

Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program

Case Study Database

A compilation of good practices and lessons learned to
bring innovative subnational solutions to global problems



Introduction

In COP10, held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan, Parties reviewed and updated the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and included the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which set out 20 biodiversity targets to be met between 2011 and 2020.

For their successful implementation, there is a strong need to have the involvement of a large range of stakeholders, including the private sector. Businesses and companies have a key role in protecting biodiversity and achieving sustainable development, through the adoption of active measures for the sustainable use and promotion of the conservation of biodiversity.

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Project Summary

The “Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program” has the objective of certifying companies that have implemented excellent initiatives related to biodiversity and environmental protection.

It aims to encourage companies that have taken active efforts in biodiversity conservation and to promote further efforts from these and other companies that can be influenced by these activities.

The project counts with a guideline and an evaluation system, which can also be used as indicators and recommendations for companies that want to start taking initiatives in this regard.

Key Information

Location

Aichi, Japan

Areas of focus

Sustainable production, natural conservation, mainstreaming biodiversity and governance

Founded in

2022

Investment

8,400 US dollars per year

Aichi Biodiversity Targets addressed

Strategic goals A, B, C and D

Sustainable Development Goals addressed

SDGs 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17



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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

About Aichi

Aichi Prefecture is a major metropolitan area in Japan with a population of 7.5 million as well as home to Japan's greatest concentration of industries. With its abundant water resources, Aichi is also one of Japan's leading agricultural prefectures. The warm climate and the diverse and abundant natural assets from mountains, rivers, seas, and villages also nurture the lives of many living beings. Members of the community have inherited and continue to develop lifestyles, economy, culture, and traditions in the prefecture.

Basic Data of Aichi

- **Population: Approx. 7.5 million people**
- **Area: 5,163km²**
- **GDP: Approx. 40,937.2 billion yen (as of 2018)**
- **Major industries: Automobiles and aircraft**
- **Natural preservation areas: Approx. 17.2% of the prefecture's land area**
- **Flora and fauna: 16,180 species**

Regulations on large-scale development

In order to prevent natural environment destruction by large-scale development, Aichi Prefectural Government established the "Large-Scale Development Notification System" by ordinance in 1973. This regulation requires prior notification to be submitted by developers of residential land development or land reclamation exceeding one hectare in areas not regulated by law. It also requires a certain amount of green space to be secured within the development site.

Furthermore, upon the notification, the prefectural government may give concrete suggestions to developers based on the Guidelines for Conservation and Restoration of the Natural Environment (formulated in 2013) so that they can take preferable effective measures to enhance the quality of green spaces such as planting of local native species and shaping of reservoir revetments in consideration of nature. Developers have been encouraged to understand the importance of, not only minimizing the negative impact on the natural environment, but also enhancing the green quality. In many cases, development projects have reflected to a certain extent the suggestions by the prefectural government. Between 2013 and 2022, 210 out of 315 projects reflected these suggestions.



Conservation activities through collaboration among various stakeholders based on the regional strategy

In order to contribute to the achievement of the “Aichi Targets” adopted at COP10 in 2010, Aichi Prefectural Government has formulated a regional biodiversity strategy aiming for “Aichi where people and nature coexist.”

As one of the key initiatives based on the strategy, “Ecosystem Network Councils” have been established in 9 regions in the prefecture, consisting of diverse members such as companies, universities, non-profit organizations, and municipalities (as of August 2022, 298 members in total. These include 82 companies, 48 academic groups, 98 non-profit organizations and 70 local governments). In response to local conditions and challenges, those councils have been promoting various initiatives such as planting local native species, exterminating alien species, and holding observation meetings and enlightenment forums.

In addition, the prefecture has also been working to match non-profit organizations that need manpower and funding for conservation activities with companies that need conservation know-how and opportunities to contribute to the community (number of successful matching cases since 2018: 12).

