

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted routine immunization, leading to a sharp increase in the number of zero-dose children worldwide. In response, international organizations launched “The Big Catch-Up” initiative, calling for accelerated global action. Japan has contributed through UNICEF and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), yet public awareness remains low, especially among younger generations. To address this gap, a group of medical students took action, receiving support from the Gates Foundation to expand their activities. In consequence, NGO Reaching Zero-Dose Children was established in 2025, centered on research and advocacy aiming to create a world where every child has equal access to vaccines and primary healthcare.

## Activities

### ① Research

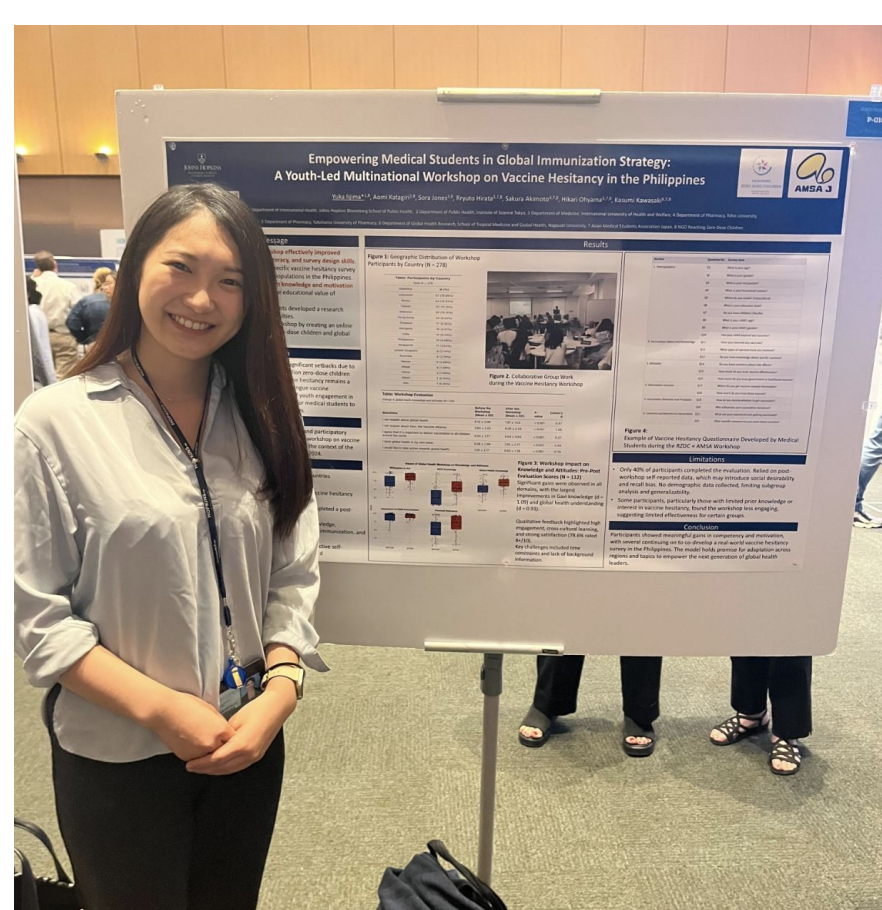
We conducted a survey of 88 Japanese medical students and presented the findings at international academic events, while also launching collaborative research with partners in the Philippines. In 2024, we organized a workshop at an international conference with about 140 participants from 17 countries, and measured its educational impact through pre- and post-evaluations.



