



Examples of the English version of project cards actually used in the game. Each project card specifies the required costs, the resulting benefits, and the eventual global impact of that proposal.

## Playing for Our Global Future

How a Tokyo-born card game is spreading the message of sustainability worldwide.

by **Phoebe Amoroso**

On October 24, 2020, Tokyo Skytree was illuminated a startling red. Then it turned a deep gold, followed by vibrant green. The light-up progressed through 17 different colors, each representing one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of a five-day commemoration for the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations.

The SDGs are 17 goals agreed upon by world leaders in 2015 in order to create a better, fairer world by 2030—ending poverty, addressing climate change, and abolishing inequality. Given their ambitious scope and the complexity of the global situation, it is hard to imagine how all of these could be condensed into a game, let alone an educa-

tional one. Yet that is exactly what Tokyo-born company Imacocollabo has impressively achieved with their card-based 2030 SDGs Game. Multiplayer and highly interactive, it has reached businesses, schools, and organizations around the world and continues to grow in popularity.

Imacocollabo co-founder Inamura Takeo has always had an interest in environmental issues. While working on creating innovative talent development methods, he encountered business simulation games and realized their potential for positive impact. An idea began to form as he contemplated a way to spread the message of sustainability further.

Collaborating with a genius board game developer,



the card game 2030 SDGs Game was born in a mere two days. For Inamura, it was important that the game be fun to play so that even those with no interest in SDGs would be able to enjoy and take away some key ideas. Over 200,000 people from 20 countries have played in just 4 years—figures that can attest to its success.

The premise is surprisingly simple. Players receive one of five goal cards: “Acquiring wealth,” “Enjoying leisure,” “A world without poverty,” “Environmental conservation,” and “Social justice.” Each of these goals has specific criteria that must be met. Players race to carry out projects, each requiring varying amounts of time and money, through which they might earn more time, money, and “project cards” and also “principle cards,” which help players with value-based goals.

Just like the real world, all of these actions have an impact. On a white board with color-coded magnets, the World Meter tracks the status of the global economy, environment, and society. “Build Transportation Infrastructure” by spending 500 Money cards and 3 Time cards, and you will contribute +1 to the global economy and earn back 1,000 Money cards—quite a profit! Yet this is not without consequences—the global environment will take a -1 hit.

The genius of the game lies in how it influences participants’ awareness, choices, and behavior through gameplay and thereafter. Seemingly straightforward transactions quickly turn into savvy and often socially-minded strategizing. From rushing to achieve individual goals, players begin to realize the need for a broader global perspective alongside collaboration, negotiation, and cooperation so that more goals are achieved among the wider group. As a result, by the time the game wraps up, all kinds of trades, deals, and good deeds might have taken place.

Game-play transactions are underwritten by conditions and dilemmas that closely simulate the real world. For example, participants with environmental or social goal cards quickly realize they cannot act without funds. Ironically, some may initially have to undertake profitable projects that are actively detrimental to their end goals. This kind of realism is unflinching yet thought-provoking.

The post-game discussion reiterates our global interconnectedness and the potential butterfly effect of our seemingly small decisions. To make this point even more relevant, players are confronted with the statement—candy causes climate change—and asked to think how and why, and what they can do themselves. Through this, each participant leaves with a sense of responsibility, self-awareness, and self-efficacy.

With over 850 facilitators in Japan and 90 overseas, versions in eight (soon to be nine) languages, and due to be available online in spring 2021, the game is delivering the core messages of the SDGs across borders far and wide. Although we may be racing against time to reach sustainability, it shows us that, both individually and collectively, we all have the power to effectuate meaningful change.

