

Chapter 12

Women

12-1 SDGs and Women’s Empowerment: Perspectives from Women’s Disaster Studies

When thinking about sustainability and local communities, it is essential to consider women’s perspectives and gender issues. This section introduces the concept of “Women’s Disaster Studies” which emerged from Miyagi following the Great East Japan Earthquake. It focuses on issues that became evident through the discussions of the Women’s Working Group on “SDGs and Miyagi,” as described further below.

1 What Is Women’s Disaster Studies?

Women’s Disaster Studies is an academic field, made up of practical and interdisciplinary expertise that draw from the realities on the ground involving women and disasters. The publication *Creating Women’s Disaster Studies* (Fumie Asano and Mutsuko Tendo, 2021, Seikatsu Shiso-sha) was prompted by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. Asano, who has been involved in supporting women in the affected areas since the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and Tendo (the author), who returned to her hometown of Miyagi in 2015 to teach women’s studies at a university, teamed up to launch a co-authored project that aimed to bring a female perspective to the study of disasters and the practice of disaster management. We created a new academic field called “Women’s Disaster Studies” by tracing back through the research and practices of civic groups that put women in the center, including groups that were active before and after the Great East Japan Earthquake in Miyagi and other parts of Japan. This was driven by our belief in the need to identify the various issues and background factors that women face whenever disasters occur, and to develop women’s studies as an academic and theoretical framework and a tangible, practical

tool to empower women to solve these issues.

In Japan, particularly after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, there has been a profusion of sociological and psychological research on disasters. While women’s perspectives have gradually been incorporated into these studies, there are still very few disaster studies that focus on women’s perspectives or gender issues. Moreover, disasters do not affect all people equally. Rather, the impact includes human-induced harm suffered by more vulnerable groups against a background of social vulnerability and structural inequality. Above all, it is the various gender disparities that lie beneath the surface in everyday life that emerge in times of disaster. The inequitable gender order that pervades social, economic, and political systems is revealed in the division of labor by gender roles in running evacuation centers; the emphasis on women’s household responsibilities; the uneven distribution of care responsibilities; the harm caused by domestic violence; biases in support systems resulting from male-centric norms regarding the heads of households; layoffs of women in non-regular employment; and the limited number of women involved in disaster management councils and reconstruction policy-making. In other words, in times of disaster, the veil that had previously covered such disparities is lifted, and gender issues built into the structure of society are brought to the surface all at once. It is not that gender issues had not existed before, but rather that there had been a failure to adequately address them in normal times.

As such, it is essential to make a conscious effort to incorporate democratic, civic engagement, and gender-equitable strategies throughout the reconstruction process and disaster prevention efforts. Women’s Disaster Studies argues that regularly giving voice to those who find it

difficult to speak up, and ensuring their dignity and rights as human beings, must be established as criteria for disaster prevention and reconstruction (*Creating Women's Disaster Studies*, pp. 14–15). This conception of Women's Disaster Studies can be applied to the SDGs and women's empowerment.

2 Women's Empowerment

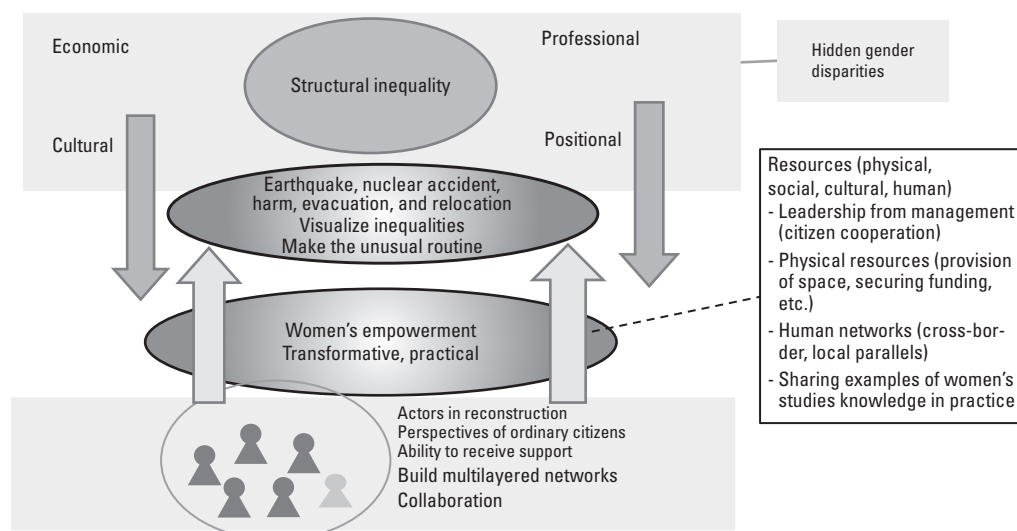
The “empowerment” of women means women themselves achieving power. This “power” refers not to authority from above, but a force of change and creativity produced by people connecting with each other and showing solidarity. In other words, it refers to the power of women at the grassroots acting in solidarity to change their own circumstances and positions: a bottom-up approach. This concept was popularized after the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985, and has been adopted worldwide. In Japan, this concept was introduced early by Muramatsu and others (Yasuko Muramatsu and Yasuko Muramatsu, eds., *Empowerment in Women's Studies*, Yuhikaku, 1995).

