

### **Women in Japan: Current Roles and Expectations** **3 December 2021 16:00-18:00 (JST) / 08:00-10:00 (CET)**

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**Rabea Brauer (Country Representative, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Japan Office)** gave opening remarks and expressed her gratitude to the moderator Shiori Kanno, Minister Seiko Noda, and other speakers. She mentioned the current gender situation in Japan, which lags behind the world, and shared the purpose of holding this event as an introduction to the 'Women in Japan' series, which will focus on the areas of politics, business, and society.

**Shiori Kanno (Chair, International Humanitarian Platform/ Former Member of the House of Representatives)** introduced the speakers and commenced the session as moderator.

#### **Women in Politics**

Keynote Speech: **Seiko Noda (Member, House of Representatives (LDP), Minister of State for Gender Equality)**

MP (Member of Parliament) Noda pointed out the fact that currently since 90% of the Japanese Diet members comprised of men, women and children's issues are not taken as priorities, and as such, many gender-related issues have been overlooked. She also raised the issue of the lack of women representation even in local assemblies, where everyday topics are more prominently discussed than in the Diet.

Dialogue: **Mari Miura (Professor of Political Science, Faculty of Law, Sophia University)** and Seiko Noda

Prof. Miura agreed on the impact of the 90% male percentage in the Diet, suggesting the inadequate legislation on harassment issues in Japan as an example. MP Noda mentioned that as a society, there is an increasing interest in discussing gender issues and that even in Japanese politics, there is a change in its landscape. Due to the increasing number of working married couples, the number of "politicians' wives" who are pushed to the forefront as supporters of their husbands during campaign season and usually treated as secretaries of their husbands is on the decline. In addition, male support for "unwanted non-marriage" (women who want to get married but are unable to) has also been recently added to the government's 'women support plan'. With regard to the question of how to increase the number of women in the local assembly, MP Noda pointed out the importance of recruiting and supporting women in each party and raising them as potential candidates. To do that, however, there is a need to create an environment where both women and men can participate, and nursing care, childbirth, childcare etc. have already started being included in the local assembly rules. Prof. Miura and MP Noda also discussed the impact of the electoral system on medium or small constituencies on female candidates, the prejudice that 'politics is for men', and the efforts to allow married couples to have the option to choose separate surnames.

#### **Women in Business**

Keynote Speech: **Keiko Hamada (Journalist and Former Editor-in-Chief, Business Insider Japan)**

Ms Hamada discussed why the number of women in management positions in Japan has not increased, stating that both the workplace (companies) and the home (society) are the reasons. She pointed out that even though the perspectives of the younger male generation are changing, the mindsets of male middle managers in their 40s and 50s have not changed. There are also structural problems that exist

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which discourage women from becoming managers and that instead of the 'glass ceilings' for women's advancement in the workplace, Ms Hamada shared the existence of 'glass clogs'<sup>1</sup> that men have that comes with networking at drinking parties. She also mentioned positive changes caused by COVID-19, such as the case of women returning to full-time work from part-time due to the 'new' work-from-home style.

Dialogue: **Machiko Osawa (Labour Economist and Professor Emeritus, Japan Women's University)** and Keiko Hamada

Prof. Osawa backed up her theory with data and discussed the situation where the main reason for women in Japan leaving their jobs is not childcare and housework but rather, dissatisfaction with their jobs and career impasse, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on the increasing number of young people who placed more importance on life than work. In support of this, Ms Hamada, through the interviews she conducted, shared the opinions of working mothers who said they wanted 'satisfaction' rather than 'kindness' from the systems that support balancing work and family life. In response to a question on how to change the Japanese working culture, Ms Hamada gave examples of how changes in society have eventually affected the working culture, while also mentioning examples of how 'changing the mindsets of husbands have changed society', as well as the importance of voting to express one's opinions. Prof. Osawa wrapped up the discussion for the panel by raising the need for dialogue on systems such as spousal deduction (tax breaks) that can lead to poverty among women and has restricted the way women work and live.

### Women in Society

Keynote Speech: **Kiri Minashita (Poet and Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Economics, Kokugakuin University)**

Prof. Minashita attributed the reason why the gender situation of women in Japan has not changed to the fact that gender inequality has not been made visible. She stated that some gender-related issues have been made visible by COVID-19, which is a sign that gender issues have come to be regarded as human rights issues in the general society. Prof. Minashita pointed out that despite women in Japan earning almost only half of men, they still played a big role in supporting the family budget. At the same time, she also raised the issue that the standards expected for household chores and childcare (by women) in Japan are the highest in the world.

Dialogue: **Chizuko Ueno (Sociologist, Gender Studies Specialist and Professor Emeritus, University of Tokyo)** and Kiri Minashita

Responding to Prof. Minashita's keynote speech, Prof. Ueno summarised that the gender issues made visible by COVID-19 were related to 'care' work and the 'physical body'. She then quoted the phrase, 'Give birth, raise a child, and work,' which describes the current double burden of women in Japan. As for outsourcing options for 'care' work, she presented the choices of 'marketisation' or 'publicisation'. In regards to which option Japan should take, Prof. Minashita pointed out that although the Japanese public would like to go for the 'publicisation' option, the government is steering the country towards the

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to men who are able to gain an advantage- clogs= gaining height- over women due to them being able to attend drinking sessions (which are mostly catered to men who don't have to traditionally participate in childcare unlike their women counterparts) and network with their superiors. 'Glass' taken from the term, 'glass ceiling'.

## Event Report



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'marketisation' option. Prof. Ueno also pointed out that the problem is that the tax system and social security system, which Prof. Osawa had pointed out in the earlier 'Women in Business' session, is not regarded as an issue in the first place.

#### **Discussion with all the speakers**

A discussion was held on how to outsource the 'care' work as pointed out by Prof. Ueno in the 'Women in Society' session earlier. The point that the Japanese government relies on self-help was pointed out, and the need for tax reform was reconfirmed.

Ms Kanno (moderator) concluded the session by showing her gratitude to the speakers.