

# A Blueprint for Action: Implementing ESG for Children

~ Children's Commission Initiative ~



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ESG for Children Research Team

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## SUMMARY

The Basic Act on the Child, which came into force in April 2023, is the first to establish a basic law in Japan that spells out the rights of children as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children and Families Agency as established at the same time, to be the center for child-related policies and lead to promote rights of children throughout the Japanese society.

In addition, as the birthrate decline rapidly, public concern about children and the childcare environment has increased. However, it is unlikely that the meanings of, and positive impact of children's rights are widely understood in Japan. Therefore, the Japan Research Institute (JRI) launched the "Children's Commission Initiative" and advocating the following initiatives.

1. Promoting an understanding of the positive impact of respect for children's rights on society and the negative impact of disrespect.
2. Promoting understanding of the significance of mechanisms for independent monitoring of how children's rights are respected in society.
3. A forum for various stakeholders to share best practices and solutions to issues related to children, and to discuss necessary actions while learning from each other.

The ESG for Children Research was conducted with the view that private companies should respect children's rights not only through employment but also through products and services. The targets of the research are listed companies with eight types of products and services (Food, daily necessities (sanitary products), pharmaceuticals, sporting goods, real estate development, communications, nursery schools, cram schools) that are particularly relevant to children's lives.

As a result, it was found that the system for respecting human rights through corporate activities is evolving in listed companies, but there are some differences depending on the sector. In addition, companies engaged in human rights due diligence were limited in their views of children as a wide range of corporate stakeholders, such as "children as customers" and "children as local residents," and in their views of utilizing the views of children in management.

For each sector, we also analyzed the pathways that increase the positive impact on the environment in which children grow up, and extracted the points we would like to see in the future to reduce the negative impact. In both cases, it is important to view children as stakeholders in corporate management and to base implementation on a comprehensive, rather than fragmentary, understanding of children's rights.

It is necessary to expand our understanding of the relationship between children's rights and business, and to clarify the business processes and effectiveness of respecting children's rights. It can be said that the relationship between companies and children should be included as one of the "risks and opportunities" of management. Enhanced cooperation between child-related sectors holds the potential to significantly improve respect for children's human rights.

## CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSION INITIATIVE

Chapter 1 sets the stage by outlining the current landscape of children's rights in Japan. It then emphasizes the crucial role corporations play in this space and concludes by introducing the objectives of the Child Commission Initiative.

### 1-1. Basic Act on the Child

In Japan, the Basic Act on the Child was enacted in 2022 and enforced in April 2023. At the same time, the Children and Families Agency was established under the Act for Establishment of the Children and Families Agency.

Since Japan's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, the Basic Act on the Child is the first comprehensive basic law concerning children, waited for 28 years. Four principles on the rights of the child set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Prohibition of discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, respect for the child's views) were articulated as basic principles (art. 3). In the field of children, the major feature of the law is that it sets the basic principles for measures in the field of children, in contrast to the various laws that have been formulated for each issue (e.g., Child Abuse Prevention Act, Anti-Bullying Promotion Act, Child Poverty Promotion Act, Child Welfare Act).

One of the new developments that has been evident since the passage of the Act is that the practice of incorporating the voices of children and young people in the review process of child-related measures has been spreading at both the national and local levels with the aim of respecting the views of children. Growing public concern about children's rights, especially respect for children's participation, and the accumulation of experience are positive changes in Japanese society.

However, the creation of the Basic Act on the Child and the Children and Families Agency will not solve all problems related to children. Issues related to the environment in which children grow up and the childcare cannot be solved overnight, such as the increase in child suicides, educational disparities, abuse, the rapidly declining birthrate, and the increase in the number of people who do not feel that the country is warm for child-rearing. It is necessary to maintain a high level of public interest in how the Children and Families Agency will function considering changes in the environment in which children live.

Critically, Japan lacks a national-level independent monitoring mechanism specifically dedicated to children's rights. This means, for example, that a professional role has not been created to listen independently to disadvantaged children and to whom their families should appeal in the face of possible differences in child rights advocacy among local governments.

The "independent monitoring" mechanism is sometimes referred to as the "Children's Ombudsman" or the "Children's Commissioner." Although the mechanism involves multiple functions (Dissemination, advocacy, relief, etc.), there are various examples of the division of roles

between national and local governments, depending on the countries that have already introduced the mechanism. Although the Japanese government is reluctant to establish this mechanism as a new institution, it is necessary to keep a close eye on whether the current human rights protection mechanism is truly acceptable to realize the basic principles of the Basic Act on the Child from the viewpoint of effectiveness.

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## **1-2 Private companies in the Basic Act on Child**

While the Basic Act on Child states that "society as a whole will work on measures for children" (Article 1), in Japan, child-related matters such as childcare and education are primarily the role of families, followed by local governments, communities, and educational and welfare organizations, and the role of private companies is rarely recognized. In the Basic Act on Child, the only specific expectation for enterprises is to improve the employment environment of parents (Article 6. Efforts by employers).

Companies have a huge impact on their children's parents through employment, including income, time spent living and work environment. Therefore, all companies have contact with children through their employees. But the intersection between companies and children doesn't stop there. Through their products and services, companies influence children's food, clothing, learning, and play, and they are a force to be reckoned with in shaping children's lives. From the viewpoint of climate change or biodiversity, the actions of companies will affect the living environment in the future. From a corporate perspective, children are stakeholders who can become future customers, employees, and partners. This relational perspective is necessary for society to address various issues related to children.

About the relationship between business and human rights, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights were formulated in 2011 to cover all human rights, not limited to children, and corporate responsibility for respecting human rights became the global standard of conduct. As a result of the formulation of the "National Action Plan", it is believed that corporate understanding of human rights, including consideration of human rights through the supply chain, is rapidly advancing in Japan.

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## **1-3 Children's Commission Initiative**

Based on the above recognition of the current situation, we believe that the following initiatives are necessary to improve the environment in which children grow up in line with the principles of the Basic Act on the Child.

