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Read *Asian Breeze* online:



How Gender Equality Will Move Forward



Mary C. Brinton
Harvard University

In discussions of gender equality in every country, there is an emphasis on women gaining access to the same opportunities and resources as men. In other words, policies and reforms usually focus on making women's lives more similar to men's. This makes sense in many realms of life — in health, education, and politics, for instance. But how about paid labor? Here, there is an often overlooked and inconvenient fact: in many countries, including some that are highly economically developed, the conditions of men's work lives make it very difficult for them to have a reasonable balance between paid work on the one hand and unpaid work and leisure time with family on the other hand. If men's lives continue to be highly work-oriented and gender equality policies continue to focus on how to make women's lives similar to that, where in people's everyday lives is there time to spend with family?

East Asian societies are a case in point. Around 80% of men in Japan work an average of at least 40 hours per week, and the figure is considerably higher in China, Singapore, and South Korea. Average commuting times for men are also very long: nearly one hour per day in China and Japan and even longer in South Korea. It is no wonder, then, that men's contribution to housework and childcare in these societies is very limited. The total amount of time spent in paid and unpaid work every day is very similar for men and women. But in Japan and South Korea, the proportion of work time that is unpaid is five times higher for women than it is for men.

Asian societies are often portrayed as more "family-oriented" than countries in Europe, North America, or Oceania (Australia and New Zealand). But it is important to think carefully about what "family-oriented" means in the 21st century. All East Asian societies now have birth rates that are far lower than the OECD average, and increasing numbers of young men and women are rejecting family life by not marrying at all. In contrast, men's average work week in Northern European and many Western European countries is considerably shorter, and the birth rate is higher. None of these countries has achieved complete gender equality, but some of them have moved significantly in that direction by making men's lives more like women's rather than the reverse. What does this mean? It means that men's and women's work hours are more similar than in East Asian countries. It means that the proportion of

men's and women's daily workload spent on housework and childcare is much more equal. And it means that the proportion of men who take paternity leave is closer to the proportion of women who take childcare leave.

In summary, the most gender-equal societies have achieved this through creating policies based on the idea that men and women should have equal rights not only to a meaningful and satisfying work life but to a meaningful and satisfying family life as well. By supporting men and women as individuals, these policies have supported the family. In contrast, many of the most gender-unequal societies have created policies that try to "accommodate" working mothers in the workplace and "encourage" male employees to take paternity leave. For instance, Japanese and South Korean childcare policies now include some of the most generous provisions for paternity leave in the world. But the implementation of these policies in the workplace is lukewarm due to the fact that many managers do not want male employees' work lives to change. The result? In Japan, just 6% of men employed in the private sector take paternity leave. This is generally because they fear retaliation by employers who want new fathers to continue to "work like men."

It is high time for governments and private firms to recognize that for societies to prosper in the 21st century, policies and gender-role attitudes need to be as supportive of men's lives becoming more like women's as the reverse. Otherwise, we are likely to move only incrementally towards gender equality. And it will be a gender equality that is based on both women and men "working like men" without regard to their wishes for a more balanced life.

Profile

Mary C. Brinton is the Reischauer Institute Professor of Sociology and Director of the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University. Before joining the Harvard faculty in 2003, she taught at the University of Chicago (1986-1998) and Cornell University (1998-2003). Brinton has published extensively on gender inequality in Japan, the impact of Japanese labor market restructuring on young workers, changing gender-role ideologies across postindustrial societies, and low fertility in Japan and elsewhere. Her current research links Japan's persistent gender inequality to the stagnating birth rate, and will be published in book form in Japanese later this year.

Computers and Women's Empowerment (Part 1)



Harumichi Yuasa
Meiji University

Profile

Professor at the Graduate School of Governance Studies, Meiji University since 2021. Previous academic positions include Vice-President and Professor at Institute of Information Security as well as Vice-President and Professor at Kyushu Kokusai (International) University. Yuasa's research focuses on legal and political aspects of internet and information society including protection of privacy and personal information as well as administrative information handling and disclosure.

