

# Asian Breeze

KITAKYUSHU FORUM ON ASIAN WOMEN FEBRUARY 2009

Triannual Publication



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NO. **55**  
FEBRUARY 2009

## Women Today

### *How we think about what we do*

True teamwork makes 1 plus 1 greater than 2. The power of gender-balanced teams is even greater. Different perspectives between women and men complement each other, enable holistic and innovative work, and facilitate the growth of enterprising teams.

This is one merit of ending discrimination against women's participation in social and economic activities outside the home. The logic is simple. But, no organizations move in earnest unless top leadership's head and heart are connected. A shortcut is for the leadership to experience it, but such opportunities are rare in workplace where women are few.

An international aid group dominated by male culture once asked me to help break this vicious circle. I shared with them my experience at the World Bank, which led to some good outcomes. Below is an excerpt from what I said to this group.

*The development challenge we confront today lies not in what we do, but in **how we think about what we do.***

*In your work that concerns energy, what image do you associate with the word electricity? (... flip of a light switch ... power station ... solar power ...) Indeed ... there is not even a shadow of a woman in your image! (Laughter)*

*Let me take you to her.*

*Deep inside rural India, we are in a thatched mud house. It is pitch dark inside but for the dim glow and flicker of a wood fire. A shadow squats deeply in raging smoke. Comforting a baby on her back, she is busy pummeling dough, slapping a flat round of it onto the wall of her stove, stirring a sizzling pot. The baby cannot stop his little cough. She pats his back as he cries in distress. A coughing fit attacks her too. She turns to us, and smiles ambiguously. Her eyes are bloodshot, her cheeks chapped raw from constant tears...*

*Indoor air pollution is a cause of death far more serious than any disease. It kills about two million women and children in the developing world every year. In rural India, infants strapped to their mothers' back over smoky stoves are found to be 6 times more likely to develop an acute respiratory tract infection than those protected from smoke. Shifting from fuel wood to electricity halves the mortality rate of children under five.*

*A skinny girl comes in with more wood, balancing one bundle on her head, and another on her hip. She walked for hours under the scorching sun collect-*



Mieko NISHIMIZU  
Former Vice President,  
The World Bank Group  
Partner,  
ThinkTank SophiaBank

*ing wood. She unloads, squats on the earth floor, motionless as if dead. She is barely twenty, but already heavy with child.*

*The chance of miscarriage is 30% among Indian women who spend six hours each day collecting fuel and fetching water. An abnormally high incidence of uterine prolapse is also linked to the heavy load bearing work. Stillbirth doubles the normal rate among pregnant women exposed to kitchen smoke. These cannot be prevented by health sector assistance. The healing power lies in electricity.*

*One cannot translate into money the cost of human life or suffering from disease. But, even smokeless stoves can save about USD50 to USD100 per person per year. Switching to electricity doubles this saving to about USD100 to USD200. The economic impact would be enormous, not just in India that harbors a lion's share of the world's poor, but among all developing nations.*

*Indoor pollution kills. This discovery is causing a significant shift in the standards against which one evaluates social benefits of electricity power development. It was a World Bank team, composed of medical experts, economists, engineers, etc., who focused on the issue.*

*The discovery was the outcome of a multidisciplinary teamwork driven by a shared passion. But, it was possible because the team was gender balanced. After all, it was a woman leader who personally experienced the devil lurking in the smoke, and moved the organization to engage because it was a matter of life and death.*

*To overlook half the human race is no different from a mental handicap. The day will surely come when we can all laugh at our own stupidity.*

It is not what we do, but **how we think about what we do.** It is this difference that moves organizations, changes nation states, and even saves human lives.

#### Profile of Mieko Nishimizu

Mieko Nishimizu is a partner at *ThinkTank SofiaBank*, which aims to build new social systems through the development of social entrepreneurs. Having taught economics at Princeton University, she joined the World Bank Group in 1980 and worked on various structural adjustment issues. She was the Vice President responsible for the South Asia Region for six years, before leaving the World Bank in 2003. Aside from South Asia, her assignments took her to countries such as China, Egypt, Hungary, Thailand, and Turkey.