1. Promoting an understanding of the positive impact of respect for children's rights on society and the negative impact of disrespect.
2. Promoting understanding of the significance of mechanisms for independent monitoring of how children's rights are respected in society.
3. A forum for various stakeholders to share best practices and solutions to issues related to children, and to discuss necessary actions while learning from each other.

This initiative is called the Children's Commission Initiative. The aim is to expand supporters of this concept, so that the environment of children growing up in Japan is more highly appreciated internationally, and that children born in Japan can feel glad to have been born in Japan.

## CHAPTER 2 ESG FOR CHILDREN RESEARCH

Chapter 2 summarizes the results of the ESG for Children Research, which explores the intersection between children's rights and business.

### 2-1 Subject of the research

In this research, the following eight types of products and services with a particularly deep involvement with children were chosen, and the companies involved in them were researched. The scope of this research is limited to publicly listed companies in Japan. This decision stems from the restricted nature of information acquisition in this instance. We primarily rely on information companies themselves disclose online, including annual reports, governance reports, integrated reports, sustainability reports, press releases, and their corporate websites (data retrieved as of February 2024). Since listed companies adhere to stricter information disclosure regulations, focusing on them ensures a more consistent and reliable data set for analysis.

Figure 6: Sectors covered

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Food (mainly chocolate)<br>Daily necessities (sanitary products)<br>Drugs<br>Sports equipment | Real estate development<br>Communication<br>Nursery school<br>Cram school |
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### 2-2 Research Structure and Items

When we look at children as stakeholders for a company, here are a few points of perspectives: children as customers (or end users), children as local residents, children as family members of employees, children in the supply chain, and children as future generations. This can be roughly divided into two categories: (1) by products and services, and (2) by the management of organization.

Therefore, the research consisted of both products and services and organizations as follows. It will identify the positive impact it is having on children's rights and what it should look forward to in the future.

Figure 7 Research Structure

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| E | Impact on children's rights through products and services | Impact on the rights of the child as an organization |
| S |   |  |
| G | Respect for the rights of the child as an organization    |  |

Figure 8: Research Items

| Major Item | Sub-items           | Points checked   |
|------------|---------------------|--|
| Governance | Top commitment      | Children and the next generation   |
|            | Human rights policy | Development and disclosure status, and whether the human rights policy refers to the "Rights of the Child and Business Principles" |



|             |                                  |   |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
|             | Human rights due diligence       | Status of implementation and disclosure, and status of coverage of children |
|             | Opportunity to listen to a child | Voice over management and voice over products and services (contact points) |
| Environment | Climate change                   | SBT (Science Based Target)  |
| Society     | Employee                         | Percentage of men taking childcare leave                                    |

## 2-3 Research results by sector

### [FOOD]

#### Overview

Among foods, confectionery is related to children's nutrition, obesity, and interests. Among confectioneries, chocolate is characterized by the risk that child labor is involved in the procurement of cocoa beans. Therefore, among the major companies related to chocolate, Ezaki Glico, Fuji Oil and Meiji Holdings, which are covered by the aforementioned "The State of Children's Rights and Business 2023" were included. In addition, Morinaga & Co., whose main product is chocolate, was included. Ajinomoto, which was also in the "The State of Children's Rights and Business 2023" was included as seasonings in particular affect children's taste and health.

Based on the above, five companies were included.

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| Ajinomoto, Ezaki Glico, Fuji Oil, Meiji Holdings, Morinaga & Co. |
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(Alphabetical order. Same as below.)

#### Relevance to children's rights

Confectionery and seasonings are primarily expected to be eaten by children and are closely related to the impact on children's health as consumers (nutrition, obesity, additives, etc.).

Second, there is an impact on the supply chain, mainly in the procurement of raw materials overseas. Cacao beans and sugar cane, which are raw materials for chocolate, are considered to have a high risk of child labor.

#### Results of ESG Research Items

The research revealed that two companies operating in sectors catering to children mentioned children in their top-level corporate website messaging. These mentions specifically included the terms "infants" and "elementary school children."

In terms of human rights policies and human rights due diligence, all five companies have developed and published human rights policies. Behind this trend is the advancement of human rights and sustainability initiatives in the food industry, particularly in companies with global business. However, while all five companies have publicly stated that they follow the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, only one company, Meiji Holdings, has publicly stated that it respects the Rights of the Child and Business Principles.

Regarding the status of implementation of human rights due diligence, three companies have implemented and disclosed the contents. In human rights due diligence, Meiji Holdings has identified "the impact of advertising and marketing on children" as one of the prominent human rights issues.

The term "human rights" appears in many of the companies' disclosures. However, even when risk assessments based on human rights policies are carried out, the focus is on human rights of employees and supply chains. All five companies mention child labor, but only Meiji Holdings mentions children's rights other than child labor. In 2020, the company established the Meiji Group Marketing Policy for Children, which describes consideration for children in marketing confectionery and ice cream. As priority areas for FY 2023 and beyond, it has identified issues in the value chain related to children's rights, including the areas of advertising and marketing, and has formulated an action plan.<sup>1</sup>

While all five companies in Japan offer opportunities for direct communication with children through social initiatives like food education workshops, events, and school delivery classes, none of them currently provide a platform for children to directly express their views or opinions on management.

The rate of male employee taking parental leave is over 80% at three companies. From the viewpoint of promoting diversity and inclusion, Ezaki Glico is promoting a project to solve social issues related to child-rearing called "Co Rearing PROJECT."<sup>2</sup>

#### Positive impact on children's rights

##### **Raising awareness in Japan**

The food industry is ahead of other industries in responding to the risks of child labor in its supply chain. They have also conducted campaigns in which a portion of product sales is donated to support children in countries where raw materials are sourced, and it can be said that it has also played a role in promoting and raising awareness among general consumers.

##### **Promoting the elimination of child labor and ensuring access to quality nutrition and overseas education for children**

Each company carries out activities aimed at improving maternal and child nutrition and providing children with a good quality of life and education in countries where raw materials are procured.

##### **Disseminating information on children's health, nutrition and dietary education**

Each company offers pre-school classes and food education for children and parents. Some companies set up activities such as taste education for children and salt reduction, as well as communication sites on nutrition and health.

