

**Research, Analysis and Network Development to  
Sustain Businesses of Rural Women Entrepreneurs:  
from North Kyushu to Asia**

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## **Summary**

Women in Japan often face much difficulty in continuing their work, particularly after having a family. On the other hand, more women are starting up their own business in order to create a workplace where they can keep on working. This research analysis focuses on the empowerment required to sustain business in the case of rural female entrepreneurs.

First, we interviewed four established female entrepreneurs in north Kyushu area, to find out the key points in sustaining their business in agriculture. From these thorough interviews, we made a questionnaire to investigate what kind of support is actually required for the female entrepreneurs in agriculture. Second, we conducted a questionnaire directed to female entrepreneurs nationwide, mainly in agriculture, to find out the factors that make it difficult for them to maintain their business. Data from Rural Women Empowerment and Life Improvement Association (2007) *National Map of 400 Selected Female Entrepreneurs in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery* was used, and out of 423 questionnaires mailed, response rate was approximately 40%.

Third, we analyzed the accrued data statistically to find out the tasks of female entrepreneurs in agriculture to verify the ways to help them. From the statistical analysis, we found out that those female entrepreneurs in agriculture analyzed have priority for 'communication with customers' and 'smiling staff', rather than 'rate of return'. They can be clustered into two groups, one of which have 80% responses with strong correlation with 'smiling staff', 'smiling family', 'communication with customers' and 'less chemicals', the other group with 'rate of return', 'return to investors', 'administrative support' and 'low price'.

It was also quite clear that there was no correlation between 'sales volume' and

'satisfaction from business aim'. These are the characteristics of Social Entrepreneurs, and we can say that through our statistical analysis, it is confirmed that female entrepreneurs in agriculture operate Social Enterprises, that put priority in their contribution for the society rather than the rate of return.

Fourth, we constructed a homepage to carry useful information for female rural entrepreneurs, in order to help them sustain their business, and to develop it as a prototype to share useful information among them. At the same time, these female entrepreneurs can make regional communities through the website and help each other or merge their businesses. In the rural areas where it is difficult to find people with similar entrepreneurship and objectives, such website will support creating networks, thereby decreasing shut downs, and will lead to opportunities of business development.

These female entrepreneurs in agriculture have the characteristics of Social Entrepreneurs, as confirmed by the statistical analysis. In the interview held in Fukuoka Prefecture, one established female entrepreneur clearly said that she is not after sales volume, but she wants people to know that agriculture is important for everyone, and that's why she is supporting hard working female farmers making good quality products.

What we have constructed through our research analysis is a homepage that can be used as a tool to learn efficient ways of doing business, and also to meet similar female entrepreneurs in agriculture with whom they can exchange ideas or cooperate to develop business. This is a prototype of networking tool not only for female entrepreneurs in developed countries including Japan, but also for the developing regions around the world.