

Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women

“Eat the Earth, Eat on the Earth”

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) held the 19th Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women on November 15 and 16 2008 at the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE under the theme “Eat the Earth, Eat on the Earth.”

 <p>Program</p>	<p>November 13:15–14:45 Panel Discussion “Eat the Earth, Eat on the Earth”</p>
	<p>November 15 (Sat.) 15:00–17:00 Workshops & The Japan-Korea International Seminar Workshops from the Gender Perspective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 “Food Today and Our Future” 2 “Power to Recover ‘Our Food’: How to Overcome Food Imbalances” 3 “Flying Foods” <p>The Japan-Korea International Seminar “Female International Migrants’ Current Status of Cultural Conflicts and Health Problems in Japan and ROK”</p>
	<p>November 10:00–12:00 International Symposium</p>
	<p>November 16 (Sun.) 13:00–16:00 “Families Now in East Asia: Work, Marriage, Child Care, and Care for the Elderly” Reports on KFAW Research Activities</p>

■ Panel Discussion “Eat the Earth, Eat on the Earth”

● Coordinator

Etsuko KITA

President, The Japanese Red Cross Kyushu International College of Nursing

Advisor, Japan Association for the United Nations World Food Programme

● Panelists

Ramesh JAIN

Former Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Sachiko TABARA

President, Green Co-op Fukuoka

Mihee HONG

Director, Incheon Gender Policy Center

Japanese consumers have become seriously concerned about the quality of the food they eat because of many recent problems related to food safety, including pesticide residues, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), deceptive labeling of food origins, and chemical contamination. As well, people in developing countries have long been suffering from the spread of serious famines, indicating that imbalances in global food resources persist.



▲Panelists

At the panel discussion with Etsuko Kita as the coordinator, three panelists gave presentations from gender-sensitive perspectives. The panelists discussed recent problems related to the safety of daily foods and the worsening imbalances in global food resources.

First, Sachiko Tabara explained the commitments of her organization, Green Co-op Fukuoka.

As part of Green Co-op’s commitment to providing safer food items, we place the utmost priority on mothers’ perspectives. After giving birth to my own child, I truly realized that children grow by eating food. Indeed, it is food that builds our bodies and nourishes our lives.

However, since the period of high economic growth in Japan from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s, people have placed high priority on economic efficiency. As for food, people place higher priority on ease of cooking, convenience, long durability, and low prices. As a result, food is being mass-produced and mass consumed. Yet, at our Green Co-op, we are committed to the “Safe-Food Campaign for Bringing Up Our Lives,” an activity to develop food items that truly nourish our bodies. In this project, we are developing wholesome, healthy foods through discussions with producers: vegetables grown without using or with limited use of pesticides, livestock raised with natural feed in a favorable breeding environment, and food items processed without using or with controlled use of additives.

In this project, we are also committed to realizing North-South coexistence. Some 20 years ago, we learned that a famine on Negros Island in the Philippines was related to the “gourmet boom” in Japan. We realized that under the present economic system, people living in the North are exploiting people in the South, degrading their natural environment, affecting their livelihoods and even depriving them of their very lives. To help the Negros islanders suffering from the famine, we commenced

importing Balangon bananas, a kind of banana that satisfies the Japanese palate but is seldom eaten by the islanders themselves. In farming villages on Negros Island, women began shipping Balangon bananas. Together with young islanders, the women played leading roles in developing their communities. Currently, in collaboration with the islanders, we are working to create various other job opportunities for local people too, including the processing of agricultural products other than bananas.

Next, Ramesh Jain gave a presentation about problems of agricultural resources from gender-sensitive perspectives.

Food security has become an increasingly serious problem due to global environmental degradation, world economic problems, and many other factors. In this environment, the key to food security is increasing domestic food production.

Women play essential roles in increasing food production since women produce about half the global agricultural output. Women's contribution is particularly high in Africa, where at least 80% of food output is produced by women. Despite these facts, women's roles are usually underestimated or even ignored. As a result, women comprise 70% of the poor population in farming villages. Even in agricultural countries, only 4% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to the agricultural sector. Of the fraction allocated to this sector, only 10% or less is allocated to gender-sensitive projects.

Ignoring women's contributions incurs considerable costs. In Burkina Faso, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, for instance, agricultural output is predicted to grow by 10 to 20% if men and women equally share agricultural resources, such as farmlands and fertilizers. In Honduras, Nepal, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia, agricultural productivity and farmers' incomes are estimated to increase sharply only if women are involved in the development and field tests of new agricultural technologies (diversification of crop varieties, development of small cultivators and other agricultural machines, etc.) By helping women engaged in agriculture maximize their potential, we can increase food production. This in turn will enhance food security, and what's more, will benefit women in the agricultural sector.