#### Areas requiring further improvements



While the food sector has made progress in respecting human rights, particularly by prohibiting child labor, we look forward to further focusing on children's rights in other contexts.

For example, regarding responsible marketing to children, Nestlé, for example, limits paid media advertising to children under the age of 16 in categories such as sweets and does not provide marketing communications to children under the age of 6.<sup>3</sup> This is partly due to laws in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere banning advertising aimed at children. On the other hand, while Japanese companies seem to reflect the voices of children in their marketing, there are two sides to whether they see this as a positive influence on children or product PR. Advertisements for children, etc. can be considered from the perspective of children's rights.

In addition, because the company has a product group directly consumed by children, it is expected to promote the reflection of children's views on management and the establishment of direct communication channels with children from the viewpoint of respecting children's rights. Although there is a possibility that children's needs (I want to eat something sweet and soft to play with, etc.) and children's health may not go hand in hand in the short term, it is expected that development and improvement of products that take children's health into consideration will be promoted in parallel with the provision of appropriate information.

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## [DAILY NECESSITIES - SANITARY PRODUCTS]

### Overview

The daily necessities sector is particularly relevant to children because they frequently interact with these products in their everyday lives. In this research, we focused on sanitary products, especially sanitary napkins, as the "Period Poverty" became evident as a social issue. We included the following three companies from companies listed on the TSE Prime Market.

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|---------------------------|
| Kao, Daio Paper, Unicharm |
|---------------------------|

### Relevance to children's rights

Sanitary products are closely related to a child's hygienic lifestyle, but also to respect a child's opinion about sex. We believe that the rights of children, which are behind the "period poverty" of children, are an important issue.

As the environment surrounding women has become more severe because of COVID-19 countermeasures, "period poverty" has become a social problem in Japan. In a 2021 survey conducted by a private organization, about 1 in 5 students said they had trouble buying sanitary products, such as putting up with other things and buying sanitary products instead.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare first conducted a survey on "period poverty" in 2022, and found that more than 12% of young people, especially those in their 20s or younger, had trouble buying it.<sup>5</sup>

Period poverty is defined as "the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and educations, including but not limited to sanitary products, washing facilities, and waste management" according to the American Medical Women's Association. [\*]<sup>6</sup> In other words, "period poverty"

requires not only financial support but also support for access to correct knowledge about sex, period, and the need for menstrual equity.

"Period poverty" among elementary, junior high and high school students has also attracted attention, and independent surveys have been conducted to clarify and resolve the actual situation. In a survey of female students attending elementary and junior high schools in Shiga Prefecture, about 40% said they had had problems with not having sanitary products at school.<sup>7</sup> The survey also found that although schools provide sanitary products in the infirmary, about 50% said they found it "difficult" to receive sanitary products in the infirmary for reasons such as "embarrassment" and "not wanting other friends or teachers to know." These facts show that the "period poverty" of children is caused not only by economic reasons but also by the stereotype that "periods are embarrassing."

### Results of ESG Research Items

Major manufacturers of sanitary products also sell many consumer products other than sanitary products. Human rights policies and human rights due diligence are developed and implemented by all companies. In addition, the human rights due diligence section provides separate sections on the human rights of children, not limited to child labor. Specifically, Kao identifies "human rights risks to consumers and customers" as "adverse impact on children, senior citizens or women due to inappropriate advertising or promotion" and recognizes them as high risks.

On the other hand, all the companies referred to international standards in their human rights policies, but none referred to Children's Rights and Business Principles.

### Positive impact on children's rights

#### **Providing access to sexual and reproductive health resources**

The sanitary products sector focuses on first menstruation education to prepare children and their guardians before menarche and information on proper menstruation and sex. In addition to providing information through its own websites, social networking sites, and apps, it has also developed, menstruation education for educational institutions. Laurier's first menstruation education set provides free samples sanitary products and leaflets for children and educational materials for teachers.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Creating a safe space for open dialogue about menstruation**

In addition to providing one-way information from companies, companies are also working to create opportunities for children to actively hear their concerns and worries about menstruation. The "Sophie Girl app", an app for menarche children and their parents, helps them manage their periods, as well as help with concerns over menstrual cramps and premenstrual syndrome (PMS).<sup>9</sup> The app includes surveys about how children talk to their parents about periods and sanitary products, creating an opportunity for real views from children.

These efforts can be expected to have a positive impact on children's rights, leading to access to the correct knowledge about their periods and sexuality and for children to be able to "voice their opinions."

#### Areas requiring further improvements

The following two points are expected from the sanitary napkins sector to solve "period poverty" among children.

1. Initiatives for providing menstrual hygiene products in school facilities.
  2. Focus on ending the stigma. Strategies to challenge the misconception that menstruation is shameful.
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1. Regarding sanitary napkins in school bathrooms, the opinions of children have already become apparent, and some municipalities have installed them free of charge. However, many of the measures are temporary, and no permanent measures have been found. One company is offering free sanitary napkins for one year to students who have difficulty obtaining sanitary products for various reasons.<sup>10</sup> In the future, we believe that it is necessary to consider initiatives for the permanent use of sanitary napkins in school bathrooms, including cooperation between companies and local governments.
  2. As for the dissemination of information related to periods, there are cases where adults and parents overreact to sexual and reproductive content, and it is undeniable that there is a difficult aspect for companies to deal with. On the other hand, there is still a stereotype among children that menstruation is embarrassing, and this has led to the result period poverty. According to the survey, 70% of young women and 60% of young men think that men need more knowledge about menstruation.<sup>11</sup> Currently, the information on menstruation from companies is mainly sent to women, but we think it is necessary to actively promote the same information to men in the future. At the same time, we look forward to efforts to break the stereotype that menstruation is shameful through marketing, such as creating a scene in which men and women talk openly in advertisements for menstrual products.

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## [PHARMACEUTICALS]

### Overview

Since medicines, including vaccines, are closely related to health, pharmaceutical sector always has contact with children. The following five Japanese pharmaceutical companies are included: Takeda Pharmaceutical Company and Astellas, which specialize in new drug development, as well as Otsuka Holdings, Daiichi Sankyo, and Eisai, which handle Over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, supplements, and health foods in addition to new drugs.