## Gender-Sensitive Measures to Prevent HIV/AIDS

### Part 1

#### Disease and Society



Yoko TSURUGI

Medical Staff, International Programs,  
Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association  
Obstetrics and gynecology physician

#### Profile

Yoko TSURUGI worked with public health programs in Myanmar as an NGO doctor. In Cambodia, as an expert in co-infections of tuberculosis and HIV, she was involved in the anti-tuberculosis project of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. She is currently a clinician in Kitakyushu, and is engaged in various public health programs in and outside Japan, including anti-HIV/AIDS and TB programs, and the promotion of reproductive health/rights.

What do you think of when you hear the term anti-HIV/AIDS measures?

Since HIV/AIDS is a disease, one is most likely to think of medical tests and treatments, which are provided by and within medical institutions. To detect HIV infection, a blood test is usually performed. If the result is positive, more tests are conducted to determine conditions of the individual's immune system and the amount of the virus in the body. Depending on the test results, the patient is given anti-HIV drugs. Large medical equipment is not necessary for blood tests and administering anti-HIV drugs. Accordingly, treatment is available not only in advanced countries, but also in an increasing number of developing countries. In Cambodia in 2007, for example, where I stayed for two and a half years from the end of 2005, there were nearly 200 Voluntary Confidentially HIV Counseling and Testing centers and nearly 50 medical institutions that provided HIV/AIDS treatment. In that year, anti-HIV drugs were administered to at least 26,000 people in that country.

My next question is whether or not establishing test and treatment systems at medical institutions can stop the spread of HIV. The answer is "No." Even in Japan, the number of HIV patients is increasing steadily. Moreover, many of those infected with HIV are unaware of their infection; many do not go to hospitals until they develop symptoms (suffer from AIDS). These facts clearly indicate that anti-HIV/AIDS measures should be taken both inside and outside medical institutions. In addition to tests and treatments, the social environment of patients comprises an essential factor in determining the success or failure of initiatives to prevent HIV/AIDS. In this article, I would like to discuss the relationship between gender and anti-HIV/AIDS measures.

HIV is spread most often through unprotected sex with an infected partner or through sharing of contaminated needles or syringes. In other words, HIV is transmitted by human behavior. In any society, HIV infection first spreads among vulnerable groups, most notably Commercial Sex Workers (CSW), Men Sex with Men and Intravenous Drug Users, since such individuals often engage in

risky behavior, such as sexual contact without using a condom, or sharing drug needles or syringes. These groups often suffer prejudice and discrimination from the mainstream of their respective societies. Moreover, in some regions, prostitution, homosexual behavior and drug abuse are strictly banned by laws and/or religious codes. As a result, many of those who are the most vulnerable to HIV infection are obliged to live in shadowy areas of society. In such an environment, it is extremely difficult for these vulnerable groups to access current anti-HIV/AIDS programs, since they are available basically in illuminated areas of society.

Among those vulnerable groups, let us consider CSW. You may feel that to avoid the risk of HIV infection, CSW should find another kind of occupation. Many CSW, however, due to extreme poverty, have no option but to engage in the sex business. Some cannot stop working because of debt. This is particularly true in societies where women's social status is low, or where girls are not given adequate education. If CSW cannot take up a different kind of work, you might feel that at least they should use condoms. Constant use of condoms, however, is not as easy for them as you may suppose. Many male customers would rather avoid using condoms, and when sex business managers are not eager to prevent HIV infection, female CSW must buy condoms with their own money. Still worse, many women without education do not know basic facts about the risk of sexual contact or the effectiveness of condoms in preventing HIV infection. There are so many challenges to address, even when we limit the scope of problems to those of CSW.

Many individuals assume that only specific groups are vulnerable, and that they themselves are therefore safe from HIV infection. If people adhere to such assumptions, and if national governments maintain a similar approach to infection, governments are unlikely to take effective measures to prevent HIV/AIDS in the early stage of the epidemic, that is, when the risk is relatively limited to most vulnerable groups. However, it is essential to take effective measures while the plague is in its early stage, since HIV is likely to spread, infecting many more people outside these most vulnerable groups.

# Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women

## “Eat the Earth, Eat on the Earth”

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) held the 19<sup>th</sup> 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><b>Program</b></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 &amp; The Japan-Korea International Seminar Workshops from the Gender Perspective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 “Food Today and Our Future”</li> <li>2 “Power to Recover ‘Our Food’: How to Overcome Food Imbalances”</li> <li>3 “Flying Foods”</li> </ol> <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"

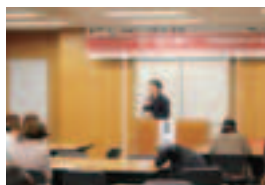
##### ● Facilitator

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, CWPD

Yuko OHARA-HIRANO

Associate Professor, Faculty of Medical Science, Kyushu University

##### ● Discussants

Yukari YAMASHITA

Representative, Global Life Support Center

Kyoung-Hee MOON

Researcher, CWPD

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

# Commemorative Lecture on KFAW's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) had the pleasure of inviting Pawadee TONGUTHAI, an associate professor at Tammasat University, Thailand, and former representative of the Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW) as a guest speaker at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of KFAW. In her presentation, she discussed the results of various efforts to realize gender equality, indicators to show the achievement levels of these efforts, and remaining problems.



▲Pawadee Tonguthai

## ● Gender Equality Indicators

Pawadee Tonguthai presented the following three indicators to demonstrate progress in gender equality:

- 1) Levels of access to education and healthcare services that ensure girls/women can enhance their abilities.
- 2) Levels of access to resources and opportunities that enable girls/women to maximize their potential.
- 3) Levels of initiatives taken to protect women from domestic violence, primarily caused by their husband/partner's feelings towards their income.

According to Tonguthai, no society can be considered gender-equal unless it has achieved satisfactory success in these indicators.

## ● Millennium Development Goal Indicators

As an urgent issue, the statement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2000, specifies the achievement of gender equality in terms of education, employment and participation in policymaking. In terms of education, the MDGs statement emphasizes the need to eliminate gender disparity in primary education. In the Asia-Pacific region, many countries have already achieved this target.

As for employment, one of the MDG targets is to increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and the percentage of women engaged in employment under legal and contractual protection. In South Asia, driven by high economic growth and the development of new industries, the percentage of paid women workers has grown sharply over the past 15 years. Yet, many women are still faced with various problems in the labor market, including limited opportunities to enter various occupations, unequal promotion and lower wages. These problems have stemmed from gender-based discrimination.

Regarding women's participation in policymaking, the world's average proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments remains at 14.9%, whereas the United Nations has set the target level at 30%. No countries in the Asia-Pacific region fulfill this target level. Yet, the rates of women policymakers are relatively high in socialist countries, such as Vietnam and Laos. In these countries, political parties adopt a quota system for proportional representation lists of

their candidates. By allocating a specific ratio of seats to women candidates after each election, the parties in these countries enable women's participation in national politics. Yet, increasing numbers of women's policymakers at the national level do not necessarily result in enhanced women's political influence.

## ● Remaining Problems

Despite numerous programs and the untiring efforts of the many parties concerned, many problems still remain unsolved. First of all, stereotypic ideas hinder women from gaining educational and job opportunities. Moreover, in some cultures, people tend to invest in boys' rather than girls' education.

The second problem is violence against women. Although this problem has been known for years, the United Nations has begun to concern itself with this problem only recently.

Thirdly, we have to resolve problems relating to women's immigration. Nowadays, increasing numbers of women migrate in order to find better employment opportunities. This has both positive and negative aspects. Regarding the former, immigration can provide women with more employment opportunities and more income. Since many such women send money back home, they can contribute to the national income of their home countries. On the other hand, many such women migrate, leaving their children in their home countries. Moreover, some women become victims of human trafficking and other violent acts in host countries. At least 1.4 million women have been trafficked for forced labor, and many of them have become sex workers.

