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WOMEN TODAY.....p. 1

COVID-19 pandemic is a chance to promote gender equality

Osamu Kunii, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

CURRENT ISSUES SERIES.....p. 2

Climate Crisis and Gender (Part 2)

Kazuo Matsushita, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto University

FEATURES.....pp. 3-7

31st Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women
KFAW Asian Gender Researchers Network Seminar
Report from KFAW 30th Foreign Correspondent

Read *Asian Breeze* online:



COVID-19 pandemic is a chance to promote gender equality



Head
Strategy, Investment and Impact Division
The Global Fund to Fight AIDS,
Tuberculosis and Malaria

Osamu Kunii

Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by disasters and pandemics in the past. That is also the case in the COVID-19 crisis.

Lockdowns and stay-at-home orders due to the pandemic have brought homes originally considered the safest place into the hotbed of gender-based violence. Reports of domestic violence have tripled and the calls to helplines for domestic violence had increased seven times during the COVID-19 crisis. Nearly 1,000 women and girls were reported missing and are feared dead since a lockdown was imposed in a Latin American country. The United Nations is warning of it as “Shadow Pandemic.”

Nevertheless, even in the pre-COVID period, gender-based violence was one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world with at least one in three women experiencing it in a life time. Even in Switzerland, which according to Forbes in June 2020 has been ranked as the safest place in the world, more than 50 daily reported cases of domestic violence occurred in the pre-COVID period.

Moreover, as many women have to provide face to face services as essential workers like nurses and helpers, they are threatened by COVID-19. In Spain and Italy, about 70% of medical personnel infected with COVID-19 were women and many of their lives were lost.

Due to COVID-19 crisis, an estimated 25 million people would be unemployed, and up to 35 million could fall into working poverty, which could affect twice as many women working in the informal sector than men.

As women have been shouldering a disproportionate share of increasing responsibilities for managing the household related to their husbands’ work-at-home, children’s school and daycare closure, and special attention and care to the elderly at home, they have been forced more and more to quit their outside jobs. Caring for kids due to school or daycare closure with the subsequent income drop has hit single mothers hard.

Then what should we do? While various measures are needed to prevent gender-based violence, to protect victims, to minimize the burden of care for children and the elderly due to school and daycare closure, and to provide social protection for unemployed women, I would like to elaborate my views through my experience and work.

I believe we could turn this COVID-19 crisis into a chance to advance gender equality. For that purpose,

the following three points would be important.

First, we need to visualize what kind of gender issues exist exactly based on data, facts, and logic. We also need to show the significance of measures and the direction to move forward and sort everything out. I am engaged in breaking down of human rights barriers and gender issues related to HIV/AIDS. I have recognized the importance of identifying and visualizing the issues and findings specific to countries of concern while clearly showing the concrete action plans for solution or mitigation with relevant stakeholders.

Second, we need to get men and decision-makers involved and engaged in promoting gender equality. Working at home due to COVID-19 crisis has made men and decision-makers experience the challenging situations to balance work and life. A recent study shows that men who felt that the care for children and the elderly is very hard work are twice as many as women who felt the same, and about 40% of male respondents think that they need to contribute to domestic chores and affairs. While politicians, policy-makers, and senior managers in public and private sectors are also aware of such issues, now is the chance to change their norms, culture, and mindsets to promote gender equality.

Now people, families, societies, and countries are seeking their “new normal.”

This is the great opportunity to demonstrate what new normal life and society are for women, girls, LGBT, and other minorities to live a comfortable and decent life without feeling isolated, discriminated, or unfair. What we need is not just discussions but real actions to change and transform. I would like to continue to be a champion of gender equality.

Profile

Osamu Kunii has over 25 years of experience in global health, especially humanitarian assistance, infectious diseases control, reproductive, maternal and child health, health systems and policy through National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nagasaki University, Research Institute of Tropical Medicine, and UNICEF. He is currently in charge of 4 departments including Community, Rights and Gender Department in the Global Fund.