Have you ever heard of a woman named Grace Hopper?

She is an American mathematician and computer scientist. She is known as one of the developers of COBOL, a computer language with a grammatical structure similar to English, which makes it easy to understand programming techniques. COBOL is still used around the world today, 60 years after its introduction. Hopper served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and retired in 1966 at the age of 60. By special exception, she stayed on the active duty until she was 79. She was promoted to the rank of commodore in 1983, as the first woman engineer to be promoted to the rank of admiral in the U.S. Navy.

Hopper was a pioneer in two ways: she was a pioneer of women engineers in the field of computers and information and communication technology. She was also a pioneer who, through her mastery of the new technology of computers, was able to carve out a career in the military, a male-dominated field.

It has been almost 30 years since Hopper's death. Computers and information technology are still providing new opportunities for women.

Women are entering workplaces that were once thought to be difficult for them due to their physical strength, thanks to advances in computers and information and communication technology. We see women driving large trucks and dump trucks now. We also see more and more female train and bus drivers and aircraft pilots. These professions used to be difficult to get into if you were not physically strong, and women were at a disadvantage in that respect. The reason why trucks and buses have large steering wheels is because they used to require a great deal of strength. However, today's cars, trains, and airplanes are computer-controlled, so driving and maneuvering them does not

require a lot of strength nor does it require a strong body.

Telework, which became popular due to the spread of COVID-19, is also expected to contribute to increasing the scope of work for women. Telework was originally proposed in the United States as a way to work without driving into workplace during the oil crisis of the 1970s, when gasoline prices skyrocketed due to a shortage of supply. Since then, telework has attracted attention worldwide for its effectiveness in increasing employment opportunities for women who are unable to work outside the home due to circumstances such as child rearing or nursing care. Telework also has the effect of realizing a flexible work style not only for women but also for men. In our rapidly ageing society, the number of "nursing care leavers" is becoming increasingly serious, with more than 100,000 people a year being forced to leave their current jobs in order to care for their elderly parents. The problem of nursing care is expected to become even more serious as the baby boomers enter their 70s, but if telework becomes widespread, it is expected to help prevent people from leaving their jobs to care for their loved ones.

However, telework also has the aspect of highlighting the disparity in the division of roles between husbands and wives at home and with informal services in nursing care. I have often seen complaints on social networking services such as Twitter and Facebook that when the husband and wife are both working from home during the COVID-19 state of emergency, it is always the wife who takes care of children at home and prepare meals. There is also a concern that if nursing care becomes dependent on family members working at home, they may eventually become unable to balance work and care and leave the workforce.

Gender Mainstreaming Policies for Government Officers 2020 [Course A/B] (Winter 2021)

KFAW offers a training program “Gender Mainstreaming Policies for Government Officers” for public administrators in developing countries. This program, implemented in commission by the Japan International Cooperation Agency’s Kyushu Center (JICA Kyushu), is ordinarily offered twice a year. However, due to the prolonged spread of COVID-19, it was only offered once in 2020-2021 and was held online for the first time. This first online training took place from January 12 to February 2, 2021, with 12 participants from 7 countries: Afghanistan, Fiji, Kosovo, Malawi, Ghana, Nepal, and Cambodia. As this was the first remote training program for JICA as well, it was implemented after over six months of logistical preparation.

The training consisted of lectures (both live and recorded), workshops, and presentations. Visits to nursery and elementary schools, which are usually part of the program, were not possible at this time. Instead, videos were used to present Japan’s efforts and initiatives for gender equality to the participants as much as possible. In particular, KFAW created an introductory video of the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE so as to make the training as equivalent as possible to the conventional one in Japan. This was also due to the fact that lectures on the activities of KFAW and MOVE, which include a building tour of the center, receive high ratings from program participants every time.

The remote participation meant that it was considerably difficult for the participants as they had to focus not only on the training but also on their work and family obligations. Taking into account the time difference between Japan and the seven participating countries, the lectures started at

4 p.m. Japan time, which meant any time between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. in the participants’ local times. Some participated in-between their work schedule, from home or elsewhere. Others had to commute to distant locations in order to participate in the JICA training. There were even those who were unable to attend on certain days due to important work obligations.