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| Astellas Pharma, Daiichi Sankyo, Eisai, Otsuka Holdings, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company |
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### Relevance to children's rights

Medicines play a vital role in saving children's lives, and ensuring access to health care through medicines and improving public health through vaccines are the closest points of contact. On the other hand, considering the significant challenges in developing pediatric medicine and the business viability of vaccines and pediatric medicine, ensuring access to cutting-edge medical care for children and improving public health remain major challenges.

As medical technology advances, we're seeing that the impact extends beyond saving lives alone. It is becoming evident that children with illnesses can also have access to education, play, and the opportunity to care for their siblings. This suggests that children's rights intersect with domains beyond the medical field.

In recent years, the policy trend of promoting self-medication – being responsible for our own health and managing minor ailments – has boosted the accessibility of OTC drugs, while inappropriate use of OTC drugs among young people has increased.<sup>12</sup> When looking at the breakdown of drug abuse and drug addiction among teenagers, designer drugs were the main drugs in 2014, while OTC drugs increased rapidly in 2018, accounting for about 40%.<sup>13</sup> Patients with OTC drug-related disorders often exhibit a high prevalence of addiction syndrome, posing a significant problem.

### Results of ESG Research Items

Medical services, including medicines, are used more frequently by older age groups. Due to this background, in all companies, there was no mention of children in their top messages.

While human rights policies were developed by all companies and international standards were also referred to, only two companies were found to be referencing the Children's Rights and Business Principles.

Human rights due diligence has been conducted in all companies, including those conducting business evaluations in terms of children's rights.

### Positive impact on children's rights

#### **Dissemination of knowledge about health and illness**

Takeda Pharmaceutical Company's Oncology Kids Program, and Otsuka Holdings' Otsuka Health Comic Library help children learn about health. Eisai distributed moisturizing cream to 75 elementary schools nationwide to encouraging students to practice daily hand care for a week.

There are also overseas activities that consider the characteristics of each country. Otsuka Holdings donated chewable multivitamins for children in the United States, aimed at promoting access to healthy food and improving household nutrition. They also engaged registered dietitians' educational activities to promote better nutrition at home. Eisai held educational events in schools abroad, where children learned about lymphatic filariasis through songs and dances and then educated their families about the importance of taking medicine.

#### **Pediatric drug research and development and support for children under medical care**

Astellas has affirmed their commitment to respect for the children's rights in research and development activities, including pediatric drugs. In addition, Eisai created Juvenile idiopathic arthritis slide kit using "symptom illustrations" drawn by children suffering from Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis, making it easier for pediatric patients and their families to understand symptoms and management. Furthermore, as a support for children in long-term treatment, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company has been supporting organizations that make the most of their playtime and growth period, thereby encouraging their will to live more fully.

### **Support for access to health care and healthy eating**

Daiichi Sankyo (Thailand) provides heart surgery to children and adults who lacked the resources to cover the cost of necessary medical care through The Life Skills Development Foundation (TLSDF). In addition, Daiichi Sankyo Taiwan participated in the food bank program to support underprivileged families in remote areas of Taiwan.

### Areas requiring further improvements

By expanding access to healthcare and promoting health literacy, we can empower every child to manage their own well-being and seek appropriate care when needed.

In addition, it is necessary to provide information on medicines that is easy to understand not only for family members (parents) but also for children, and to develop suitable dosage forms for children, so that they understand the proper use of medicines and to continue using it appropriately when trying to deal with a health issue. With the increasing availability of OTC drugs, it is important to provide children with information about consultation services for their concerns, as well as the products, to prevent the abuse of OTC drugs such as overdose.

Recently, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI), in which patients and citizens are involved in the decision-making processes, has become common in the research and development of new drugs. From this perspective, activities that incorporate the voices of pediatric patients will be required.

We must ensure access to both quality medical care and inclusive educational and play environments, so that children with illnesses can thrive.

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## **[SPORTS EQUIPMENT]**

### Overview

Regular physical activity is essential for building a foundation of health and physical fitness. Sports, which combine competition and discipline with play, offer a particularly beneficial way to achieve this. In today's society, physical activity plays a crucial role in promoting both mental and physical development.

In the sports equipment market, large companies headquartered in Europe and the United States are well known, but in this research, five listed companies in Japan are included.

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|--|
| Achilles, Asics, Descente, Mizuno Corporation, Yonex |
|--|

### Relevance to children's rights

One of the triggers for the need for corporate social responsibility throughout the supply chain was the revelation in 1997 of child labor at a major U.S. sports equipment manufacturer's outsourced shoe factory in Southeast Asia, which led to a major boycott in the United States and Europe. Since then, apparel and other industries have experienced incidents stemming from poor working conditions. They are often seen as high ESG risk sectors in supply chains, including child labor.

This research examines the relationship between children's rights and participation in sports, considering the perspectives of young athletes.

In sports, incidents that violate children's rights, such as corporal punishment and bullying of children in the course of sports instruction, practice, and competition, as well as physical strain caused by excessive practice, have occurred. In recent years, the IOC has referred to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in its host city contracts. UNICEF developed Children's Rights in Sport Principle in 2018.<sup>14</sup> Under this principle, sports equipment companies fall under the category of "Sponsoring Companies" and are expected to "Incorporate Children's Rights in Sponsorship Decisions" and to "Engage with the Organizations who are Sponsored."

These human rights issues are likely to be faced by children who participate often in sports. On the other hand, 8.8% of boys and 14.3% of girls in elementary school spend less than 60 minutes exercising, and attention should be paid to the rights of children with low participation in sports.<sup>15</sup> Sports equipment is also used in physical education and club activities, but especially in club activities, students are required to purchase equipment at their own expense, and it is necessary to replace them as children grow, so it may cause a financial burden to continue.

