.