

Preface

In today's world, Japan is currently in the lead as a "population-declining, extremely-aging" society. It is predicted that the population decline that began in 2008 will continue to escalate with the rapidly decreasing population, falling birth rate, and aging society. In particular, the rural areas have districts where, in addition to the decreasing population of youth, the population of seniors is decreasing as well. This puts the severity of population decline in rural areas ahead of the urban areas, and is connected to the economic attrition of these regions. The question of how to deal with these problems in order to build a bright future has become a pressing issue for the entire government.

In May 2014, the Population Decline Issue Review Committee (Chairman: Hiroya Masuda) of the Japan Policy Council shocked the country when it announced its projection that, "By 2040, there is a possibility that 896 municipalities will disappear (the population of young women (age 20-39) will decrease to less than half the current numbers)."

In July of the same year, the MLIT announced the "Grand Design of National Spatial Development towards 2050 ~Creation of a Country Generating Diverse Synergies among Regions~" to provide a philosophy and way of thinking for building up the country towards year 2050, taking into account the rapid decline in population and the imminence of a major disasters.

The government as a whole also established the "Headquarters for Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy" in September of the same year, in order to deal with the issues of building up rural areas as well as overcoming the population decrease by the government working together as one body. In addition, by December of that year, "Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economies: Long-term Vision" and "Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economies: Comprehensive Strategy" were formulated to be used as the base on which each local government was to establish its own "Rural Population Vision" and "The Rural Comprehensive Strategy."

Based on the above conditions and being mindful of these issues, Part I of the 2015 MLIT White Paper's theme is: "Building up the Country and Regions to Actualize an Abundant Life that Extends to Future Generations ~Creation of a Country Generating Diverse Synergies among Regions~." Taking into account the "Grand Design of National Spatial Development towards 2050", Part I will discuss the full-scale efforts needed for building up the country and regions in a society struggling with a declining population, with a special focus on "Creating Unique Rural Areas."

Chapter 1, "Current Conditions in Japan such as Declining Population", will expound on the challenges Japan is currently facing, such as the decrease in population, the declining birth rate, the aging population, and the over-centralization to Tokyo. In particular, we will analyze the effects women's employment rate and its relationship to the birth rate, which is the fundamental factor of demographic shifts. We will then review how the population decline is affecting the cities and daily life in Rural Areas.

Next, Chapter 2, "Building up the Country and Regions in a Society Amidst a Serious Population Decline", will be divided up into the two parts that contributes to the vitalization of the community: the flow of people and goods (Activity), and the regional structure that provides support (Structure). First, in Section 1, "The Flow of People, Goods, Money, and Information", analyzes the trends and causes of migration to rural areas, and attempts to quantify regional attractiveness, as well as introduce efforts being made for the vitalization of communities through the revitalization of tourism, logistics and regional economic circulation. Then in Section 2, "Structured Community Development Tailored to the Needs of the Times", we will introduce the effects and actual cases of "compact" and "networked"—the core concept of "Grand Design of National Spatial Development towards 2050"—in order to explain the importance of "compact" and "networked" as a way of thinking about the aspect of regional structure (Structure) in the creation of a country generating diverse synergies among regions.

In Part II, the progress made in FY2014 by various sections of the MLIT administration will be reported for each policy issue.