### Results of ESG Research Items

A concerning trend has emerged within the industry: many companies lack clear human rights policies. Even those with established policies often fail to disclose the results of their planned human rights due diligence, raising concerns about accountability and genuine commitment. The eagerness for sustainability disclosures tended to be lower than in other sectors researched in this study. However, some companies with a high proportion of overseas sales and some of the largest companies in the industry have developed human rights policies in recent years, which may accelerate their efforts in the future. ASICS and Mizuno have also expressed their support for Children's Rights in Sport Principles.

Because children use the products themselves, all companies have a place to hear children's opinions about the products directly.

### Positive impact on children's rights

#### **Support for children's exercise**

As a movement to promote children's exercise through the use of products, companies have taken steps to provide sports classes and exercise support programs for children. In a move to

promote healthier growth of children, Achilles is also implementing education on the correct use of products.

### **Access to sports equipment**

The high cost of sporting goods creates an uneven playing field, making it difficult for some children to access sports. There are examples of providing sports equipment to such children. ASICS provides products for orphans from the earthquake.

### Areas requiring further improvements

In the sports equipment sector, the lack of risk assessment and initiatives related to human rights and sustainability is still present. It is necessary to formulate human rights policies, conduct human rights due diligence, and promote the endorsement of Children's Rights in Sport Principles.

There are two roles for the sports equipment sector. The first is to promote efforts to prevent human rights violations in sports. Although consideration has been given to the development of safe products, it is possible that efforts to prevent human rights violations against children through sports can be further promoted. For example, government and sports organizations may work together to develop uniforms that are less likely to lead to sexual harassment and promote these initiatives as industry-wide issues related to sports.

The second point is support for creating an environment where all children can continue to exercise. In order to reduce the burden on the replacement of supplies necessary for the continuation of exercise and sports, we look forward to creating a system that makes it easier for all children who desire to continue exercise and sports by creating a system for trade-in, discount, sharing, reuse, and maintenance at the time of replacement. These efforts may also reduce environmental impact.

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## [REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT]

### Overview

The living environment is closely related to children's growth. There are various businesses related to the living environment, such as housing manufacturers. In this research, the real estate development sector was included in the research from the viewpoint of urban development and town planning.

Real estate developers are called "developers," and they mainly redevelop city blocks and develop commercial facilities and residences through land and building planning and development projects. The research included five major companies listed on the TSE Prime Market.

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| Mitsubishi Estate, Mitsui Fudosan, Nomura Fudosan, Sumitomo Fudosan, Tokyu Fudosan |
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### Relevance to children's rights

Children are included in the scope of development blocks, buildings, and services provided by them in real estate development projects and are involved as residents and visitors.



In recent years, to meet the needs of child-rearing households, the number of residences with childcare facilities, after-school facilities, parent-child cafes and child-rearing equipment sales functions has increased. These are directly connected to children's daily lives and familiar play spaces. In addition to a hygienic and safe environment, space for play and physical activity is essential for children's growth.

Consideration should also be given to the procurement of raw materials such as building materials in developing countries and child labor at construction sites in overseas projects.

### Results of ESG Research Items

In the real estate development business, block development is the main focus, and contact with children as service recipients is limited. As a result, children were not mentioned in the top messages of all companies.

Human rights policies, on the other hand, were developed by all companies and referenced to international standards, but only one company (Nomura Fudosan) referenced the "Rights of the Child and Business Principles."

Human rights due diligence was carried out by all companies, and relatively detailed reports were made. However, the topics mentioned were procurement of materials such as construction and "child labor" at construction sites, and there were no descriptions focusing on children as ordinary customers (residents and visitors).

There were no opportunities to hear children's views on management, to hear views on products and services, and to establish a consultation service or complaint handling system, since children were not the main target of the research.

The percentage of male employees taking parental leave was noted at four of the five companies and achieved a relatively high level of 70% or more at three companies.

### Positive impact on children's rights

#### **Improvement of Child Care Environment**

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of housing developments targeting child-rearing households, such as the establishment of child-rearing support facilities in residences and the provision of services that provide childcare and learning opportunities. Having a daycare center or school children close to home can reduce the burden of transportation in daily life for children. In addition, by reducing the burden on parents to pick up and drop off their children, it is expected that there will be more time to spare for children, such as listening to them enough and accompanying them to their play.

#### **Creation of a green environment**

More and more people are trying to create a green environment by planting trees around residences. In some suburban areas, many plants and trees are planted not only on the outer periphery of residences but also on the sides of courtyards and passageways. Many of them promote biodiversity conservation as a point of appeal, there is no doubt that it also improves the

quality of the environment for children's growth. With the addition of a playground function for children, it is expected that this function will contribute to the physical and mental health of children.

### **Books and toys in common areas**

The number of cases in which library spaces, playgrounds for children, and toy spaces are provided in common areas in residential buildings is increasing. In addition to securing a variety of opportunities for reading and playing, one of the factors we would like to focus on is the creation of an environment in which adult users are expected to watch children in a relaxed manner. Through these spaces, it is hoped that communication between residents will emerge, which will lead to building of community relationships necessary for the growth of children.

### Areas requiring further improvements

Real estate development has a significant influence not only on the overall character of a town and the living environment it offers, but also on the way children grow and experience their daily lives. For example, is there a situation where the "adult's" perspective is prioritized in the functioning of a city block, which is not good for children's development?

- The structure of the building makes it difficult for drivers to detect children jumping out and places where traffic accidents are likely to occur.
- As a result of being squeezed by business and commercial functions, it is unable to secure playground.
- Children's opportunities to experience nature suffer as urban development progresses.
- Over-emphasis on privacy, inducing and promoting child isolation.
- Entertainment functions such as entertainment and gambling are close to houses, reducing opportunities for outdoor play.

On the other hand, in addition to the above-mentioned aspects of negative checks, it seems possible to actively implement initiatives that have a positive impact on the child's growth environment. For example, as has been the case in some cases, to facilitate the creation of an environment in which children can be watched in the community, a community exchange function that makes it easy for non-residents to come and go as a common facility for residences is considered. Another idea is to take on area management functions, such as building spaces and structures that guide building residents to bring their children to the community without worry. There is still plenty of room to improve functions and services that make it easier for adults to keep an eye on children, rather than forcing residents' lives to be too closed to apartments for efficiency itself.