A major program currently implemented in India empowers women in the agricultural sector, thereby enhancing women's social status. One of the targets of this program is to allow women to gain the right to assets and property, such as farmlands, which had been dominated by men until recently. Unless women can control assets equally with men, women's labor will not bear fruit. As a result of the program, the land registration system has changed to allow both husband and wife to register as landowners, while in the past only men were registered as farmland owners.

Although it will take a little more time before we can confirm the actual results of this change, I believe that achieving gender equality in the agricultural sector will be effective not only in raising agricultural productivity, but also in overcoming the poverty of women in farming villages.

Following Jain, Mihee Hong gave a presentation about food and gender issues in the Republic of Korea.

Few politicians of the Republic of Korea paid attention to food problems during the 1980s. In 1989, a private organization called Minuhwe established a Coop as a way to organize housewives, whom the organization considered as potential players essential for reflecting people's daily concerns in policymaking. As a consumers' community, the Coop began purchasing green products and wholesome foods. At the same time, the Coop also provided housewives with opportunities to discuss various problems related to their daily lives and to seek solutions.

During the 1990s, famines in North Korea became a serious problem for the divided nation. Despite the detente on the Korean Peninsula, it has not been easy for South Korean NGOs to help people in North Korea who are suffering from hunger. Whereas politicians were concerned about national security, from a mother's standpoint women's groups advocated saving starving children, regardless of differences in ideology.

In the Republic of Korea, another food-related problem that triggered nationwide debate was the import of American beef. In fear of BSE, Candle demonstrations against importing American beef were held from May to August 2008. Among the leading participants of these quiet demonstrations were mothers who joined the event by pushing baby carriages. These mothers, the majority of whom had never joined a demonstration before, decided to rise together by communicating via the Internet, in order to protect their families from the risk of BSE.

It has not been easy, however, protecting families from contaminated foods and securing food safety only through such grassroots women's activities because nowadays foods are supplied through global networks. To enhance food safety, it is vitally important to build a global network under which people from different countries can discuss and act together in order to influence various national governments, international organizations, and NGOs.

Finally, as the coordinator of the panel discussion, Kita summarized the discussions in the following statement: "In discussions about food safety, securing sufficient volumes of food is an important issue. In this respect, although situations differ greatly between advanced and developing countries, we must be aware that famines are tormenting people on the planet. We must also recognize the ongoing food safety problem. Although this problem appears to be less dramatic

than armed conflicts or natural catastrophes, and therefore less noticeable, the food safety problem is expanding slowly and quietly. Many people are unlikely to recognize the magnitude of the problem until it becomes irreparable. Yet, it is imperative that we address the problem at this moment, because it affects the next generation and injures their reproductive health. In this respect, we should reconsider even more seriously women's roles, since women are essentially responsible for the reproduction of the entire human race. We must also think more seriously about food businesses and ways to ensure their continuous and appropriate operation. Food safety is such a critical issue that we should do something more than simply demand related enterprises to fulfill their responsibilities."



▲Etsuko Kita

■ Workshops from the Gender Perspective

Following the panel discussion, workshops were held to further discuss food-related problems from various viewpoints.

■ 1 "Food Today and Our Future"

● Facilitators

Mayumi YONEMITSU

Nursing Teacher, Nishinippon Institute of Technology

Member of Kanda-machi Council for Gender Equality

Sachi ONO

Senior, Faculty of Engineering, Nishinippon Institute of Technology

Asuka SHIKAI

Junior, Faculty of Engineering, Nishinippon Institute of Technology

Ryoko HAYASHI

Sophomore, Faculty of Design, Nishinippon Institute of Technology

College students introduced their activities, entitled "Food Workshop of College Students, by College Students, and for College Students," also known as *obento-no-hi* (boxed lunch day). Based on the experiences gained through the activities, participants discussed various topics from their original perspectives, including food safety, men's cooking and gender-based roles. Discussions were held with participants following the students' presentations.



■ 2 "Power to Recover 'Our Food': How to Overcome Food Imbalances"

● Facilitator

Daisuke FUJII

Assistant Professor, Faculty of International Relations,

Kyushu International University

Because of food shortages, over 800 million people around the world are currently suffering from malnutrition. Workshop 2 invited participants to think



about the worsening famines in the world by taking part in role-playing and simulating the daily lives of a poor family in a farming village in a developing country.

■ 3 "Flying Foods"

● Facilitators

Participants of KFAW College Seminar

Workshop 3, whose main topic was food self-sufficiency rates, was chaired by participants of the facilitator training seminar held by KFAW.