In this context, companies have been playing major roles in these activities, such as creating biotopes at company premises, providing seedlings, and having employees participate in tree planting activities. The council activities and the matching have been contributing to the progress of the conservation and restoration of local ecosystems, and have been stimulating corporate conservation activities.



KEY ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIONS

Overview of a new program to mainstream biodiversity within companies

In April 2022, the Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program was launched to certify companies that have implemented excellent initiatives. This aims to further encourage companies to be engaged in biodiversity conservation and to further enhance conservation activities by leveraging the thriving industry which, as mentioned in the background, is the strength of Aichi Prefecture, where many companies are located. The program has been designed as one of the key programs of the newly revised LBSAP “Biodiversity Strategy in Aichi 2030” conducted by the Natural Environment Division of the Bureau of the Environment, Aichi Prefectural Government. While there already exist some certification programs by Aichi Prefectural Government to encourage companies such as parenting support and gender equality, this is the first certification program in Aichi focused on biodiversity.

To be certified, a company is required to meet the criteria that include setting policies and targets related to biodiversity conservation and implementing activities such as biotope maintenance, tree planting, conservation of rare species, and extermination of alien species. The evaluation items (See the table below) are set based on the “actions expected of companies” that is stipulated in the regional strategy.

TABLE. OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION ITEMS

Major item	Overview
Organizational policies and systems	Evaluation of the status of formulating policies/targets and action plans related to biodiversity conservation, as well as human resource development.
Activities to protect the diverse ecosystem	Evaluation of activities such as conservation of rare species, extermination of alien species, and environment-conscious management for a decarbonized and circulatory society.
Connecting Habitats and Breeding Spaces	Evaluation of green corridor formation (tree planting & biotope maintenance), collaboration with stakeholders and reflection of expert opinions.
Use Biological Resources	Evaluation of technologies and manufacturing that reduce environmental impact in the supply chain or take advantage of biological functions.
Expand Coexistence of Humans and Nature	Evaluation of activities including awareness-raising and participation in the initiatives such as Ecosystem Network Council.

Certified companies can use the logo (Figure), according to their certified categories, on their business cards and company brochures. In addition, the names of certified companies and their efforts are showcased on the prefectural website. These are considered to increase the value of the companies.