The aim of designing city blocks not for "child-rearing households" but for "children" is to be realized from the point of "children's rights and business." The time has come to appeal to community development that contributes to children's mental and physical health, motor skills, and non-cognitive abilities.

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## [COMMUNICATION]

### Overview

Today, information and communication devices such as smartphones, tablets and PCs are pervasive in people of all ages. In the past, it was mainly used as a means of communication for adults and as a tool for work, but with the promotion of the GIGA school concept, it has become an indispensable tool for children not only for entertainment but also for learning.

Companies involved in information and communications services range from manufacturers of terminal equipment to providers of content services. In this research, three major telecommunications companies that are also covered by the "The State of Children's Rights and Business 2023" are included.

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|---------------------|
| KDDI, NTT, SoftBank |
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### Relevance to children's rights

At present, when children are exposed to information and communication terminals and the Internet in the same way as adults, information and communication devices are used as effective tools for learning and other aspects. On the other hand, the number of cases of crimes using the Internet (inductions to fraudulent sites, troubles arising from dating sites, etc.), bullying on SNS, and charging for games, etc. is increasing, and there are many cases in which children are involved. Social networking sites and games are also one of the social issues surrounding children.

Unlike manufacturing, the telecommunications industry has a greater impact on children in terms of service delivery than risks such as child labor upstream in the value chain.

### Results of ESG Research Items

The industry-wide nature of telecom services, encompassing all ages, might explain the absence of child-focused language and explicit references in top management messages. However, this presents an opportunity for the industry to engage more effectively with younger users. All three companies have developed human rights policies, all three have conducted human rights due diligence, and SoftBank has disclosed the results.

In terms of efforts to secure communications, mainly through the Internet, the company actively disseminates information, but many of the issues are not specifically targeted to children because they are common to all ages. However, it can be said that it is working to prevent and mitigate criminal damage and troubles that may also be related to children's human rights through industry-specific methods, such as cooperation in information literacy education in schools, dissemination of educational materials, provision of courses on how to safely interact with smartphones and tablets, and establishment of an introduction page for children's helpline on Internet-related troubles.

Looking at the rate of men taking parental leave as an indicator of the child-rearing environment in the company, two companies accounted for more than 70% of the total and one company accounted for more than 100%, which is higher than the general figure.<sup>16</sup>In 2022, NTT established

a system that, in principle, eliminates the need for transfer or living away from home. It is thought that this will lead to consideration of family and child-rearing in terms of avoiding separation from family and living away from home for company reasons.<sup>17</sup>

#### Positive impact on children's rights

##### **Building a foundation for diverse online educational services**

The spread of tablet devices and high-quality communication environments may reduce educational disparities depending on the region and the environment in which they are located by enabling remote teaching.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic surged, SoftBank opened the Yahoo Japan Children's Home School, which provided free content for children to search for learning in a safe Internet environment, as well as distractions such as cooking, crafts, and exercise.<sup>18</sup> It can be said that it was an example of providing materials for a rich life including learning to children who could not go to school or go outside.

Although not provided by the companies included in this research, higher quality and lower cost of communications and advances in application development have also contributed to securing learning opportunities through distance learning. An application has been created for students who do not attend school or need Japanese language instruction to go to school in an avatar space to talk with friends or to consult with support staff. It has already been introduced in some municipalities and is helping to secure learning opportunities and places for children.<sup>19</sup>

##### **Reducing the burden on education and childcare workers**

The adoption of ICT in the field of education and childcare services can lead to a reduction in the workload of teachers and can contribute to improving the quality of education, such as increasing the amount of time teachers can spend facing children and increasing the amount of time they spend preparing for education.

#### Areas requiring further improvements

While technological advances are enriching children's learning and lives, bullying and criminal victimization on the Internet are on the rise, and measures to prevent victimization are needed.<sup>20</sup> According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology survey, more than 80% of schools said "Conducted educational activities to prevent and effectively address bullying through the Internet."<sup>21</sup> According to a survey by a private company, more than 70% of school boards have introduced paid filtering for tablets and other devices distributed in schools.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, telecommunications companies are disseminating knowledge about safe Internet use through the provision of educational materials and delivery classes, and are working to prevent bullying and crime.

While these measures are mainly aimed at disseminating knowledge and encouraging individuals to change their behavior, there have also been attempts to use advanced technology to deter bullying and crime. Addish's "School Guardian," for example, is a service that uses specialized tools

to identify problematic children's writing, inspects them by professional staff, and then reports them to schools.<sup>23</sup>In addition, major social media companies are developing mechanisms to delete or hide inappropriate posts if they are reported or independently detected. There are also anti-bullying apps that can be used anonymously, and several municipalities have already introduced them at school sites.<sup>24</sup>

In a broad sense, the development of communication technologies, including AI, raises various questions about the relationship between humans and technology itself. This includes what is the "best interest" of the child or what is the right to survival and development. The law and the development of operational policies by companies and educational institutions are currently in progress, but it is also necessary to discuss how to use and distance the children according to their age and developmental stage. The telecommunications industry is expected to continue to work with SNS and application development companies to ensure that technological changes do not adversely affect the universal rights of children.

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## [NURSERY SCHOOL]

### Overview

Nursery centers and certified children's nurseries have been established to ensure the healthy growth of children before they enter elementary school, to cultivate the foundations of their ability to live, and to secure the environment. As of April 2023, the number of children using nursery centers, etc. was more than 2.7 million.<sup>25</sup>Many preschool children use nursery centers,, and it can be said that this place is big in the aspect of the child's upbringing.

The operators of nursery centers include large and small companies operating nationwide, and include social welfare corporations and NPOs in addition to stock companies. Fie companies listed on the TSE Prime Market and Standard Market that are confirmed to be operating nursery centers are included.