## ● Our Tasks to Overcome the Problems

We must first eliminate gender-based stereotypical ideas that are deeply embedded in our societies. We must also formulate adequate policies to control risks involved in women's immigration. Moreover, we must seriously consider the merits and demerits of globalization and take initiatives to secure work and income opportunities for women, as well as measures to protect women from violence and other problems related to their employment. Above all, we must study and adopt comprehensive measures to promote gender equality, so as to build a truly gender-equal society.



# Former Foreign Correspondents Visit Kitakyushu

In 1991, the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) established the foreign correspondents system, under which several members serve for one or more years in reporting on women's situations in their respective countries. As of this fiscal year, 236 correspondents from 34 countries have participated in the program. Among them, we had the pleasure of welcoming Tehreem HASAN (Pakistan) and FAIROZ Ahmad (Singapore) to Kitakyushu City for six days in October 2008.

Oct. 16 (Thur.)

## Visit to Kitakyushu Municipal Mitsusada Elementary School and Fukuoka Prefectural Mojigakuen High School

At Mitsusada Elementary School, Tehreem Hasan and Fairoz Ahmad gave presentations about their respective countries to the third-year students. They also participated in calligraphy and physical education classes. After having school lunch together with children, they learned origami (the Japanese art of folding paper) from the children.



▲Introduction of their countries at Mitsusada Elementary School

At Mojigakuen High School, the two correspondents discussed school life and other topics with members of the English Speaking Society (ESS). From the frank discussion with the students, the visitors learned about the Japanese educational system and students' daily lives.

Oct. 17 (Fri.) Visit to a women's group

The two correspondents also gave presentations about their countries to a women's group. Following the lectures, members of the women's group demonstrated traditional Japanese household tools. The two guests in turn asked many questions to the women's group members regarding their views on family and commitments in their respective communities. They were also deeply impressed by the hearty welcome and the lunch that the women had prepared.

Oct. 18 (Sat.)

## Panel Discussion "Women's Status in Sports: Pakistan, Singapore and Japan"

During the panel discussion, Hasan explained about the barriers that inhibit many Pakistani women from participating in sports. In her opinion, since the great majority of Pakistani people firmly believe that women's primary tasks are raising children and doing household chores, few women are allowed to enjoy sports. Moreover, few businesses support women's sports, so a lack of funds adds another serious obstacle to promoting women's sports. To overcome these obstacles, she stated that the Pakistani people should first create an educational system that enables women athletes to receive training while attending school.

According to Fairoz, the Singaporean population, like the population of Japan, is rapidly aging. Many elderly women, particularly Malayan women, are suffering from lifestyle-related diseases, due to a lack of exercise. In his presentation, he introduced new sports programs for Malayan women in Singapore, the majority of whom are Muslims. For these women, modern sportswear that does not adequately cover the body imposes a great challenge, along with the high exercise stress of modern sports. Accordingly, a moderate-speed dance program was created that allows dancers to wear less revealing outfits. Today, many Malayan women participate in the dance events, which are held in parks and other public spaces. These events have proven to be effective in promoting health.

Finally, the coordinator, Professor Keiko ITANI of the Kyoto University of Education, concluded that women's sports have been influenced by the religions and cultures of the respective countries, as well as by the stereotypical concept that men should be good at sports, while women need not be.



Tehreem Hasan  
(Pakistan)

The visit to Kitakyushu, particularly the visit to the schools, was extremely rewarding for me. I will long treasure the lovely *origami* and letters that the schoolchildren gave me. I am truly pleased to have met with so many kind people. I will certainly share my delightful experiences in Kitakyushu with my friends, colleagues and family. It is my sincere hope that the students, women group members and other people I met with in Kitakyushu were inspired by me as much as they have inspired me.



Fairoz Ahmad  
(Singapore)

At the panel discussion, I had an opportunity to introduce our activities in Singapore. At the same time, I was able to learn about women's situations in Japan and Pakistan, along with problems common to our three countries. We were also able to discuss our respective cultures. I was deeply impressed by the innocent schoolchildren, and by the courtesy and warm hospitality of the Japanese people who welcomed me wherever I visited.

## FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS 2008-2009

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### The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

#### Victimization of Women and Children in Nepal

Bhawana UPADHYAY (Nepal)

The story of a woman being tortured by the Young Communist League (YCL) cadre was the headline of the July 11, 2008 issue of *The Kathmandu Post*, Nepal's largest selling daily newspaper published in English. YCL is the youth-based sister organization of the Communist party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M). This incident exemplifies the prevalence of rampant discrimination and violence against women and girls in Nepal even after the CPN-M signed the peace agreement with the Government of Nepal (GON) in late 2006. Yet another heinous act against women and girls in Nepal has prompted me to shed light through this report on the horrific violations of their rights, particularly during the decade-long conflict.

Although the marginalization of women and children has unfortunately been a part of life in Nepal due to age-old patriarchal practices common throughout the country, the conflict fueled by the CPN-M was yet another key factor to aggravate this reality. Although the CPN-M waged a civil war in 1996 to secure the rights of all Nepalese people as their main slogan, they themselves have been failing to offer women and children dignified, respectful and equal basic rights.

Initially, the CPN-M enjoyed some popular support for their causes particularly among the less-educated rural population, many of whom had rare access to facilities such as education, health, public system, etc. Later, the CPN-M gradually increased the use of violence, intimidation and brutality against men, women, children and elderly.

The GON security systems, including the then Royal Nepal Army (RNA), deployed to quell the violence proliferated by the CPN-M, too had their own excuses for violating children's rights. According to the Informal Sector Service Centre Nepal (INSEC), a total of 286 children under the age of 17 years were officially reported to have been killed by July 2004. This included 161 children (105 boys and 56 girls) killed by the government forces and 125 (96 boys and 29 girls) by the CPN-M. Some children were even brutalized by both warring factions.

What could be the answer? As these violations are largely related to behavioral and attitudinal issues, more intensified efforts towards bringing about change from all parts of society are needed especially from civil society, pressure groups and the government. It is high time for Nepal—currently on the verge of writing the new Constitution—to rightly address the question of protecting the rights of women and children.

#### Looking into the Dark World of the Girl Child

Kanthi WIJETUNGE (Sri Lanka)

Sri Lanka is a country which has achieved good results in reducing gender disparities. The 1978 Constitution has guaranteed equal rights for both sexes. The Women's Charter, declared in 1993 has also made provisions to protect the rights of women. Despite these measures, violence and sexual harassment against women and the girl child is considerably high in Sri Lanka. Girls are particularly vulnerable to incest, rape and other forms of sexual harassment at a young age due to lack of protection and care.

In Sri Lanka, many mothers of poor families tend to migrate to foreign countries as domestic servants due to economic hardships in their families. In the absence of mothers, the majority of fathers cannot accomplish household chores as they are not used to carrying out such work. Because of gender stereotypes, older girls in the families are compelled to attend to all the household work. As a result, most of these girls sacrifice their education because of family.

The situation gets worse when fathers do not act in a responsible manner. Many of these men get addicted to drugs and alcohol, utilizing the money sent by their wives. They invite friends to their homes to consume alcohol and ask their daughters to prepare and serve food for all of them. Under these situations, girls become vulnerable to sexual and psychological violence. The following case exemplifies this problem.

Mala is the eldest daughter in a family with two younger brothers. Her mother went to the Middle East as a domestic servant due to financial problems when Mala was just fourteen. At the beginning, Mala's grandmother helped them with

household chores. But she died a year later. Mala was then compelled to take care of all the household work and stop her schooling. The family did not want the mother to return as she earns money for the family.

Gradually the behavior of Mala's father changed and he began to consume alcohol daily at home along with friends. Mala was tired of these evening parties because she had difficulties with the men invited to their place. One day a man invited by her father raped her. Although it was a terrible incident, she was helpless. She did not even have anyone to tell about this incident. She wanted to run away from home, but it was not possible as she was concerned about her brothers. Her father was not approachable as she knew that this particular man had influenced her father in various ways. One day, Mala began bleeding and got sick. She was taken to the hospital and this pathetic story came out at that point.

