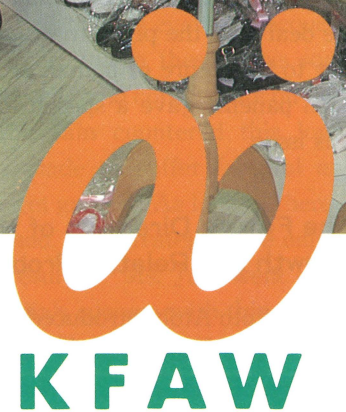


Asian Breeze



IZUTSUYA Department Store has 10 stores in Fukuoka and Yamaguchi Prefectures in Japan. In the flagship store in Kitakyushu, there are 900 women employees. Department stores in this country are one of the largest employers for women with various benefits for them including maternity as well as child care leave.

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MARCH 1994 No. 10

THE 4th KITAKYUSHU CONFERENCE ON ASIAN WOMEN



The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) held the 4th Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women, November 19-21, 1993 with the main objective of integrating exchange and research activities.

The main theme for this year's Conference was "Population and Our Earth's Future." Daily activities included a Asian cinema on the first day, an international symposium, workshops, an Asian bazaar, and a citizens' exchange meeting on the second day, and the AWID (Association for Women in Development) report and a study/discussion session on the third day.

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Theme : Population and Our Earth's Future

Panelists:

Ms. Devaki Jain (India)

Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust
Mr. Sombhong Pattawichaiorn (Thailand)
Executive Director, Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand

Ms. Keiko Higuchi (Japan) Professor, Tokyo Kasei University

Ms. Makoto Atoh (Japan)

Director-General, Institute of Population Problems, Ministry of Health and Welfare

Mr. Shunsuke Iwasaki (Japan)

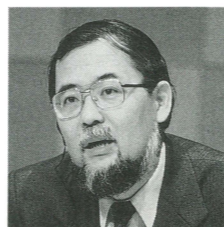
Special Advisor, Japan International Volunteer Center

Coordinator:

Mr. Hiroko Hara (Japan)

Professor, The Institute for Women's Studies, Ochanomizu University

restrained through a policy of family planning. The developing countries, on the other hand, stressed the idea that 'development is the best pill.' However, currently there is a consensus among all countries on the need for a population policy. At the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in Cairo in 1994, there will be four main topics of discussion as follows: environmental problems, human rights, abortion, and international migration. It is also expected that raising the status of women as a solution to our population problems will be emphasized."



Mr. Makoto Atoh

The North-South Problem and Our Earth's Future



Mr. Shunsuke Iwasaki

Mr. Shunsuke Iwasaki strongly criticized the commonly held view of the developed countries that current world population problems are due to the population explosion of the developing nations. We must not forget that in the past the developed countries also went through a

temporary phase of high population growth rates. He also stressed the importance of the North-South situation as a factor in present population and environmental problems, "The average amount of per capita energy consumption in the developed countries is 10 times that in the developing countries. It is the lifestyles of the people of the developed countries more than those of the developing countries that are putting such a strain on the environment. The only way we will be able to see the future of the Earth is by

changing the social and economic systems currently in place."

Towards the Guarantee of Reproductive Rights



Ms. Devaki Jain

Ms. Davaki Jain pressed for the correction of policies related to population control. "Until now, population control measures have all been directed at the woman's womb. However, each family's decision on the question of how many children to have depends on many factors; such as, infant mortality, the need for workers, etc. Under these circumstances, the population control policy which centers on handing out contraceptive drugs and devices is simply insufficient. The decision to have a child or not should be made by the man and woman together. The reproductive rights of women must be strengthened."

The Voluntary Promotion of Family Planning in Thailand

Mr. Sombhong Pattawichaiorn reported on the situation in Thailand:

"Thailand has been successful over the past 20 years in restraining its population growth rate. This is the result of the general public taking a voluntary approach to the issue of family planning in response to the increase in information, educational programs, and motivation activities by the government and NGOs. Our goal is to reduce the population growth rate to 1.2% by 1996. However, the urbanization and industrialization of Thailand have developed more rapidly than the improvement of essential public facilities and infrastructures, which creates various serious social and environmental problems; especially, in Bangkok with its highly concentrated population."