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| Benesse Holdings, Global Kids COMPANY, JP Holdings, Poppins, Teno. Holdings |
|---|

### Relevance to children's rights

Nurseries are places that many children use and spend a lot of time during the day and have a great impact on children's development and learning. Nursing care and education are provided in a nursery school, and support for the preservation of the child's life, emotional stability, and growth of the child are basic. Therefore, it can be said that this sector is closely related to the four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, nursery centers are regarded as one of the places where children are raised soundly, and this has a great impact on "Right to life, survival and development." In addition, in view of the fact that it is a place where children spend their time and a place that is developed for them, the "best interests of children" are required. From this point of view, it can be said that it is strongly related to children's rights.

### Results of ESG Research Items

Nurseries are sectors that have direct contact with children, and four companies mentioned children in their top messages on their corporate websites.

Poppins and Benesse Holdings have developed and disclosed their human rights policies, and Global Kids Company refers to the human rights of children as a code of conduct. Even when risk assessments based on human rights policies were conducted, the focus was on human rights in employees and supply chains, and there was no comprehensive or child-specific review or disclosure of children's rights. Compared with companies that operate globally, companies that operate mainly in Japan are considered to be in the process of considering and disclosing human rights.

#### Positive impact on children's rights

##### **Vital environment for children to learn and grow.**

Nursery schools offer various measures to ensure safety and education as a place to cultivate the foundation of children's healthy growth and ability to live. In recent years, child-centered and child-centered childcare practices have advanced, and efforts have been made to respect the personality of each child and to support their upbringing through life and play according to each developmental stage. In addition to supporting the child's survival and development, this has led to more appropriate assistance for the individual child.

##### **Initiatives for children in addition to business activities**

Many companies practice activities that contribute to the development and growth of children outside of business activities. In addition to activities that contribute to learning such as environmental education, a wide range of initiatives are being undertaken, including activities that contribute to the safety and security of children, measures against child poverty, and research and information dissemination on child upbringing. Activities that contribute to the growth and development of children are being actively developed outside of childcare settings.

#### Areas requiring further improvements

A variety of initiatives that contribute to the upbringing of children have been implemented in the nursery school management sector, and their impact and contribution can be said to be significant. However, there are some challenges in examining and disclosing information in terms of its impact on children's rights.

Although children are the focus of the services provided, they are often not the focus of human rights disclosures. As a company that operates businesses in which children spend a lot of time and have a significant impact on their upbringing, it is necessary to consider more active efforts and dissemination of children's rights. It is a sector in which the voices of children are often heard directly, and it is expected to promote initiatives ahead of other sectors. In particular, we believe that there is ground for companies that operate childcare centers to take a lead in seeking the best interests of children by respecting their opinions and considering their individual rights. In reality,

it is considered that there are many operations that reflect the voices of children, and organizing and disclosing the contents can be one direction.

In addition, from the viewpoint of the rights of children, it is important that they be widely accepted equally regardless of disability, nationality, etc. The practice of inclusive childcare, which accepts all children regardless of their disabilities, is also progressing, but it is important to take a broader and more fulfilling approach. Consideration should also be given to the fact that an approved daycare center, etc. is not a direct contract with a user and does not allow a completely free choice. Further consideration should be given to the management of daycare centers, etc. and other forms of support for children in order to pursue equal and individual optima for children in the face of limited choices.

Furthermore, in order to protect the rights of children, due consideration must be given to the prevention of abuse. Although companies and local governments are already taking steps to address this issue, abuse, including sexual assault, and inappropriate childcare continue to occur in some areas. In March 2024, the Cabinet approved the "Japanese version of the DBS" bill, making the institutional position of protecting children from sexual harm more important than ever before. More in-depth measures and responses are also important in daycare centers, which are closely related to children's daily lives. In addition to examining and implementing sufficient mechanisms and measures at each company and nursery school, it is also expected that the entire industry will take measures such as publicizing efforts to the outside world.

While nurseries and other businesses are taking initial steps towards human rights initiatives, the significant impact these enterprises have on children necessitates a more proactive approach. We urge all businesses to actively engage in these crucial efforts.

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## [CRAM SCHOOL]

### Overview

In Japan, after school education, “cram school” account for about 70% of the learning expenses spent in households with children in public elementary and junior high schools.<sup>26</sup> Of these, supplementary study expenses (cram schools and personal tutors) are the largest, at 120,000 yen per year for elementary schools and 300,000 yen per year for junior high schools. It can be said that the existence of cram schools cannot be ignored in the daily learning environment of children.

The cram school sector includes major companies operating nationwide and private businesses. Major companies include educational institutions as well as joint-stock companies. Nine companies listed that are confirmed to operate cram schools are included.

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| Benesse Holdings, Gakken Holdings, Gakushuisha, Meiko Network Japan, Riso Education Group, Sprix, Step, Tokyo Institute of Individual Guidance, Waseda Academy |
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### Relevance to children's rights

Education is one of the essential elements for a child's "right to life, survival and development." For children, the provision of learning opportunities in addition to schooling has the advantage of complementing learning and offering poor choices.



On the other hand, in Japan, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly pointed out that "excessively competitive nature of education system" is a burden on children, and cram schools are a sector heavily involved in this. There are concerns about the psychological burden of competition, lack of exercise and opportunities for other experiences caused by spending too much time at cram schools during school holidays and long vacations, and lack of sleep due to homework. Recently, the younger age of entrance examinations has accelerated, especially in metropolitan areas, and there is also a negative side to the "right to life, survival and development" of growing children.

In addition, it has been pointed out that there is a gap in academic ability depending on whether children can attend cram schools, that is, the income of parents. Given the current educational system and social structure of Japan, disparities in academic achievement, such as those seen in exam scores, are likely to lead to income disparities later in life and into adulthood, and to intergenerational cycles of poverty.

#### Results of ESG Research Items

In the child-facing sector, only one company mentioned children in its top messages on its corporate website.

In terms of human rights policies and human rights due diligence, the companies are divided into two groups. Gakken Holdings and Benesse Holdings, which have human rights policies and disclose them, and seven others. However, even when risk assessments based on human rights policies were carried out, the focus was mainly on human rights in employees and supply chains, and no comprehensive consideration of children's rights was found.