In addition to these difficulties, a major cyclone hit Fiji during the training period. The 4 participants from Fiji managed to attend lectures despite the unstable internet connection caused by power outages and heavy rain. It was a relief to us all when we were able to hear them online.

As this program places importance on the horizontal connection among participants, a virtual space was created where they could communicate freely. The participants developed strong relationships while using the virtual space to share COVID-19 situations and videos of beautiful scenery in their countries.

Women and girls have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased domestic abuse and unpaid care work worldwide. As the situation becomes more prolonged and serious, the participants of this program recognized the need to further promote gender mainstreaming and participated enthusiastically.

The instructors also made considerable efforts to adapt lectures to the online modality of the training program, which attained a high satisfaction rate from the participants. KFAW will continue to work in partnership with participants of the JICA training program to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.



Date March 16, 2021

Participants 34

Location Zoom (online)

Live screening at Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE

KFAW administers a visiting research program where selected researchers conduct research studies on latest gender issues around the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This program is intended to reveal domestic challenges through the analysis of global trends and perspectives, with the aim of contributing to the realization of gender equality in Kitakyushu. In this reporting session, the 2019 visiting researchers presented the outcomes of their research over the 2-year period from 2019 to 2020.

Title

Organizing Discourses around Family before and after the International Year of the Family: Basic Research for International Comparison

Reporters

Mayumi Hachisuka, KFAW Visiting Researcher 2019/2020 (M&Y Consultants Co., Ltd.)

Mayuko Sano, Co-researcher (Associate Professor, School of Human and Social Sciences, Fukuoka Prefectural University)

This bibliographic study analyses the transformations of interest levels in family and of family forms/functions during the period that marked the establishment of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 1989.

The 1994 International Year of the Family is an international observance proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. It was declared with the theme of “Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world,” adopting “Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society” as its motto. Given that many international policy discussions are based on the premise “the family constitutes the basic unit of society,” this study aims at answering the following 3 research questions:

1. Why did the family become an “issue of international concern” during this period?
2. What was the aim of the IYF?
3. If the IYF occurred in response to issues surrounding the family during this period, what changes in “the state of the family” gave rise to this event?

For the purpose of organizing discourses in family research, this study further hypothesizes that the IYF was established based on: A) a heightened interest in power relations within the family and the gendered division of labor; and B) transformations in the forms of family, individualization, closeness between members, functions of the family, same-sex partnerships, and the need to respond to such transformations.

The results are as follows:

1. The IYF was constituted based on concerns about social developments, such as 1) the principle of human-rights protection (first established in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights); 2) the 1978 UN resolution “World Social Development” (adopted based on the 1969 Declaration on Social Progress and Development); and 3) the 1979 UN resolution “Implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.”
2. The analysis concludes the purpose of the IYF was to “raise awareness of issues related to the family, which is

a source of wellbeing for each family member.” The study argues that there was a need to focus on “family” to ensure a more comprehensive (rather than fragmented) inclusion into policies of women, people with disabilities, senior citizens, and children as beneficiaries of social development.

3. Regarding the changing family dynamics as the background to the establishment of the IYF, the UN discussions recognized emerging changes in family size (shrinkage), lifecycles, and roles during the process of capitalization, industrialization, and urbanization, which occurred as results of development and progress in both developed and developing countries. In particular, the economic slowdown caused by the 2 oil crises as well as welfare reforms and socioeconomic liberalizations in both developed and developing countries as strategies to cope with the slowdown led to the regression of social development and the weakening of family functions in developing countries. This, in turn, strengthened interests for family wellbeing, resulting in the establishment of the IYF.

It should also be noted that there is no direct mention of same-sex partnerships in the discussions about the establishment of IYF, and there are evidences that the establishment was indirectly influenced by the feminist movement of the time (e.g., the declaration of the 1983 Inter-American Year of the Family).