Mr. Sombhong Pattawichaiorn

Japan's Low Fertility Rate - A Peaceful Strike by Women

Ms. Keiko Higuchi touched on another population problem - low fertility rates, by pointing out that, "Japan's low fertility rate is the result of a peaceful strike by women." "From now on, I don't think women in the future will be able to enjoy having children and raise them unless we can create a culture where men and women share some of the responsibilities of childbirth, raising children, and homemaking." Also, on the issue of abortion, she



Ms. Keiko Higuchi

added, "In Japan, abortion is not guaranteed as a woman's right. After World War II, the Japanese Government, which was struggling with a over population situation at the time, established the Eugenic Protection Law. Based on this law, abortions are allowed in our country. However, there is still a need to create a new law to protect the reproductive rights of women."

Population Problems and Raising the Status of Women

The discussion which followed the opening comments focused on two topics: "population problems and raising the status of women" and "human rights and population control policies." Mr. Iwasaki stated, "In order to achieve a stable livelihood while at the same time maintaining the rights of women and protecting the environ-



Ms. Hiroko Hara

ment, we must change not only the relationship between men and women, but also the relationship between urban and rural communities as well as between developed and developing nations." In response, Ms. Higuchi emphasized, "In order to rebuild this male oriented society where work and life are separated along the lines of gender, first men need to change themselves." The coordinator, Ms. Hiroko Hara, added an episode about a pharmacologist who is working on a contraceptive for men, but is having trouble finding support for the research from scientific societies and corporations. She also commented, "Both men and women seem to have the preconception that population control is something achieved through adjustments to the woman's body. This type of thinking will have to be changed."

Human Rights and Population Control Policies

Mr. Pattawichaiorn started the discussion off with the comment, "The birth rates in Thailand's poor northeast and southern regions remain as high as ever. Consequently, in the future we will determine in these areas some target groups for family planning and concentrate on their education." However, Ms. Jain countered this logic. "Poor women are always made to suffer forceful and rough treatment in such target groups. As long as there is a monetary incentive attached, such strategies are unlikely to turn up appropriate results." Ms. Jain went on to introduce an example of India's success with this type of project in the State of Kerala. She stressed, however, that education, improvements in public health and changing the attitudes of men were the factors that contributed to its success. Mr. Atoh added, "According to the World Fertility Survey, it is clear that many women in the developing

countries already feel that they don't want to have more children. This means that there are people out there who want family planning services. Certainly, as far as how to provide this service, force is out of the question and other options; such as, economic incentives or penalties are also questionable. Since every country has its own policies on this issue, providing family planning services is a difficult matter."

Looking Forward to the Cairo Meeting

In closing, Ms. Hara added, "In the developing countries, many children are born out of instability. On the other hand, in countries like Japan the difficulty of childbirth and raising children has led to a low fertility rate. Both cases share common socioeconomic problems. Under these circumstances, the most important way of addressing population problems is to guarantee the reproductive rights of women as human rights. For that purpose, I believe women need to get more involved, and have their opinions reflected in the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo where the direction of the world's future policy on population control will be decided."

REPORT ON AWID CONFERENCE

The AWID (Association for Women in Development) is a worldwide women's organization comprised of researchers, government planners, etc. Its purpose is to raise public awareness about the relationships that exist among nations, groups and individuals involved in development initiatives. At the same time, it is striving to insure that women are actively involved as complete and equal partners in the process of development and that men and women share equally in the fruits of development. AWID holds an international conference in the United States biannually. Although most of its members are American, the group's membership is spreading worldwide. AWID's 6th International Conference (October 21-24, 1993) in Washington D.C., was attended by over 1,000 people from more than 50 countries around the world. It consisted of exhibitions, workshops, debates, round table discussions and several hundred presentations on a vast array of topics including health, family, economic activity, political participation, education, the women in farming communities and gender analysis. The conference also provided an opportunity for exchange and networking among participants. KFAW reported on "Changes in the family in the process of development, and their effect on the women in Japan, Korea and Thailand."

STUDY/DISCUSSION SESSIONS

General Discussions on Women's Issues in Asia

This session, which solicits participation from the entire country on research related to Asian women's issues, once again drew a broad range of researchers and provided many valuable research presentations.

Session No.1 - Presentations (Coordinator: Ms. Mitue Yasutake) "A Historical and Structural Analysis of the Experience of the Japanese Women in Development" by Mr. Akira Namae; "Women Migrant Workers from Asian Countries" by Ms. Yoko Tanaka; "Environmental Issues in East Asia—A Comparison of Student Consciousness between Japan and Korea" by Ms. Shinobu Saito.