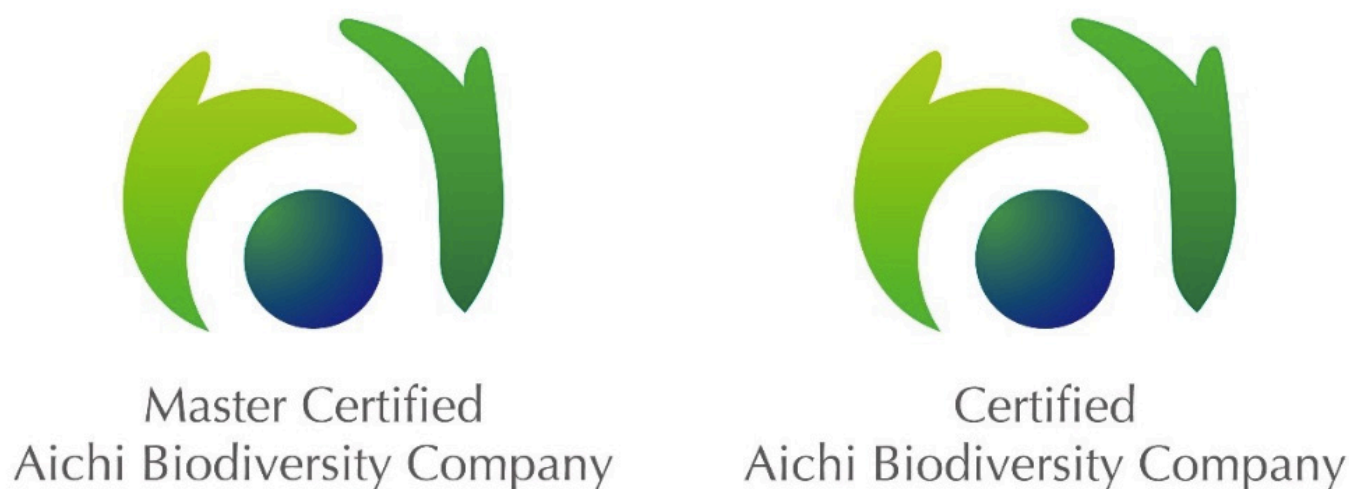


FIGURE. LOGOS OF THE CERTIFIED AICHI BIODIVERSITY COMPANY. ENGLISH VERSION.

The left logo is for the Master Certified Companies, while the right one is for the Certified Companies.

The mark depicts a pair of hands gently embracing the blue earth that shines with life. The two figures, which look like two hands, represent life, such as plants and animals. It represents the initial “a” of “Aichi” between the hand and the earth, expressing that Aichi’s efforts are globally connected. The gradation from green to blue represents water, greenery, and the sky that nurture diverse ecosystems, and expresses the hope that the awareness of protecting and nurturing biodiversity will grow into the future.

The designer of this logo is Mr. Akio Ogawa, who designed the symbol mark of the COP10 Support Executive Committee.

The process of the certification

Companies with headquarters or business offices or factories in Aichi Prefecture are eligible to apply for this program. Those who wish to be certified should check if they are making efforts that meet each of the items listed in the check sheet of the application form and apply with supporting materials of proof.

There are two categories of certification, and applicant companies can only apply for one of them. The criteria of “Master” Certified Companies with better initiatives require deeper, more extensive, or more frequent implementation of the actions indicated in each item.

The review process includes two stages: application review by relevant officials and a panel of experts, and it takes about two months for a series of reviews. In the document review, conformity with the criteria is reviewed, and if each item is cleared, points will be added. Total points required to be certified and items differ depending on the category. If applicants are able to obtain certification standards or higher, they will be certified after approval by a panel of experts.

The certification shall be valid until the end of March after five years have passed from the date of certification. Each certified company is required to report to the Governor every year about the status of its initiatives implemented with respect to the certification criteria.

When a certified company wishes to continue to be certified after the expiration of the validity period, the company needs to complete the renewal application procedures before the expiration of the validity period.





ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS •

The Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program is expected to be a great encouragement to companies that have been implementing excellent efforts to date, and to encourage them to further enhance their efforts. It is also expected that excellent initiatives will be replicable for other companies, not only in the prefecture, but also nationwide and worldwide through their business activities, amplifying the wave of mainstreaming biodiversity. For companies that have not yet started initiatives or do not know what to take, the criteria of the program will serve as milestones for their efforts.

The program also aims to encourage more companies to take actions that contribute to biodiversity conservation by showcasing good practices of certified companies, because it is easier for beginners to follow and learn from forerunners. The expectation is that several dozens of companies become newly certified each year. While there is no current envisioning of measuring the direct environmental impact of this program.

In FY2022, the first year of the program, Aichi Prefectural Government certified 40 companies, ranging from large

corporations to small and medium-sized enterprises in a wide range of business fields, including manufacturing, construction, energy, and finance.

Prominent among the efforts of the certified 40 companies are activities in terms of social responsibilities such as extermination of invasive alien species, conservation of rare species, formation of green corridors, and communication to raise public awareness. Most of those activities are conducted under the guidance of experts and in collaboration with various stakeholders such as local community groups, non-profit organizations, and other companies. All 15 of the Master Certified Companies have made those efforts.

On the other hand, some areas have been found where further progress could be made. Not many companies have yet set clear targets for their current conservation activities over the next five years. As for sustainable use of biodiversity in their major business activities, it seems there is more room to be improved by business activities in the supply chain and at the development and production stages to reduce negative impact and to bring positive impact.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

As mentioned above, the “Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program” is expected to increase the value of companies that have implemented excellent initiatives, and to bring an increase in the number of companies highly committed to biodiversity conservation in the prefecture.