Youth Talk: Climate Action and Gender

Date March 21, 2021

Location Zoom webinar & YouTube live streaming (online)

Moderator Mitsuko Horiuchi, President of KFAW

Participants 58

KFAW hosted a parallel event as part of the NGO Forum organized during the 65th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65). The event was a panel presentation where four youths from Japan and other Asian countries discussed effective ways to integrate gender perspectives into climate actions. The panelists each gave a 10-minute presentation on their gender and climate justice activities. Participants joined from across the world and gained a valuable opportunity to develop a better understanding of the important connection between climate action and gender.

The four youth presentations are summarized below. (Detailed summaries are available on our website.)

The actual heroes are women! Intersectionality and young indigenous women in indigenous people and ethnic minorities' movement

Arisa Junio, Philippines (Global Support Officer of VOICE Program; KFAW Foreign Correspondent 2017-2018)

Arisa presented about the Philippine's indigenous women who are at the forefront of the climate justice movement. During the mining operations that took place in their ancestral lands, they barricaded to protest against the exploitation by the government and industry. The framework of intersectionality reveals complex problems related to indigenous women's leadership efforts: 1) patriarchy and history complicate their path to leadership; 2) practices and traditions still limit their development; and 3) intersecting challenges of land protection and concerns for the future generation. We can support indigenous women by endorsing their access to education, intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and participation in policy discussions.

Youth advocacy and gender on climate in Japan

Natsuki Murai, Japan (Undergraduate student at Keio University; Member of Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability (JYPS))

Natsuki, who shared youth perspectives on climate action and gender, presented examples of policy proposals made by Japanese youth advocacy groups. When the Japanese government solicited public comments on its draft of the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality covering 2021-2025, a group of youth gathered opinions from their generation and submitted a statement calling for actions to: 1) increase women's participation in disaster-response council meetings in order to better prevent/intervene gender-based violence at evacuation centers; and 2) address different impacts of climate change on various social groups by collecting disaggregated data, empowering women in STEM fields, thinking beyond the binary framework of gender, and reflecting social diversity in the policymaking process.

Lessons learned from Japan's disaster experiences: roles of civil society in eliminating gender-based violence

Ayano Nagata, Japan
(Graduate student at the University of Manchester)

Ayano discussed the roles of civil society in eliminating gender-based violence by aid-workers at post-disaster shelters. Given the unequal power dynamics between victims and aid workers, the need for special rigors (e.g., workers' code of conduct) has recently started to gain recognition by civil society. As the frontline of disaster relief, they are expected to: 1) implement skill-building workshops for victims, aid workers, and public administration about victims' rights and available legal frameworks; and 2) organize transparent and inclusive systems such as community-based complaints mechanisms, victim assistance, and mutual support system. The common method of increasing female shelter staff does not offer a fundamental solution and can only reinforce gender stereotypes.

Climate action and gender through the lens of feminist storytelling

Disha Arora, India (Documentary filmmaker and development communications specialist; KFAW Foreign Correspondent 2020-2021)

Disha presented on how women are viewed in the context of environment and how to leverage the principles of feminist storytelling when discussing climate action and gender. Nature is commonly associated with feminine (e.g., "mother earth"). This association equates earth's natural resources with women's productive and reproductive resources, representing our patriarchal society which perceives women as exploitable. It also disregards power inequalities that exist in different social contexts, thus depriving women of decision-making opportunities. As feminist storytelling respects diversity, intersectionality, and inclusivity, it is helpful for climate justice advocates to consider complex social power relations. It is particularly useful for horizontal communication which allows the voice of the marginalized to be represented.

KFAW Foreign Correspondents 2021-2022

In 1991, the Kitakyushu Forum on Asia Women (KFAW) established the foreign correspondent program to build a broad international network, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This year, 3 correspondents from 3 countries will report on some of the latest gender issues worldwide. Their complete profiles and reports are available on our website: <http://www.kfaw.or.jp/en/correspondents/index.html>.