Session No.2 - Presentations (Coordinator: Mr. Katuo Osato) "A Comparative Study on Patriarchal Socialism: China and North Korea" by Mr. Kaku Sechiyama; "Comparative Studies on the Custom of Childbirth between Japan and Korea" by Ms. Noriko Yoshimura; "The Change of Women's Childbirth Consciousness in Reforming and Open China" by Ms. Ketsu Chin.

Discussion on Women's Reproductive Rights and Population Problems in Asia

In this session, participants debated many problems related to the theme of Women's Reproductive Rights and Population Problems in Asia. In contrast to the previous day's discussions on the macro problems of social structure, this session dwelt on the microproblems of individuals dealing with childbirth. The question of how people; especially women, will be able to decide and preserve their reproductive rights was discussed.

The discussion was headed by Mr. Ryoichi Suzuki, a veteran family planning specialist who has been involved in family planning work throughout all of Asia as a member of JOICEFP (the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning). Mr. Suzuki drew on his experience to define the problems facing women's reproductive rights today. He raised the example of Bangladesh where the population has doubled in the past 30 years. If the current high birth rate is allowed to continue, Bangladesh will remain one of the poorest countries in the world. Bangladesh also has the lowest average first marrying age in the world—16.7 years of age. In addition, there is also little opportunity for education; especially for females. As a result, these young women go into marriage uninformed about pregnancy, blindly following the decisions of their husbands, who tend to be much older. When they become mothers they are ill prepared for

the tasks of child raising and homemaking, leading to the profusion of "children giving birth to children". However, if you enter the villages of Bangladesh and talk to middle aged women you will hear heartfelt comments; such as, "We aren't having babies because we want to" and "It would have been better if I didn't have many children" which reveal the true attitudes of women in the region. Ms. Rikko Chin, a researcher at the United Nations Center for Regional Development, reported on a conspicuous phenomena which has occurred under China's population control policy following the country's recent moves towards a market oriented economy. China's current economic strategies have resulted in lowering the status of women who were previously thought to be equal to men. The change can be explained by China's "one child per couple" rule. This policy has led to a human rights problem where the birth of a son is celebrated but the birth of a daughter is seen to be a misfortune. The "one child per



▲ Discussion on Women's Reproductive Rights and Population Problems in Asia

couple" rule has proved effective in achieving the objectives for which it was designed, but, as Ms. Chin pointed out, it has, on the other hand, led to the unexpected problems of unbalanced sex ratio and violence against women's reproductive health.

In response to these two comments, Ms. Kuniko Funabashi, a researcher on women's issues, stressed the need for actions to guarantee reproductive rights as a fundamental human right for women. Ms. Funabashi also questioned the belief that overpopulation is the cause of poverty and environmental problems in developing countries, and asked whether these problems aren't actually the result of the developmental practices of the developed nations. Chief Researcher Ms. Masami Shinozaki, the meeting's coordinator, brought the discussion to a meaningful close by drawing attention to the underlying causes of Japan's current situation where it is difficult to have children even if one wants to. She called for the participants involvement in activities based on the principle that "my body is mine", while resisting Japan's gender biased mass media, sex discriminating education and social arrangements.

WORKSHOPS

Citizens' groups were able to exchange information and present their opinions on problems facing Asian women or Asia in general.

1. OASC (Our Asian Seminar Club)

Ms. Phanomwan Yoodee, Director of the Sankhampaeng YMCA in Chiang Mai, Thailand, reported on the current situation of women in Thailand's farming villages, and discussed the farming village development project which the YMCA is promoting.

2. The Kitakyushu Action Wing

The Kitakyushu Action Wing reported on its 5 years of activities in the Philippines through slide and panel presentations.

3. The Kyushu International University International Commerce Department's Students' Association.

Association students, who visited Indonesia over summer vacation for the purpose of foreign language training, displayed Indonesian crafts, introduced traditional Indonesian clothing, showed videos as well as photographs of Indonesia taken during their trip.

ASIAN BAZAAR

A bazaar was held with the cooperation of private sector groups for the dual purpose of introducing handmade products of Asian women and promoting assistance for their economic independence.



WOMEN TODAY



Ms. Mariko Sugahara Bando
Cabinet Councillor and Director
Office for Women Affairs in the Prime
Minister's Office

Japanese women and men have both changed. However, men have not changed as much as women have. The Japanese society is not fully aware of the changes which have occurred in women's lifestyles; such as, the increasing percentage of women pursuing advanced education, marrying later and having fewer children as well as entering in the work force.