Certified companies are expected to be recognized as proactive in biodiversity conservation and to attract investment more easily. In addition, it is expected that the increase in the number of such companies in the prefecture will accelerate the trend toward mainstreaming biodiversity.

POLICY IMPACTS

Aichi Prefectural Government has designed the Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program based on the accumulated experiences and lessons through past and existing policies.

The above-described Large-Scale Development Notification System, one of the regulation policies in Aichi, requires as minimum and mandatory for companies to conserve the natural environment, which may reduce environmental destruction to some extent but may not be able to prevent it. Suggestions made by the Guidelines for Conservation and Restoration of the Natural Environment are not mandatory for companies and not accompanied by any incentives, and thus the result may heavily depend on companies’ attitude and voluntary actions. The Ecosystem Network Councils and the matching program may encourage and support companies, but do not have an official framework that acknowledge and praise their voluntary efforts. Thus, a need has arisen to launch a new program to certify companies for mainstreaming biodiversity and bringing transformative change.

Since the Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program is thought to be effective to raise corporate awareness of environmental conservation, it is expected that in the near future, companies in Aichi may play an even more active role in local environmental conservation such as suggesting various environmental measures. In the long run, excellent initiatives by Aichi companies may cross boundaries, attract investment and be replicated globally through their business activities, leading to a significant shift away from ‘business as usual.’ 925 of the companies in Aichi have a total of 4,261 hubs in 87 countries around the world.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY — PARTNERSHIPS

The Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program is identified as one of the key projects of the current biodiversity strategy of Aichi, and will be continued next year and after.

The half of the financial source is a grant from the national government which can be allocated to the expenses required for the implementation of voluntary, independent, and pioneering projects by subnational and local governments. The remaining half will be covered by the prefecture. The total budget for FY 2022 (regular period) is about 1.24 million yen (around 8,400 US dollars) and the expectation is to be able to secure the similar amount for FY2023, while the budget for FY 2021 (the start-up period when the program was designed) was approximately 4.87 million (around 33,200 US dollars).

Although the “Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program” targets only private companies, its criteria emphasize on their cooperation with various stakeholders such as local communities, non-profit organizations, and experts.

Companies are often engaged in business activities that take advantage of the unique natural blessings from the region. This is why companies, as key members of the local communities, are expected to work in collaboration with various actors in the community and to actively take on the responsibility of conserving the local nature.



REPLICATION AND APPLICABILITY

The “Aichi Biodiversity Company Certification Program” can be replicable in many subnational, regional, and local governments seeking to mainstream biodiversity in private sectors. In the case of the Aichi Prefecture, some relevant factors that have enabled this project to be successfully launched and expected to be continued and developed could be:

- Having previously established participatory councils that are committed to promoting activities and initiatives to protect the environment, with the participation of companies working together with non-profit organizations in conservation activities. As explained in the context section, these councils have stimulated corporate conservation activities
- Promoting partnerships between companies and other actors in the community
- Having an official description in LBSAP, which made it easier to get funding and launch this kind of program
- Creating an evaluation system for the accurate identification and recognition of companies’ conservation efforts as well as specific criteria which also work as a guideline
- Creating a yearly-reporting system to make sure the companies’ initiatives are sustained throughout the certification validity period

These conditions should be considered for the project’s replication. However, it is important to note that they need to be adapted to the specific regional characteristics.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this project, please visit
<https://www.pref.aichi.jp/soshiki/shizen/biodiversity-certification.html>

You can also contact us at info@regions4.org to set up an informative meeting, solve doubts and get support in implementing similar projects.



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RegionsWithNature

ABOUT

Regions4 (formerly known as the nrg4SD) is a global network that solely represents regional governments (states, regions and provinces) before UN processes, European Union initiatives and global discussions in the fields of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents over 40 members from 20 countries in 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation and capacity building, Regions4 empowers regional governments to accelerate global action.

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