Author of own fortune: F-commerce businesswomen in Bangladesh

Nishat Taslin Mohona (Bangladesh)

An independent researcher and bachelor student from Bangladesh who enjoys writing to contribute to women's welfare, mainly from the financial and economic aspects. Also a senior associate member of her university's Model UN club and participated in 4 International Model United Nations conferences. Aims to compose a notable contribution featuring new scope of women's empowerment through research. Her career goal is to become a female scholar who supports society and highlights women's values worldwide.

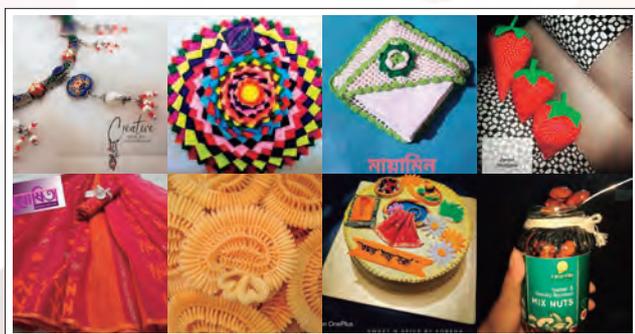


"I'm Koly, Owner of Koly's Attire, working on Jamdani saree."¹ Various similar iconic lines like this are used to express the entrepreneur's identity in Bangladesh. Those lines reached millions of people through Facebook-based business (F-commerce) amid the existing COVID-19 pandemic, reports Bangladesh Economic Review (BSR).

In Bangladesh, it is difficult for women to be self-empowered or work outside, crossing the house's boundary. In the Muslim-dominated country, a male is considered the only earning person in many families. A small portion of women blooms their destiny, encountering unreasonable social context. Countless working women in our social circumstances retire early from the professional world, considering family responsibilities. The crime rate in the country also holds another factor that does not grant women the liberty to work outside. Hence, women's scope of financial independence becomes limited. It will not be easy to transform social order and mindset any time soon. That said, Facebook enables talented women to try out ingenious ideas at minimal risk. As everything takes place online, the pandemic seems a blessing to existing women entrepreneurs, and there is a massive rise of new F-commerce entrepreneurs while staying at home.

Role of social media in creating businesswomen in Bangladesh

Social media is no longer a place for killing time. Instead, it has shifted to a versatile business platform. With a global user base of 2.35 billion and 25 million in Bangladesh, Facebook is undoubtedly a splendid networking and client-hunting platform for businesses. It converted to a blessing for women, as it allows them to run businesses from home. Hence, entrepreneurs have originated with creative ideas.



Innovative products by women entrepreneurs
(Pictures extracted from Women and E-Commerce Forum (WE))

Despite many benefits, a complication arises when connecting with tremendous people according to the target of the individual business. A freshly emerged Facebook page faces difficulty approaching a wide audience. Here, a Facebook community named Women and E-commerce Forum (WE) assists businesswomen in connecting with millions of people at a time. This group is considered to be the most prominent women entrepreneurs' association in Bangladesh.

Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Women entrepreneurship is not only an income-generating activity. It also contributes to making women financially independent, helping the nation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The benefit of ICT is tremendous. Without ICT's nourishment, this massive transformation is nearly unthinkable. Sadly, women are still less likely partakers in the ICT related disciplines, and there is a gap in digital skill proficiency levels when it comes to women and girls.² Since women's contribution to ICT and digital technology is less than men, training can help overcome the gender gap in the ICT field.

Measures to overcome the challenges

The F-commerce platform requires appropriate economic definitions and guidelines concerning entrepreneurs and consumers. Businesswomen's skills must be developed through training and workshop to alleviate the gap in digital skill proficiency levels, for which government incentives would be helpful.

Women entrepreneurs create a followable pathway for the rest of society to acquire financial freedom and self-sufficiency. ICT renders the limelight for women entrepreneurs to build their fortunes and narrate a story of overcoming difficulties. Such winner stories win the heart and motivate others to stimulate inherent creativity to be self-sufficient.