As little as 20 to 30 years ago, most women in Japan were not blessed with opportunities to further their education. Women, expected to bear many children, spent most of their energy on raising the children and doing household chores. They also had no income of their own, and no knowledge about their rights. Women no longer need the kind of protection they did in those days, but there are still not enough opportunities for women to fully develop their potential and contribute to society. Japanese women and men are caught up in outdated social roles. This, in turn, is an obstacle to creating a freer society where all people, regardless of their gender, can fully develop their individual talents and be held equally responsible for their participation in the running of society.

Women need to be more involved in decision-making in Japan. In Japan women now hold only 2.7% of the seats in the Lower House of the Diet. There are no female governors, and only four female mayors. There has been some changes; such as, the appointment of women as Speaker of the House of Representatives, three Cabinet Ministers, and a Judge of the Supreme Court. However, these high level appointments of women need to be increased. There are still very few women among the ranks of the top management of economic associations, labor unions, cultural entities, universities, etc.

Compared to other developed nations, the percentage of women leaders in Japan's corporate and political world is astonishingly low.

Under the strict conditions of the current economic slowdown, several phenomena such as the increased difficulty of finding jobs for female college graduates, the laying off of part time employees, and marked differences in wages provided to female employees versus males, show that Japan has not yet established equal opportunities in the job market.

In the future, we need changes in our educational system and attitudes of the people. Men should share more the burden of raising children and looking after the elderly. Society must also support women more fully in the areas of national pension plans and taxation systems. And many outdated practices should be eliminated to achieve a social order which guarantees equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

In 1994 which the United Nations has designated as the International Year of the Family, it is a good time to examine the many questions surfacing with the changes in the types of social roles being played by women in Japan. How can women balance the responsibilities of a job with those of marriage, childbirth, and the raising of children? The traditional gender based roles and responsibilities of Japanese society might actually be causing empty relationships among married couples in Japan. Another area of doubt is how far welfare programs can help women with her familial responsibilities. Currently, the traditional breakdown of responsibilities based on gender is not only hard on Japanese women but also making it difficult for Japanese men to choose fulfilling occupations and lifestyles.

In light of these issues, the Legislative Council of the Ministry of Justice is examining how the drastic shifts in women's lifestyles may require legal revisions; such as, the requirement that married couples use the same family name, the effect on society of the difference in marrying age between men and women, and the position of illegitimate children in society.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS

Theme : Women in Education

Vision 2020

by Ms. Machiko Nakama <Malaysia>

The government of Malaysia developed its renowned "Vision 2020" plan with the goal of entering the ranks of the developed nations by the year 2020. Under the auspices of this plan, the government is relying heavily on the power of women in the workplace, the home and in other parts of society. This understanding has brought changes in governmental policies for the education and protection of women.

With Malaysia's stable economic growth, women are free to choose the lifestyle they wish to lead among an increasing variety of options open to them. In the area of education, the once popular notion that there is no need to educate women has disappeared at least in urban areas. In spite of the above progress, there are still many serious problems. While there are many hard working women, there are others who, because of some unfortunate circumstance in their families or the lack of ability, are not receiving a proper education. In the worst case these girls

drop out of school or leave home due to the frustrations of family life, get together with the wrong sort of people and end up as prostitutes. In addition, there are still major disparities between urban and rural women situations.

There are also reports about abandoned infants in public restrooms, schoolyards, etc. The government is taking this problem very seriously and has required classes for mothers at all state run hospitals, both prior and after childbirth. These classes are intended to provide more women with basic knowledge concerning childbirth and the raising of children. It is also hoped that these classes will dispel the fears associated with motherhood that are assumed to be behind the abandoned children incidents. Large privately run hospitals have also started their own programs of education for soon-to-be-mothers. I hope that in the future these types of programs will develop further and close the knowledge gap between urban and rural women.

In this way all women can gain a better understanding of their positions in life and their bodies as well as more actively participate in society.

Empowering Women through Employment Training

by Ms. Kanthi H. Wijetunge <Sri Lanka>

In spite of the increasing awareness of the role and contribution of Sri Lankan women to the success of the overall development of the country, they continue to be economically disadvantaged.

Access of women to employment training may have an impact on their financial independence. In Sri Lanka, although women face no major barriers in training and employment, their options are still severely limited. The large majority of women workers are concentrated in a narrow range of occupations with low levels of skills, productivity and pay. Hence it is important to examine gender disparities as related to the access of Sri Lankan women to employment training in terms of skills, career mobility and achievements in order to ascertain their prospects for financial independence.