As workshop facilitators, they practiced what they learned during the seminar. Focusing on ingredients in daily meals, workshop participants held lively discussions concerning the potential impact of an increase in Japan's food self-sufficiency rate on Japanese families, communities, regions, and the world economy.

■ The Japan-Korea International Seminar

"Female International Migrants' Current Status of Cultural Conflicts and Health Problems in Japan and ROK"

For people living in foreign countries, it is important and challenging to adapt themselves to the cultures of their host countries while also maintaining their own cultural identities. What particular cultural and social aspects influence immigrants? Does the unavailability of food items familiar to them dramatically influence their quality of life? To discuss these issues, this seminar was held jointly with the Chungnam Women's Policy Development Institute (CWPD) in the Republic of Korea.

● Coordinator

Chung Nam CHO

Professor, Department of Politics, Korea University

● Presenters

Yong-Joo KIM

Researcher, CWPDI

Yuko OHARA-HIRANO

Associate Professor, Faculty of Medical Science, Kyushu University

● Discussants

Yukari YAMASHITA

Representative, Global Life Support Center

Kyoung-Hee MOON

Researcher, CWPDI

Among the various problems resulting from immigration and adaptation to the cultures of host countries are problems related to cooking and eating. Many non-Korean women who married Korean men and who are living in the Republic of Korea have been assimilating Korean culinary culture.



Yet, they also try to use the foodstuffs of their home countries in Korean dishes, or cook their home countries' dishes using locally available ingredients. Sometimes, these women gather together to dine, appreciating their home countries' delicacies. They also use such human networks to exchange and share foodstuffs of their home countries.

For immigrants, such networks of people from their home countries play an essential role in sustaining their physical and mental health since the networks can provide them with opportunities to exchange information and encourage each other.

This seminar proved to be extremely rewarding for participants since they were able to deepen their understanding about multicultural societies, and to seek ideal ways of creating multicultural, multiethnic societies.

■ International Symposium

“Families Now in East Asia: Work, Marriage, Child Care, and Care for the Elderly”

In the process of high economic growth and economic globalization, family structures, functions and values have been rapidly changing in East Asia. From a number of issues emerging from the change in the family, this symposium particularly looked into women's lifestyles and life courses. Although different in stages and degrees of change, East Asia has been undergoing some similar trends: a decrease in birth rates, the issue of work-life balance, and an increase of cross-border marriages, as well as new types of care provision for aged parents. Participants exchanged expertise about changes in the family in each country and area and aimed to identify appropriate policies and measures to grapple with the current family-related issues in the region.



“The Present Conditions of Nursing Care Policies for Children: To Support Women's Job Involvement”

HE Jian Hua

Researcher, Women's Study Institute, All-China Women's Federation

“Care of/by the Elderly Women and Family Relations: Case of Shanghai”

GUI Shi Xun

Lifelong Professor, Institute of Population Study, East China Normal University

“Family Changes in Korea and Care for the Elderly”

Seungah HONG

Researcher, Korean Women's Development Institute

“Increase of International Marriage and its Problems in Taiwan”

Hsiao Hung Nancy CHEN

Professor, Department of Sociology, National Chengchi University

“Marriages in Contemporary Japan and Issues of Work-life Balance”

Masami SHINOZAKI Chief Researcher, KFAW

■ Reports on KFAW Research Activities

Chaired by Yukiko ODA (KFAW chief researcher), a KFAW researcher and several visiting researchers reported the results of their research activities and discussed them with participants.



KFAW established its visiting researcher program with the aim of reinforcing KFAW's research activities. Since April 2007, visiting researchers have focused on their own research activities, whose themes differed from KFAW's researchers. Since this is the second and final year of their tenure, the visiting researchers are expected to present their reports to KFAW at the end of March 2009.

KFAW will publicize their detailed research reports on its website as soon as they are finalized.

● KFAW Visiting Researchers

“A Comparative Case Study on the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies: Evaluation on the Positive Action in the Bidding System of Japanese Local Governments”

Harumichi YUASA

Vice President, Kyushu International University

“Empirical Study on Community and Gender in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz”

Junko OTANI

Associate Professor, Graduate School of Human Science, Osaka University

● Co-Researchers

Takuzo OSUGI

Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies, Kyushu University

Asuka KAWANO

Assistant Researcher, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Science, University of Tsukuba

“Gender Sensitive Budgeting: Issues and Approaches in Japan, Korea and Taiwan”

Reina ICHII

Research Associate, Centre for Work and Life, University of South Australia

● Co-Researcher

Yasuko MURAMATSU

Professor-Emeritus, Tokyo Woman's Christian University

● KFAW Researcher

“Eco-business by Women's Groups in Gujarat, India—From the Perspective of ESD”

Masako OTA Senior Researcher, KFAW