Climate Crisis and Gender (Part 2)



Professor Emeritus, Kyoto University
Kazuo Matsushita

The year 2020 began with a COVID-19 disaster and ended with a COVID-19 disaster. On the other hand, the damage caused by the climate crisis is also becoming apparent in the world. The climate crisis and the COVID-19 disaster are issues that affect the survival of humankind, and they are urgent issues that the international community must address in a coordinated manner. The destruction of ecosystems due to climate change and other factors is behind the outbreak of infectious diseases, and the globalization of economic activities is accelerating infectious diseases and climate change. The damage caused by these crises is amplified by social inequalities and disparities, and the most affected are the socially vulnerable and the poverty-stricken. There is a need to transition into an economic society that is less prone to infectious diseases and can avoid the climate change crisis.

Women are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change than men

According to Carbon Brief,¹ a recent review of studies empirically demonstrates that women are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change than men. The article summarises that among the 130 peer-reviewed studies analysed, 89 of them (68%) found that women are more affected by the health impacts associated with climate change than men. It quotes the example of heat waves in France, China, and India as well as of tropical cyclones in Bangladesh and the Philippines where women are more likely to die.

UN Women Japan Liaison Office² remarks that the underlying factor that makes women more vulnerable in crises and post-disaster situations is compound discrimination against women. For example, it draws on a study on the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh where the mortality rate for men aged 20-44 was 15 per 1,000 while the rate for women amounted to 71 per 1,000. It also reports that in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, more than 70% of the deaths from the 2004 tsunami were women. Likewise, 61% of the deaths from the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar were women.

1 Carbon Brief, Mapped: How climate change disproportionately affects women's health, 29 October 2020, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health>

2 UN Women Japan Liaison Office <https://japan.unwomen.org/ja/how-we-work/flagship-programme-initiative/risk-changing-climate>

Profile

Professor Emeritus of Kyoto University, Senior Fellow of the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), Chairman of the Japan Society for GNH Studies. Before holding these positions, worked at several institutions including the Ministry of Environment of Japan, the Environment Directorate of the OECD, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and as Professor of Global Environmental Policy at the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies of the Kyoto University. Major research areas are sustainability studies as well as climate change policies and global environmental policies from the viewpoint of environmental governance.

In addition, women are more likely than men to suffer from poor mental health, spousal abuse, and food insecurity in the aftermath of extreme weather events.¹ Carbon Brief quotes a specialist that this tendency has more to do with social gender roles than physiological differences, and climate change tends to exacerbate gender and other existing inequalities. An example of this is the impact of climate change on maternal health. Maternal health risks increase as a result of climate change impacts, often leading to reduced access to reproductive and maternal care services.

Addressing gender inequality is “critical” to climate adaptation

Carbon Brief further reports that efforts to improve gender inequality are critical to improving climate adaptation.³ It discusses research demonstrating that increasing the proportion of women in key positions in health care, education, and government will be effective in helping society as a whole adapt more quickly and appropriately to the impacts of climate change. Vulnerability to climate change impacts depends on factors such as income, occupation, and education. In many countries, women are more vulnerable to climate change impacts due to traditional social norms and structures that deprive them of access to resources, decision-making, and information. The article quotes a research analyst that societies with the most gender inequality are often most vulnerable to climate change. Conversely, countries with greater gender equality tend to take more proactive action against climate change and are thus less vulnerable to its adverse effects. There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between improving gender inequality and enhancing climate resilience, which helps to create a “virtuous circle of sustainable and equitable development.”

According to another quote in the article, climate policies also tend to progress when women are better represented in government. Women's representation in parliament can move countries to adopt more stringent climate change policies, which may lead to reduced CO₂ emissions.

3 Carbon Brief, Tackling gender inequality is ‘crucial’ for climate adaptation, 15 December 2020, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/tackling-gender-inequality-is-crucial-for-climate-adaptation>

31st Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women Climate Change and Gender

Date October 8, 2020

Location Zoom Webinar (online)

Live screening at Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE

The 31st Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women (KCAW 2020) was held on the theme of climate change and gender. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, this conference was, for the first time, held online via Zoom Webinar. It was also screened live at the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE, which allowed participants to choose a viewing method of their preference. The Webinar enjoyed registrations from all over the world with more than 190 participants, the highest number ever.