In response to the grave unemployment situation in the country, vocational education has been given a prominent place by the government in recent years. Although the participation of women in vocational education has increased recently, gender based assumptions have directed women to largely feminine courses. The percentage of

women in technical colleges has increased from 14.9% in 1973 to 28.3% in 1987. However, while 61.9% of male students were enrolled in technical and craft courses, the female percentage of that was only 22.4%.

There are number of factors which influence the economic status of women. Among those, market considerations; such as, the demand for labor, level of education, employment training and women's expectations have the greatest effect on their financial independence. Lack of education or training has caused high unemployment and poverty among women.

To remedy the unequal access of men and women to employment training, it is necessary to bring vocational education, job training and apprenticeship programs for the benefit of women in line with the standards set by equal employment laws. In addition, curriculum development and counseling to update labor force projections will benefit both men and women. Also women should be involved on an equal basis with men in every stage of vocational education, from student recruitment to career counseling and training to follow up on how they do on the job. Changing the attitudes and practices of employers and unions, and motivating women for employment training may also have positive results.

The Hidden Wall

by Ms. Shiori Sato <Thailand>

Currently, women with higher education working in white collar positions are broadening their range of activities in Thai society. However, working conditions are not completely equal for women and men. Also married women who are working and raising a family at the same time are experiencing problems. Thai women have not let these obstacles stand in their way and are well on their way to taking up a more important position in society. For example, the percentage of women in management at corporations and in government agencies in Thailand is already much higher than that of Japan.

At the same time, Bangkok continues to draw more and more laborers from rural regions. As most of the women who come to the city seeking higher wages are not well educated, they end up working at low paying jobs and living in the slums. Furthermore, working conditions and treatment do not always meet the levels required by law. When people talk of the raising the Thai women's status, they are generally referring to professional workers and intellectuals, forgetting the continuing plight of the women at the bottom of society. There is still a disparity between men and women in varying degrees at every level of



society. Women must confront the values and systems which exist in Thai society throughout their lives. However, I sense that Thai women are not yet unified by a sense of their common plight and mutual interests. The gaps between the different classes of society are still larger than the gap between the genders, and these social gaps may be hard to overcome. It is difficult for successful women with a good education and high salaries who have earned their status in the workplace to understand that the problems of the women at the bottom of the social ladder are the common problems of their gender. Basically, the women in these two categories are living in completely separate worlds.

Education—A Catalyst for Changing Lifestyles

by Ms. Swapna Majumdar <India>

Education has acted as a tremendous catalyst for change in the lifestyles of women in the cities. This is due to the growing awareness of the importance of education, the accessibility of education tools like schools, books and the positive attitude of the parents all of which have helped the girl child to develop her talents.

Once a woman has been embellished with education, her lifestyle undergoes a major change. Freed of the shackles of economic dependence, she has used her skill honed by education to stand up on her own feet. She has seized every opportunity and made the best of it.

This trend, however, is restricted to the metropolis. Women in the villages have not been able to match the progress of their counterparts in the cities. Education is still a distant dream for many. Because parents are either completely illiterate or at best semi-literate, they are reluctant to invest in their daughter's education since she has to ultimately leave her parents' home after marriage.

Once a daughter marries, there is no major change her lifestyle as an uneducated woman. She will remain a home maker. When it is harvest time, she will be out in the fields working shoulder to shoulder with her husband to augment

their shrinking income. In many cases, the husband sits idle while she will sell vegetables, eggs or straw baskets to keep the home fires burning. He does not reciprocate when it comes to cooking, cleaning or taking care of the children. Wives never really have time for themselves and rarely participate in decision-making.

Many such women are also victims of violence and abuse. But, unlike the illiterate women who accepts the abuse as her fate, educated women are not so stoical. They are aware of their rights and are ready to fight for them.

Divorce is no longer an ugly word as a solution to marital violence. The women are ready to file for divorce because they know they can fall back on their education to support them. Although orthodox Indian society does not look kindly upon a divorced women, it is forced to respect her grit and determination. Although both educated and uneducated women are imbued with these qualities, they can act as propellants only. Education is still the vehicle of change.

Fortunately, more women are realizing the worth of education thanks to an improved implementation of government schemes and the stellar role played by NGOs and the media. With the government's promise of education for all by the year 2000, there is still hope that the lifestyles of all women will change and for the better.