In conclusion, it is well recognized that violence and sexual harassment against the girl child negatively affects human development in any country. Hence, it is vital to take measures to eliminate this problem and allow these young girls to grow up with their dignity and full potential. Sri Lanka has been taking various measures to eliminate this problem. Establishment of women and children's desks at police stations is progressing satisfactorily. A hotline facility is available to report such cases and capture the perpetrators. However, it is vital that protection and care of the girl child should be given due attention. Education and awareness is needed to open the eyes of people about the dark world of the girl child and bring light to their lives.



▲ A girl attending to a younger sibling

## Wives for Sale: Contract Marriage in Indonesia

Gloria ARLINI (Singapore)

Recent years have seen heartening developments in Indonesia's efforts to combat exploitation and violence against girls. Greater attention has been paid to this issue at the governmental and policy level, while civil society organizations keep watchful vigil at the grassroots level. The National Committee for Child Protection (*Komisi Nasional Perlindungan Anak* or KPA), has been formed to spearhead the national effort to eradicate violence against children. It identifies four types of violence or abuse: sexual abuse (including trafficking and prostitution), physical abuse (including domestic violence), verbal or emotional abuse, and abandonment (including neglect of health and education, and forcing children into any kind of work that would jeopardize their normal development).

A particular cultural phenomenon in Indonesia—*kawin kontrak*—seems to fall into a grey area, however, within this map of “conventional” abuse. *Kawin kontrak* is, literally, contract marriage. From a cultural standpoint, it is a “proper” marriage in the sense that the couple is wedded before a Muslim clerk presiding over the *akad nikah* (wedding ceremony). Moreover, there are witnesses, a wedding dowry, and sometimes even “guests”. What makes it unusual is that it only lasts for as long as the agreed upon contract holds, which could range from two days to several years. The dowry for such marriages almost always takes the form of hard cash, which could be a one time payment or regular subsistence allowance for the bride. At the end of the contract, both parties are single again, and are not bound to each other in any way.

It is much like “formalized” prostitution, where a wealthy man can “buy” a girl and receive sexual favours from her—but without shame or guilt, especially since some consider it *halal*, or permissible, in the eyes of religion. But those who suffer the most from such arrangement are, of course, the girls. Most of the *kawin kontrak* brides are sourced by local agents, called *calo*, and pimps who specialize in playing liaison for the groom and bride-to-be. It is not unusual for these girls to be pressured, forced or threatened into *kawin kontrak* by their family and relatives for the sum of money being promised. After all, many of these girls are naïve villagers whose families are typically in dire financial need.

Unlike prostitution, which is frowned upon from both moral, societal and religious standpoints, those sending their daughters into *kawin kontrak* seek moral refuge in that they are sending their daughter into a “good marriage” with wealthy men.

And in addition, certainly, some *kawin kontrak* wives eventually get so used to the effortless income that they become seasoned in doing *kawin kontrak*, either locally or overseas. However, we must identify the exploitative elements of such practices which treat girls like commodities, while entirely ignoring their rights and wishes as free human beings. Exploitation need not be defined solely in relation to the elements of violence, as is often the case. In working towards an effective and thorough eradication of exploitation and abuse against girls, policy-makers and practitioners must be aware of “softer” and less obvious elements of deception and disrespect for girls.

## THE FORUM WINDOW

### Viewing Japan from Outside

As a result of advanced globalization, increasing numbers of people now travel across national borders. According to statistics from Japan's Ministry of Justice (<http://www.moj.go.jp/>), approximately 17.29 million Japanese went abroad in FY 2007, surpassing arrivals to Japan by approximately 8.14 million. As evidenced by this fact, many Japanese are traveling around the world, giving both positive and negative impressions of Japan and Japanese. During my travels abroad, I found that in addition to the excellent products made in Japan, such as cars and cameras, many people overseas associate Japan with negative incidents and affairs.