KCAW 2020 hosted two keynote speeches and two presentations by community-based organizations (CBOs). Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 13 (Climate Action) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were discussed. The first keynote speech was by Kunzang Lhamu, then-Director of the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in Bhutan, who spoke on the country's challenges and measures related to climate change and gender. It was followed by a second keynote speech by Emiko Murakami, Director of Business Promotion, Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon

Society, City of Kitakyushu, who introduced the City's projects to promote and develop low carbon society in Asia. Finally, two CBOs reported on their activities under the themes of "integrating women's perspectives in disaster shelter management" and "efforts to reduce global warming."

KFAW's new initiatives this year also included uploading to YouTube an archived video of the Webinar for a limited time. This allowed those who were not able to join the live Webinar to access the presentations for about a month in December 2020.

Keynote Speech 1

Climate change and gender: challenges and measures in Bhutan

Kunzang Lhamu, former Director of the National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Government of Bhutan (Currently Director General, Department of Employment and Human Resources, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources)



Kunzang Lhamu from Bhutan, a landlocked Himalayan country, gave a keynote speech on Bhutan's gender-responsive initiatives on climate change. Lhamu, a Royal Government of Bhutan's leading gender equality expert, had also contributed an opening article in *Asian Breeze*, issue 88. Due to the global spread of COVID-19, she was unable to come to Japan and hence joined us remotely via Zoom. Her speech was given in the form of a dialogue with Mitsuko Horiuchi, President of KFAW, which allowed the two to exchange opinions as well.

Lhamu is the former Director of the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), which is the nodal government agency to protect and promote the rights of women and children (i.e. national gender machinery) in Bhutan. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008) makes strong commitments towards eliminating all forms of discrimination and exploitation against women and children. The NCWC coordinates, formulates, monitors, reports, and advocates for gender-related interventions in the country.

Standing on the idea that aspiring for happiness is the goal of everyone, Bhutan bases every development policy on the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). This philosophy attempts to achieve a balance between material well-being and spiritual, emotional as well as cultural needs through a human-centered development approach. With regard to how GNH promotes gender equality and environment, one cannot be achieved without the other. In addition, Bhutan's constitution states that environmental stewardship is the duty of every citizen, mandating that at least 60% of the country be maintained under forest cover for all times to come. This contributes to Bhutan's being carbon neutral, with negative net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Bhutan is still new to integrating gender into climate actions, and examples of such recent initiatives include solar dryers as sustainable food preservation techniques, eco-stoves using less fuel wood, and waste recycling training for women and youths.

Gender gaps are particularly large in waste management sectors, and distinct gender roles are observed due to the fact that women take up household work and maintenance in most societies. For example, disposal and transport tend to be taken care of by men while waste sorting, picking, and cleaning at transfer centers are predominantly performed by women. In addition, women's engagement in the waste sector is often

informal with low or no wages. The lack of protection and job security are also issues.

Although Bhutan's National Waste Management Strategy emphasizes the need to integrate gender, institutional capacities to connect waste management, climate action, and gender issues are yet to be established. While efforts are being made to ensure equal gender representation in the Disaster Management Committee and to provide gender-conscious amenities and facilities, it is necessary to empower and train women to take on leadership roles, to participate actively in decision-making, and to be the change agents in climate action.

Despite the important role that women play in coping and adapting to the impacts of climate change, their voices are yet to be heard. We must acknowledge that women and men have different capacities which influence their contributions to adaptation, mitigation, and disaster risk management. As Lhamu concluded, women play a critical role in family and community life, making it all the more imperative to engage women in every stage of

climate decision-making.