Empowering Women for Socioeconomic Change in Nepal

Mr. Sharad B. Shrestha <Nepal>

Nepal, with 96% of female population still dependent on agriculture, has a very low literacy rate. These women work on an average of 11 hours a day. An United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study found that women account for 70% of the agricultural production in Nepal, but their role is neglected by both development program planners as well as implementators. In reality, women do not have much access to resources and services in spite of their high contribution to the country's economy. Aside from the obvious problems associated with social and cultural problems, Nepalese women also have inadequate food and health care. The most critical concern of rural women is that their basic human needs are not met.

In addition, a deeply entrenched prejudice in Nepal underestimates the capability of women causing them in turn to lack self-confidence. This prevents women too from taking on a leadership role in the society.

In order to create a heightened awareness of their role in the society, formal, informal and non-formal education are effective tools. A mass education program should also be launched, focusing especially on women.

A Laotian Symbol

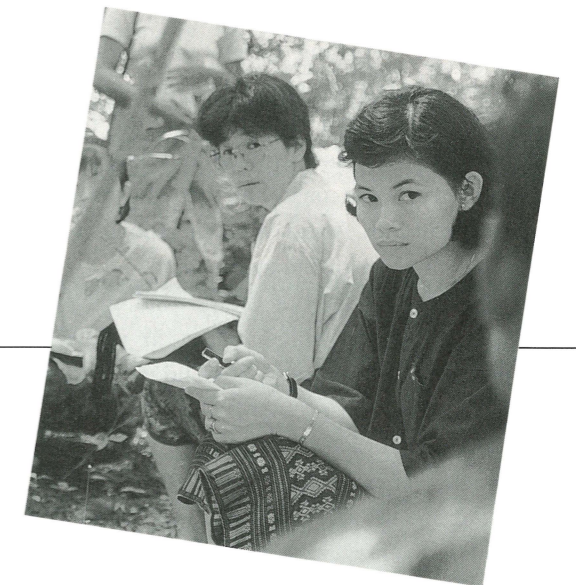
by Ms. Mutsumi Akasaka <Laos>

Although there are currently more than 30 NGOs operating in Laos, Laotians have not yet been granted the legal right to organize NGOs. Therefore, all of the NGOs operating in this country are actually foreign entities with headquarters located in Europe, the United States or Japan. Presently, there are about 200 Laotians working as support staff in the various NGOs. Presently, I work with the Japan based JVC (Japan Volunteer Center) where I met Ms. Maripetto. Maripetto, 30 years old, is known as one of "The Three Great Ones."* She studied agricultural economics at the University of Hanoi before working at the Agricultural Bureau of Vientiane City. She left her work there and became a staff member of JVC three years ago.

In Maripetto's words—"What surprised me most was that the Japanese staff really tried to learn the language and was concerned about the problems in the rural communities. I wasn't even aware that such problems existed in the farming communities of my own country." She made numerous trips to the farming villages with the Japanese staff and tried somehow to change the desperate situation in her country. She learned what is important in rural

Women must recognize too that only by organizing and acting in a group will social and economic changes occur. The commitment of the group member to actual action beyond words and feelings has to be made. Most important in the empowerment process is the promotion of the belief that both men and women have equal power and can contribute equally to the socioeconomic upliftment of the family and community.

Many governmental and non-governmental organizations have been involved in the empowerment of women, designing and implementing special programs and projects in Nepal. These groups realize that women as a potential force for development have played a nominal role in development. Consequently, a future vision for Nepalese women with clear cut strategies needs to be developed.



rural community development is for the villagers themselves to become aware of the problems. Once they are aware of the problems, they will be able to find solutions. From that point on Maripetto was able to approach her work positively. It was around this time that she started being considered one of "The Three Great Ones". However, she is still dissatisfied and queries: "Why must the Laotian people be limited to positions as support staff under the management of foreigners?" Fortunately, this situation with the NGOs in Laos has started to change. Some groups have promoted Laotian members to positions as high as deputy representative, and entrusted them with the actual running of projects. Maripetto herself is likely to become the symbol of JVC Laos.

For my part, however, I hope that "The Three Great Ones" including Maripetto, will someday form an NGO managed entirely by Laotians. When that day comes we will gladly let go of her hand.

*The Three Great Ones are three Laotian women including Ms. Maripetto who have earned high honors from the United Nations, foreign government and other NGOs for their NGO work.