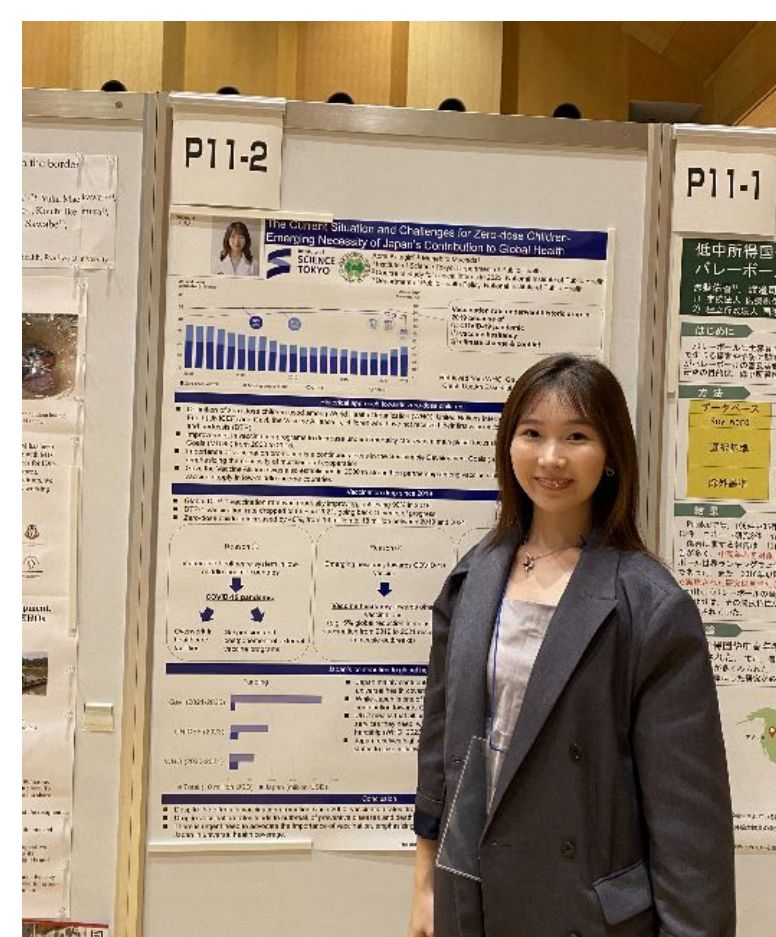
Workshop at an international conference



Reporting educational impact at a global academic forum

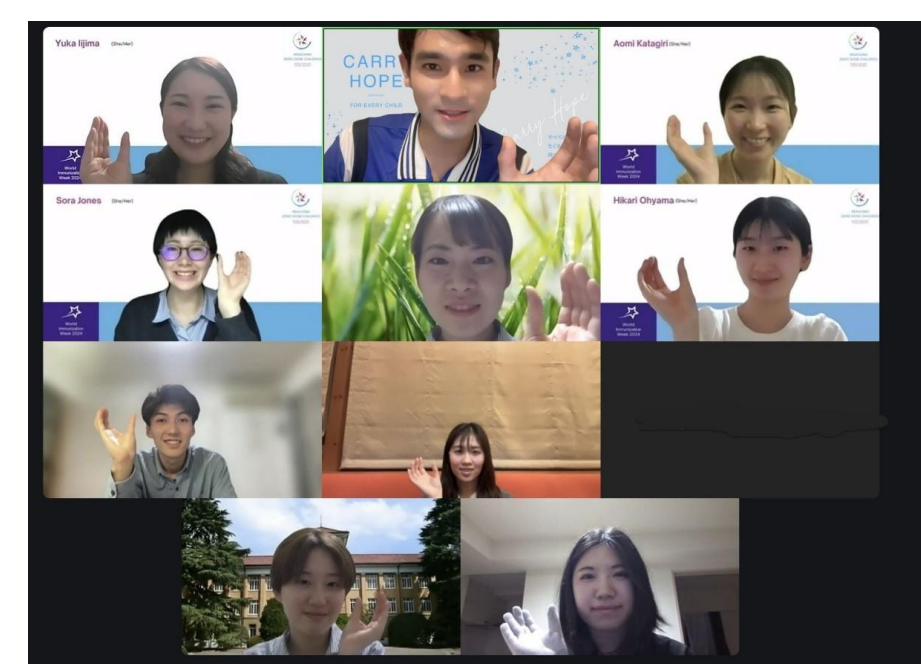


Our surveys and commentary publications form the basis of our policy recommendations and is shared through journal articles and international conferences.



### ② Advocacy

We built networks with over 20 diet members, government officials, and cross-sector experts, directly raising awareness of zero-dose issues. Using data from our research and insights from field visits, we developed evidence-based policy recommendations.



Co-hosting a Youth Forum during World Immunization Week



Policy dialogue with diet members



Policy pitch on sustaining support for Gavi



Meeting with Gavi representatives



Field visits in Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, and India



Events for civic engagement

## Outcomes

Our survey revealed that while Japanese medical students were highly familiar with UNICEF, awareness of Gavi and zero-dose children was significantly low. At the same time, more than 70% recognized the importance of Japan’s role in global health, and 65% expressed support for politicians prioritizing international health, demonstrating strong latent interest. At our international workshop, participants showed statistically significant gains in both understanding of Gavi and motivation to take action, with some even initiating joint field studies. These activities are believed to have positively contributed to Japan’s advocacy success toward its 2025 pledge to Gavi 6.0.

## Conclusion

This initiative revealed that while Japanese youth show strong latent interest in global health, their recognition of specific issues remains limited. By grounding advocacy in evidence generated through education and research, we demonstrated that this approach is effective in raising awareness and influencing policy. Amid cautious financial commitments to international cooperation in the U.S. and Europe, Japan continues to provide stable support to Gavi, underscoring its leadership in global health. Youth-led international collaboration not only offers a practical model for addressing the zero-dose challenge but also strengthens Japan’s global presence. Moving forward, NGO Reaching Zero-Dose Children will continue to deepen the cycle of research and advocacy, contributing to the realization of international agendas such as “The Big Catch-Up” initiative and Immunization Agenda 2030.