Promoting women's inclusive, active, and meaningful participation in decision-making is also an important issue in Japan. In October 2020, the Suga administration announced a policy agenda to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050. KFAW hopes that this keynote speech provided the audience with an opportunity to learn from Bhutan's environmental measures and to reflect on how every citizen can work together, regardless of gender, to accomplish carbon neutrality in the next years to come.



Keynote Speech 2

Kitakyushu City's activities for green cities' promotion in Asia

Emiko Murakami, Director of Business Promotion, Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon Society

Emiko Murakami of the Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon Society presented the City's environmental initiatives to pursue the transition of Asia into a low carbon area. Having developed as an industrial city since the 20th century, Kitakyushu has a history of suffering from pollution during the 1950s. Facing serious damage caused by industrial pollution, women who are concerned about the health of their family launched a citizen's movement to demand action of businesses and the government. What is notable about this campaign is that these women investigated the situation and collected scientific data by themselves to back up their demands. Citizen's campaigns like this led the City to overcome its pollution and later apply its then-developed environmental technologies in international cooperation.

In recent years, the City of Kitakyushu has been working to establish an eco-town with the goal of creating a recycling-based society. Indeed, the amount of renewable energy generated in the city is the second largest in Japan. In addition, the City also utilizes its environmental technologies to work with Asian cities to help solve their pollution problems.

For example, in Surabaya, Indonesia, where large amount of waste used to be brought into landfills unsorted and thus causing odors, the City of Kitakyushu provided training on waste sorting and recycling in local communities. As a result, the situation improved gradually. The City also carried out a project to make compost from the sorted food wastes and to use it to grow greenery in the local communities. This enabled the Surabaya citizens to recognize the significance of waste sorting.

Kitakyushu also works with Davao City, Philippines, to address their waste-related problems. As availability of electricity is low in Davao, the energy-from-waste technology has been selected as one of the solutions. Murakami emphasized the necessity of waste sorting here as well since it plays a critical role in ensuring efficient energy generation. In order to make waste easier to burn, it is essential to recycle as much as possible.

Finally, in order to deliver environmental projects effectively, it is essential to carry out activities rooted in local communities. Since the best method for waste sorting and recycling is different from country to country, it is important to formulate measures that are practical for those who engage in daily waste sorting tasks. Therefore, Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon Society implements recycling policies that incorporate perspectives of women who often perform waste sorting at home. Murakami concluded that initiatives designed with women's perspectives tend to be more long-lasting and sustainable. Her presentation provided insights on the importance of women's participation in addressing waste-related issues.



Integrating women's perspectives in disaster shelter management

Kimiko Ōba, Director of KIZUNA Asakura Disaster Support Center for Mothers and Children

In July 2017, Asakura City in Fukuoka Prefecture suffered severe damage due to the Northern Kyushu Flood. Subsequently, Kimiko Ōba established KIZUNA Asakura Disaster Support Center for Mothers and Children as the first volunteer-run shelter designed specifically for women and children in Japan. In her presentation, she spoke about the importance of designing support with women's perspectives.

During the post-flood recovery process, gymnasiums were converted into shelters where nearly 100 people had to share the space to rest on the floor without air conditioners despite the hot summer weather. Among the evacuees, there were mothers, infants, and children who were under high stress from prolonged life in shelters.

One of the challenges at evacuation centers is support for persons requiring special care, such as the elderly, the disabled, the pregnant, infants, and foreign citizens with limited Japanese. Ōba saw the need to design support for each group as each has different needs for support and care. She also felt the importance of providing dedicated care for newborn babies and pregnant mothers as quickly as possible. This led her to open KIZUNA using a facility of a temporarily closed OB/GYN clinic.

Since KIZUNA uses a former obstetrician's office with private rooms, users were able to maintain their privacy,

which made it ideal as a shelter for women and children. In addition, vacant rooms provided free lodging for female volunteers from across the country. The center was also used as a base for providing services such as mental and physical care for users.

Ōba concluded her speech by expressing her hope that more centers like KIZUNA will be built across the world in the future.