Looking Ahead to the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women

My Experience at the Asian and Pacific Symposium of NGOs on WID
by Ms. Sachiko Wada

Member of Executive Committee of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

Why were so many women gathered at the Manila Hyatt Hotel on November 16th last year? They had come to attend the Asian and Pacific Symposium of NGOs on WID. The symposium was in preparation for the upcoming UN Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995 and to insure that the voices of the NGOs will be heard at that event.

The sponsors of this symposium (ESCAP, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women and the Asian and Pacific NGO Working Group) originally expected about 400 people to participate, but it was later announced that over 700 people had registered by the time of the opening ceremony. I was surprised and delighted to find many friends from the past and acquaintances of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women among the participants and the sponsors of the symposium.

The real reasons behind the timing and place for the Manila symposium were made clear in the discussion "Evening in Beijing" held on the second day of the event. Initially, many potential problems were raised related to preparation for participation in the Beijing conference; such as, visas; whether the facilities for the conference and lodging accommodations would be ready on time; whether the policy of free entry into discussions and workshops would be maintained, etc. These questions were all answered politely by the representatives from China but there were in fact some complications.

During the symposium, we were divided up into many sectional meetings on specific regions or specific topics; such as, health, labor, education, environment and so on. I offered my opinion on several subjects and did my best to participate actively in each discussion. However, I realized that the conditions surrounding women in Japan are quite different from those facing women from other nations of the Asian Pacific region. I certainly do not deny the severe social situation of women in Japan but in these talks I was made keenly aware that in order for Japan to earn the trust of the people of the Asian Pacific region, and of the world in general, we must first understand and accept the differences between our society and those of other countries.

In the sectional meeting for the region of East Asia, there was discussion about the comparative lack of involvement from the representatives of that region. Consequently, a new grouping known as the East Asian Women's Forum



▲ Asian and Pacific Symposium of NGOs in WID

was created to foster networking among the nine countries and regions of the area, including Japan, China, Korea, and Hong Kong. The Forum will help reflect the voices of women from this area at the Beijing conference.

The Kitakyushu Beijing Conference Preparatory Organization Holds its First Meeting

In the City of Kitakyushu, interested citizens were called to participate in the first meeting of The Kitakyushu Beijing Conference Preparatory Organization on December 28, 1993. Many of these citizens are representatives of women's groups working to promote women's status and other activities in the region. Many of them also sponsored a workshop at the NGO Forum held at the same time of the Nairobi Conference. During the meeting, participants reviewed the activities taking place around the world in preparation for the Beijing Conference and confirmed the contents of the Manila Conference. They also decided to sponsor a workshop at the NGO Forum scheduled to coincide with the Beijing Conference in 1995.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women will be held in Beijing, September 4-15, 1995. The last conference was held in Nairobi in 1985, the last year of the United Nations Decade for Women. At the 4th Conference, there will be discussion on how the "Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" has been realized in each country, and an action platform will be created, spelling out what types of activities the women's movement should act on up to the year 2000. An NGO Forum will be held for private sector groups and the general public at the same time as the International Conference.

People's Forum 2001, Japan

The People's Forum 2001, Japan, established last November, includes Japanese citizens from a broad range of NGOs, working together to achieve sustainable development. The group's core is made up of members from the Citizens' Coalition for Follow Up to the '92 United Nations Brazil Conference, many of whom participated in this conference or so called Earth Summit held in June 1992. We, as members of this forum and citizens of "planet earth" are trying to approach the current environmental problems as our own problems.

People's Forum 2001 main goals include creating tangible relations with the people of Third World nations; strengthening regional ties between Japanese villages and farming communities with those in Third World countries; establishing contacts among NGOs worldwide working towards bringing people from the Third World countries together with those in developed countries and actively making concrete proposals to the people in positions of authority in national and local authorities, corporations, special

interest groups, the United Nations, etc.

Specific activities of the group consist of regular research and study events; the creation and distribution of information newsletters; the establishment of computer networks as well as the development of human resources, etc.

As a people's forum, we put together proposals based on the Japanese government's action plan, decided after the Earth Summit, and hold informal discussions with the related governmental agencies regarding these plans.

For the human race to survive, it is necessary to establish a new relationship with both development and the natural environment. As members of the international community, we must all play our individual part in forging this new relationship by overcoming our different ways of thinking, the differences in how environmental problems affect us personally, the differences in the needs of the regions where we live, and the differences in the circumstances of the places where we work.

At present, the forum is looking for members who are willing to participate in these activities. Information is available by calling 03-3834-2436.