1 Jamdani Saree: Traditional dress of women in Bangladesh

2 According GSMA 2020 report, women are 29% less likely than males to own a cell phone and 52% less likely to utilize mobile internet in Bangladesh (cited in the Business Standard, 3 February 2021, <https://cutt.ly/Xmv81hR>).



Philippines

Alexander Antonio Abelar
College Instructor



Bangladesh

Nishat Taslin Mohona
University Student



India

Neha Vekhande-Hinge
Assistant Professor

PANDEMIC, ICT, AND LEADERS

Alexander Antonio V. Abelar (Philippines)

The Philippines has suffered from one of the biggest blows brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in terms of economic difficulties besides health-related concerns. According to the National Economic Development Authority of the Philippine Government, the country's economic activity has contracted by 9.5 percent in 2020 (source: <https://cutt.ly/m00aTh>). The recession further continued in the first quarter of 2021 with a decrease of 4.2 percent in GDP (source: <https://cutt.ly/am00ju5>). The statistics reflect a seemingly hopeless situation, worsened by economic uncertainties and by the national government that had its share of lapses, with erring officials flouting quarantine rules among others.

But then again, people have risen to the challenge, and initiatives have been made viral, largely through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Community pantry and social media

What started as a personal and a modest effort by a young woman to help marginalized people in her locale turned into a nationwide movement of community pantries, providing poor people with a day's worth of food and something to look forward to in the coming days and weeks. Patricia Non, a young entrepreneur whose fledgling furniture business was affected by the mobility and quarantine restrictions brought about by COVID-19, started her community pantry in a street that was a popular dining hangout before the pandemic. From a small bamboo rack about the size of a small TV stand containing vegetables and basic provisions, her project inspired hundreds of other community pantries in Metro Manila - the National Capital Region of the Philippines. Eventually, the movement spread nationwide, with new iterations such as a combined food and medical community pantry (source: <https://cutt.ly/0m00v9c>) and even a community pantry for pets.

Ms. Non's efforts have become popular mainly because of social media. People have used ICT to help in any way, from buying

An educator with two decades of teaching/tutoring experience. Currently teaches tourism management at the Imus Institute of Science and Technology in Imus City, Cavite Province, Philippines. Coming from a modest social-economic background and a former migrant worker, Alex has experienced first-hand inequalities brought about by an imperfect society, which has prodded him to be more empathetic to the plight of those in the less privileged sectors.



ANA PATRICIA NON helps a vendor pack vegetables from her community pantry along Maginhawa St., Quezon City on April 15, 2021 — PHILIPPINE STAR / MICHAEL VARCAS

directly from farmers at a fair price (source: <https://cutt.ly/rm00Em4>), to creating an app that helps citizens find a nearby community pantry for their in-kind donations (source: <https://cutt.ly/Zm00Yx9>), and to donating money via fintech (source: <https://cutt.ly/Dm00IB7>).

Good governance

Barring those traditional politicians, demagogues and political butterflies, there are some shining stars in the government, both at the national and local levels. The Vice President of the Philippines, for example, has turned to ICT to maximize her reach in assisting Filipinos in this pandemic, given her office's limited mandate and financial resources. She launched E-Konsulta, a teleconsultation platform using Facebook Messenger, which has helped thousands of people who need free medical consultations and referrals (source: <https://cutt.ly/0m00Dc7>).



A call for volunteers announcement of E-Konsulta

The pandemic has brought out the worst and the best in people, and ICT can be harnessed positively to help accelerate the latter. It can also be utilized to take on the challenges of an ever-increasing VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world, provided citizens recognize the true leaders.



Help us improve *Asian Breeze*!

We would like to know what you think about *Asian Breeze* so we can meet readers' needs and improve our work. Please help us by completing a short survey which is accessible from this QR code. It should only take about 1-2 minutes to complete. All responses will remain confidential.

Deadline: November 1, 2021

Two respondents will be selected to each win a towel handkerchief from IMABARIxSHIMA-SHIMA featuring a unique Kokura-ori design (pattern may vary). Kokura-ori was a traditional textile that was produced at the beginning of the 17th century by the feudal clan in the Kokura area of southern Japan.