Natural disasters can occur anytime, anywhere. Ōba's presentation provided an opportunity to think about what is necessary for creating a disaster-resilient society where the needs of each victim are respected.



Efforts to reduce global warming

Ryoko Kizawa, Director of the NPO GENKI Net for Creating a Sustainable Society

Ryoko Kizawa of the GENKI Net for Creating a Sustainable Society (GENKI Net) discussed their public awareness activities on waste sorting and recycling as well as on the importance of the "3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)," a key concept for promoting a recycling-based society. GENKI Net has been active since 1996 when waste-related problems became a social issue.

Goal 12 of the SDGs, i.e., Responsible Consumption, is pertinent to each one of us. Kizawa began her presentation by stating that now is the time for each person to change our awareness and behavior.

GENKI Net works in partnership with citizens, businesses, and governments. For example, there was a proposal made at GENKI Net's multi-stakeholder meeting to make medals for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games from regenerated metal collected from recycled small appliances. After being discussed at the subsequent meetings, this proposal was put into practice and became a nationwide project involving public participation.

GENKI Net is also engaged in community training on disposal of containers and packaging. In order to provide correct information even to those who are not interested

in recycling, the NPO has developed interesting, fun programs that attract people's attention and implements them frequently at community events. In developing such programs, they made special efforts to integrate women's knowledge and perspectives. GENKI Net actively encourages the effective use of word-of-mouth communication and youth participation as both are important to make local activities sustainable.

All of these activities contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases, which in turn leads to the mitigation of climate change.

Kizawa concluded that the NPO hopes to facilitate the creation of diverse recycling-based communities, not through criticism or conflict but through proposals incorporating citizen's perspectives and through provision of opportunities for community learning. In the post-Webinar questionnaire, some participants commented that they were strongly inspired and encouraged by how GENKI Net's activities are rooted in the community without blaming anyone. Kizawa's talk provided the audience with the opportunity to reflect on climate actions that each individual could take.

CEDAW and the SDGs: how can Japan move up on the Global Gender Gap Index ranking?

Date: November 14, 2020

Location: Zoom Webinar (online)
Live screening at Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE

Speakers: Hiroko Akizuki, Professor, Asia University;
Member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Yasuko Yamashita, Professor Emeritus, Bunkyo Gakuin University;
Co-President of the Japanese Association of International
Women's Rights



Hiroko Akizuki



Yasuko Yamashita

Hiroko Akizuki and Yasuko Yamashita, who are leading gender researchers, gave lectures on the link between the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The basic principle of the CEDAW is the transformation of stereotyped gender roles, i.e., establishment of complete gender equality. In addition, the Preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a statement reading “[The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets] seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.” This means that human rights and gender equality are like a horizontal skewer pertaining to all 17 SDGs. Understanding and acting on the CEDAW, therefore, relates closely to achieving the SDGs.

There are three key elements necessary to achieve full gender equality. First, to attain effective (and not just conceptual) gender equality. Under the Constitution of Japan, men and women are legally equal and the Civil Code of Japan guarantees the right to select the surname of either spouse at the time of marriage. In reality, however, 96% of married couple choose their husband's surname, which represents deeply ingrained patriarchy and misogyny. Second, to end discrimination in social customs and practices by individuals, organizations, and firms. Domestic quarrels, which were in the past regarded as something not to interfere in, are now recognized as domestic abuse, and the police intervene with appropriate action. Finally, to adopt interim special measures until gender equality is fully established. Although the law says to treat all persons equally, de facto gender inequality still exists against certain groups. Thus, the provision of favorable treatment for those weakly positioned is needed and does not carry out reverse discrimination.

Japan ranks 121st among 153 countries in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index. This is not only at the bottom of

the developed countries' rankings, but also among the lowest in the entire world. One of the major factors contributing to Japan's poor standing is the underrepresentation of women in politics. There is an urgent need to introduce a quota system that establishes a minimum number of female legislators to be elected into an assembly, as this would facilitate the reflection of women's perspectives and opinions in policies and bills as well as the enactment of legislation against any overarching, factual discrimination in the society. (According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, about two-thirds of the countries have adopted a quota system in various fields.)