THE FORUM WINDOW

The International Year of the Family (Part 1)

While I was riding in a taxi over the recent New Year's holiday, the driver, who was single, said to me, "This season from Christmas to New Year, I hate it!" "Why?", I asked. "There are Christmas cakes and presents for the family, and family photographs on New Year's greeting cards. It seems like you're a bad guy if you don't have a family. That conversation made me realize that the International Year of the Family in 1994 (IYF) could be a source of great stress rather than creating sympathy for the family.

It is true some people especially feminists including myself are afraid that a nation or a government will increase its intervention in our private lives and place limitations on our freedoms; such as, the right to choose whether to marry or not; whether to have children or not; and whether to divorce or not. There is also a strong concern that the government will limit rigidly the definition of what is a "family." When the Japanese government first revealed its poster to promote the IYF, which shows the United Nations' symbol with the pictures of eight people, men and women from different age groups, there was an immediate backlash from women. Some reacted by saying, "Why eight people?"

Do you want us to go back to multi-generational, large families again?"

However, the United Nations is not emphasizing the restoration of the "traditional family" this year. This is clear from their accent on "diversity" and their catch phrase, "Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society." Furthermore, it is important that more people be made aware that Article 1 of the Principles for IYF calls for strengthening the respect shown for human rights. In short, with the need to enforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it has already been made clear what the governments and private entities should be doing as far as the family is concerned. Japan must also work hard to shed some light on the more urgent aspects of these provisions; such as, the realization of the right for married partners to use different family names; the abolition of discrimination against illegitimate children; and the establishment of a system for the equal participation of men in doing housework, raising children, and caring for the elderly. Instead of looking at the International Year of the Family negatively, we should look at it as an opportunity to establish a new order in human relations.

Masami Shinozaki

Chief Researcher, The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

INFORMATION

● FORUM 1994-1995 FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS WANTED!

Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women is pleased to announce its 1994-1995 recruitment of foreign correspondents. This foreign correspondents program, initiated in April of 1991, is aimed at promoting an information network covering all Asian countries, including collecting general information on Asian women's issues as well as publishing correspondents' articles in our Foreign Correspondents' Reports Journal and/or in our newsletter—"Asian Breeze".

As this is the International Year of the Family, the theme of our 1994-1995 program is "Women and Family Life". Selected correspondents are encouraged to write their reports on this theme about the existing situation of women in families; for example, traditions, roles, laws, economic changes, etc.

We look forward to receiving many applications.

Number of recruits: fifteen

Duration: May, 1994-March, 1995

Qualifications:

- ① Residence in an Asian country other than Japan.
(However, there is no limitation as to one's nationality or sex)
- ② Participation for one year including three reports written either in Japanese or English.

Application:

Applicants must prepare the following items and submit them to the Forum.

- ① Application Report—up to 1,200 Japanese letters or up to 700 English words.

Theme: "Women and Family Life"

- ② Curriculum Vitae
- ③ Photographs: Personal photo and photograph/s related to the report with an explanation.

Deadline date: April 15, 1994 (Fri.)

For more information, please contact: Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women.

● THE 5TH ASIAN SEMINAR

The Forum will be holding a seminar intended to further the understanding of Asia on Saturdays from May 21 to June 18, 1994.

Now more than ever before, the economic and political importance of Asia, home to 60% of the world's population, is rising. The directions taken here in Asia can be integral to the world's future.

The Forum's seminar "Towards the Goal of Peaceful Coexistence with Asia" will look for ways that Japan and other Asian countries, as residents of the same region, can live together peacefully. The lecturers for this seminar come from a variety of fields and backgrounds, both domestic and foreign. For more details, contact the Forum.

● MS. HISAKO TAKAHASHI APPOINTED AS JUDGE OF THE SUPREME COURT

On February 9, 1994, Ms. Hisako Takahashi, President of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, was appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court. This marks the first time a woman has been named to the post of Judge of the Supreme Court. With this appointment Ms. Takahashi resigns her post as President of the Forum. Ms. Yoshiko Misumi, Managing Director, will take over the duties of President until such time a successor can be named.

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

Several panelists from the "Population and Our Earth's Future" 4th Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women are now actively involved in the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in Cairo in 1994. That core of specialists on women's issues are serving as catalysts for change, a warm breeze welcomed by all.



Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

KITAKYUSHU INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTER
ASANO 3-9-30, KOKURA-KITA, KITAKYUSHU, 802 JAPAN
PHONE(093)551-1220 FAX(093)551-7535