The percentage of men taking parental leave ranged from no information to 51%. Many cram schools have pointed out long working hours and unpaid overtime, suggesting that employees' labor issues have become a priority in management.

#### Positive impact on children's rights

##### **Improvement of the learning environment for children**

In the cram school sector, there are many products and services that can be expected to make a positive difference and help children grow, such as learning content that can satisfy diversified intellectual curiosities, enrichment of learning environments using ICT, and learning support tailored to individual needs. Given the existing schooling system, there will be more options for children who can afford the cost.

##### **Dissemination of information on children's lives**

In addition, some companies have in-house research and research functions such as "Benesse Educational Research Institute" and "Gakken Educational Research Institute." They have conducted their own research on children's lives and learning (Living time, sleeping time, ICT utilization, etc.) and publicized the results, thereby contributing to fostering a social understanding of the current situation of children.

### Areas requiring further improvements

While there are positives, there does not seem to be enough perspective in the cram school sector that there could be a negative impact on children's rights.

If the cram school sector believes that there is "no" involvement in an "excessively competitive" educational environment in the industry as a whole or in individual companies, it underestimates the influence of its own business. They may think that they have no choice but to respond to the needs of the parents, their source of revenue, to raise better and better results at exams. However, it cannot be ruled out that the continuation of individual optima has led to the neglect of an "excessively competitive" educational environment.

In addition, due consideration must be given to the prevention of abuse. There are many cases of sexual assault and voyeurism by cram school instructors. The Japanese version of the DBS bill was approved by the Cabinet on March 19, 2024, and efforts to prevent sexual violence are expected to advance in the future. However, it is essential to share a fundamental understanding of respect for children's rights, rather than responding to the bill because it was institutionalized by law. Unlike nursery schools, local governments are less involved in cram schools, so it is important to take voluntary measures and measures regardless of the size of the establishment.

Human rights due diligence efforts are in progress in the cram school sector. It is essential to incorporate respect for human rights into concrete business processes, regardless of the size of the company or whether it is deployed nationwide.

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## **2-4 Respecting children's rights through employees**

This research has focused on the impact on children's rights through products and services, with the initial awareness that the role of companies in the Basic Act on Child is only through employment.

The point of contact between a company and its children is not something to be taken lightly. Therefore, among the ESG status of an organization, we have taken the percentage of men taking parental leave as an indicator of the relationship between a company, an employee and her/his child and looked at the characteristics by sector. This is because a wide range of companies are currently disclosing the percentage of men taking parental leave, and it can be used to estimate whether a company is more likely to allow children to spend time with their parents.

However, considering the respect for children's rights through employees in light of the four principles of children's rights, this will not be sufficient.

For example, we hope that the following initiatives and information disclosure will be promoted in the future.

- Reduction of working hours and working days: The role of childcare centers in society is changing from a place to "take care of children who lack childcare at home" to a role as a local child-rearing center regardless of the working status of parents. Efforts should be made in light of such changes in the external environment.

- Employees who can listen to children: In order to estimate "Are employees who raise children listening to their opinions?" it is necessary to understand the current situation of employees with children under the age of 18, as well as employees with children in infancy, taking leave and actually interacting with children.
- Taking up children's rights in internal human rights training, etc.: Only a limited number of companies seem to provide comprehensive internal education on children's rights. Child labor should not be singled out, but the various positions of children, such as those of customers, residents and employees as family members, should be considered.
- Employee support after the "first grade wall": Parents' concerns about education and life diversify as their children grow up. In terms of child-rearing support measures, although it is generally considered that once the barriers of infancy and first grade can be broken through, efforts can be made to encourage lateral connections between employees who raise teenage children and make it easier to obtain professional advice.
- Linking employee policies with product and service development: Some of the companies included in this study also linked their internal D & I policies with product development for children. By linking efforts through products and services with internal efforts, there is a possibility that employees who are raising children and those who are not raising children will be able to interact with each other.

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## 2-5 Climate action and respect for children's rights

In this research, we used as a guideline whether the level of greenhouse gas reduction targets set by companies is scientifically recognized as a measure of their environmental awareness.

In the sectors researched, all the companies were certified in pharmaceuticals. The number of certified companies is growing, particularly among large companies in the sanitary products and food sectors. Contrary, in the service sector, which has many smaller companies (Nursery schools and cram schools), only one company was certified.

The major impacts on greenhouse gas emissions are in industries such as electricity, oil, steel and chemicals, which are not covered in this study. In addition to climate change, other environmental issues are extremely important for future generations of children, including biodiversity conservation. We need to develop further research frameworks in relation to climate change and children's rights, as well as biodiversity and children's rights.

## CONCLUSION

Under the umbrella of initiative concept, JRI launched a project called "Children's Commission Initiative" to increase recognition of children's rights among stakeholders, focusing on understanding how businesses can respect children's rights. We started by looking at eight different types of products and services.

Through our research, we identified activities in many companies that we hope will lead to positive impacts on children. However, the company's awareness of the path to children's rights still requires further understanding. Thus, efforts to minimize negative impacts while increasing positive impacts on children's rights through business are called for. The first step in implementing this approach may be to explicitly include children in the process of human rights due diligence. It is also important for top management to recognize children as stakeholders for them to conduct business.

As a guideline for corporate activities, there are leading initiatives such as the Children's Rights and Business Principles. Using such principles, it is necessary to clarify what are the business processes that respect children's rights and what are the areas requiring further improvement as practical and concrete actions have not yet been demonstrated for Japanese companies.

It is possible that various sectors can work together to promote business development while respecting children's rights. For example, when considering the field of children's sports, there is a great deal of involvement not only with the sport equipment sector, but also with the food or pharmaceutical sectors for their nutrition and health, and with the real estate development sector, which creates a field for children to exercise. We hope that such cross-sector cooperation will advance both in terms of respect for human rights and business.

Moving forward, the Children's Commission Initiative will prioritize:

- Expanding the scope of ESG for Children Research
- Clarifying business processes that respect children's rights
- Reviewing existing regional and national systems for independent monitoring of children's rights
- Promoting appreciation, exchange of opinions, and support for policy review by domestic ministries and municipalities

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