While 2020 marks 35 years since the ratification of the CEDAW, its recognition rate in Japan is only 37.4% (2019). In addition, Japan still has not ratified its Optional Protocol (OP-CEDAW), which incorporates an individual complaints mechanism. This effectively nullifies the convention in Japan as the ratification of the OP-CEDAW is essential for the full enforcement of the CEDAW.

The CEDAW is not something in a distant world but a convention very closely related to our daily lives. We must consider both the CEDAW and the SDGs when we work to achieve the fundamental goal of gender equality.





No help for helping hands – Impact of COVID-19 on female domestic workers in India

Disha Arora (India)

An award-winning feminist documentary filmmaker and development communications specialist. Committed to challenging social systems and ideologies which promote gender-based discrimination. Produces films that highlight the impact of social structures on women's rights and tells stories of women who are re-writing the social narratives to fully realize their human rights and build a just and peaceful world.



COVID-19 has earned itself a popular tag of “pandemic of inequality.” This title rightly fits the virus as its effects vary according to the inequalities in place. The poor are suffering more; marginalized communities are more at risk while developed countries (except for few) can cope up better due to higher resources. This makes it clear that the effect of COVID-19 on different population groups is not uniform. Domestic workers are one such population group that has faced severe challenges due to COVID-19. This article examines the case of the impact of COVID-19 on female domestic workers in India.

Domestic labor in India

According to the ILO, around 3 million women in India are employed in domestic labor. However, this is a severe underestimation of the actual number of domestic laborers which is estimated to be in between 20 million to 80 million, thus suggesting that the exact number of female domestic laborers is also relatively high (source: ILO, 2020). The domestic labor group in India represents extreme marginalization which is defined by economic class, caste, urban migration etc. Women under this group face multiple disadvantages on account of socio-cultural conditions. Most of the labor laws in India do not apply to domestic laborers. Thus, the worsened impact of COVID-19 on female domestic workers is a combined effect of the absence of protective laws and socio-economic conditions.

Impact of COVID-19

Despite the predictability of this problem, it was not appropriately tackled at the macro-level, which resulted in several losses for this group.

Most of the domestic workers in India are migrants, and they (especially lower-income migrants) often do not own



Millions of female domestic workers were pushed into extreme poverty during COVID-19. PHOTO BY DIPLEENA SAIKIA

housing at the location they migrate to. Bearing rent of housing thus became a serious problem for domestic workers.

Another major crisis was the lack of food security caused by economic losses among the domestic labor class. Although the government announced the distribution of basic ration for low-income households, like many other workers in the Indian informal sector, women in domestic labor workforce face the lack of documentation (such as ration cards, residency proof etc.). This made many domestic laborers incapable of availing the benefits of specific government schemes started as a response to COVID-19.

Reasons for crisis

The biggest reason for this effect on women in the domestic labor force was the lack of any specific government sanctions for the target group. An indefinite nationwide lockdown was announced on March 23, 2020. This lockdown imposed several mobility and economic restrictions, making domestic laborers incapable of continuing their employment. Several Resident Welfare Associations imposed restrictions on the entry of domestic laborers into housing societies during the lockdown and even after that. Women in domestic labor workforce also faced stigma on account of being potential virus carriers, making their situation even more difficult.

Measures to alleviate the crisis

We can argue that the significant reason for crisis borne by female domestic laborers is the absence of specific state intervention. The approach to handle this crisis must be two-fold - immediate relief measures and long-term solutions. The immediate actions can include more inclusive economic packages for low-income groups, desensitization of community to remove the stigma against domestic workers, and the creation of alternate employment opportunities. The long-term solutions involve revamping of the informal sector by strengthening labor laws pertaining to this sector.



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Deadline: April 30, 2021

Two respondents will be selected to win an eco-gold bookmark with the motif of Kokura Castle. This bookmark is made locally from metal recovered from recycled appliances.