To my great regret, I learned some time ago that the Japanese term *yakuza* (gangster) is well known in the Philippines, and that there were quite a few victims there of incidents caused by *yakuza*. On another occasion, in a local Japanese restaurant in Thailand, I came across a Japanese magazine that showed middle-aged Japanese men how to become “friends” with young Asian women around Thailand. Since then, I can't help recalling that article whenever I see a middle-aged Japanese man walking on the street with a young Asian woman.

More recently, I had an opportunity to talk with Asian women who had been trafficked to Japan and finally returned to their home countries. It was indeed painful to hear their stories about the many hardships they had experienced in Japan. I was also surprised to learn that they had stayed in many Japanese cities, both large and small, across Japan. This fact indicates that some victims of human trafficking have been and are suffering in our own cities, possibly even in our own neighborhoods, although we have been unaware of the fact. Those victims must have views of Japan that are quite different from our own view of Japanese society.

Each time I see and hear of such facts, I can't help worrying about overseas people's impressions of Japan and its society. In this age of advanced globalization, so many Japanese are traveling around the world. I hope that our travels will offer us good opportunities to look at our own society with a global perspective.

**Yukiko ODA**

Professor, The Japanese Red Cross Kyushu International College of Nursing  
KFAW Chief Researcher

# INFORMATION

## Q&A Corner

### Question

In Japan, many children are keen on playing video games when they play whether alone or with friends. How do the children of your home country play?

Yasuhiro HOSODA, Kitakyushu, Japan

### Answer



Keiko OHAMA, China

I asked some Chinese friends, who are around 40 years old, how they played when they were children. They told me that girls played different games than boys did. Boys played marbles and hide-and-seek, while girls played Chinese jump rope and other games. Boys and girls didn't play together, but they both played outside.

However because of the one-child policy, the number of children has decreased sharply and many parents have become overprotective. They run to their child's kindergarten or elementary school at the end of the school day and take their child home. The children play alone or with adults in their homes because they don't have any siblings. They also have a lot of homework, so that limits their playtime even further. In urban areas, in particular, children attend cram schools even during long vacations.

In these situations, many parents don't know how their children play with their friends. You don't see children playing outside anymore. My Chinese friends said when they do see children jumping rope on school grounds, they feel nostalgic for the passage of time.



Starting from the issue (June 2008), we capitalize the last names of persons at the beginning of articles. We adopted this policy so that our readers can easily distinguish last names in spite of different customs regarding the writing of family names.



### KFAW

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) was established in October of 1990 with a special government fund for revitalization projects. Subsequently, in 1993, the KFAW was recognized as a foundation by the Ministry of Labour (the present tne Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare). The purpose of the KFAW, through various projects, is to promote the improvement of women's status as well as their mutual understanding and cooperation in Asia.

## Asian Lifestyles

~Photos from KFAW Readers~

### Kimchi Vendors in Bazaar (Kyrgyz Republic)



I took this picture at Osh Bazaar in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz is one of five countries in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

These countries became independent from the former Soviet Union. I often see ethnic Korean Chinese women selling *kimchi* at bazaars in these countries. The Kyrgyz people, who represent more than 65% of citizens in Kyrgyz, have features similar to Japanese.

Takuzo OSUGI, Fukuoka, Japan

### COVER PROFILE



### Yoshiko UENO

Paper Craftsperson

Yoshiko Ueno has always enjoyed collecting paper, and started to learn the art of papermaking after having an opportunity to meet the writer, Mr. Tsutomu MIZUKAMI. The art of making paper is very time-consuming; even preparing the materials and cooking plants used in making the

paper require time and effort. However, Ueno says that when she is making paper, it is a time full of pleasure, and the sound of the water relaxes her. She also has had a wonderful experience when teaching papermaking and helping out with exhibitions, where children who have previously been housebound due to depression have been able to go out into society and find work on their own. Her husband uses her paper to make lampshades. The light passing through the *washi* creates a soft and warm atmosphere. Her dream is to take the best parts of *washi* and use it not only for lighting, but in other ways as well, and discover new possibilities for Japanese paper.

## Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

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