As shown in [Figure 12-1](#), the resources for empowering women are networks of mutual support; the extent of

physical resources (public and private support such as provision of space and financial resources) to create and maintain a place to work together; a shift from a relationship of support/receiving support to one of collaboration; and the sharing of practical wisdom in women's studies. Even if the power and resources of each individual are limited, by working together, speaking up, and moving forward while maintaining respect for the wishes of each individual, we can share and cultivate a deeper awareness of the issues and open the way for improvement and change. When these networks connect across perspectives and disciplines, it offers the possibility of building multilayered networks that transcend the boundaries of corporations, local governments, and even countries (Asano and Tendo, *Creating Women's Disaster Studies*, pp. 165–168).

Women's empowerment has become a key concept in international indicators of gender equality. A well-known example is the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s *Human Development Report*. The UNDP published the GEM until 2009, with Japan ranking 57th out of 109 countries in the 2009 edition. The 2010 edition of the *Human Development Report* replaced the GEM with a new Gender Inequality Index (GII).

Figure 12-1: A practical model of women's empowerment



Source: Adapted from *Creating Women's Disaster Studies* (Asano and Tendo, 2021, p.166)

The GII quantifies the level of gender equality based on three dimensions and five indicators: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate), empowerment (gender ratio of legislators and gender ratios in primary and secondary education), and the labor market (women’s labor market participation rate). Recently, Japan ranked 24th out of 162 countries in the GII (2020). Japan’s low maternal mortality ratio and low adolescent birth rate (the rate of pregnancy and childbearing among women aged 15-19) are some of the factors that boosted its ranking in the GII (*UNDP Human Development Report 2020*, Gender Equality Bureau 2021) (**Table 12-1**).

Another index that measures global gender equality is the Gender Gap Index (GGI), published annually by the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WEF Gender Gap Index reflects the inequality between men and women based on the four areas of politics, economics, education, and health. Specifically, these areas cover political power (representation in decision-making structures), economic participation and opportunities (salaries, participation levels, and employment opportunities in technical jobs), opportunities provided from basic to higher education, and health and life expectancy.

As shown in the table, Japan ranks 120th out of 156 countries (116th out of 146 countries in 2022) in the ranking announced in 2021, the lowest among the G7 countries (**Table 12-1**). Japan scored particularly low in the areas of politics and the economy. The proportion of women in the House of Representatives is less than 10% (9.7% in November 2021), which is extremely low compared to other countries. In the area of the economy, the income gap between men and women and the small number of women in managerial positions have a major impact (*Global Gender Gap Report 2021*).

Japan ranks near the top in education, health, and health care, with no disparities in literacy rates and primary and secondary education, although there are some challenges in higher education such as the low rates of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Given that enrollment in higher education affects the choice of profession, career development, economic independence, and lifetime wages, gender equality in education is an important issue for Japan (**Figure 12-2**).

The absence and paucity of women in decision-making positions in the public sector is not limited to the political sphere. As shown in **Figure 12-3**, the percentage of women in decision-making positions in many fields, such as in the legal profession (judges, prosecutors, and lawyers), in education (school principals), and in management positions in private companies, remains below 30%. The proportion of women on local disaster management councils is also low.

Table 12-1: Comparison of countries using the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP) and the Gender Gap Index (WEF)

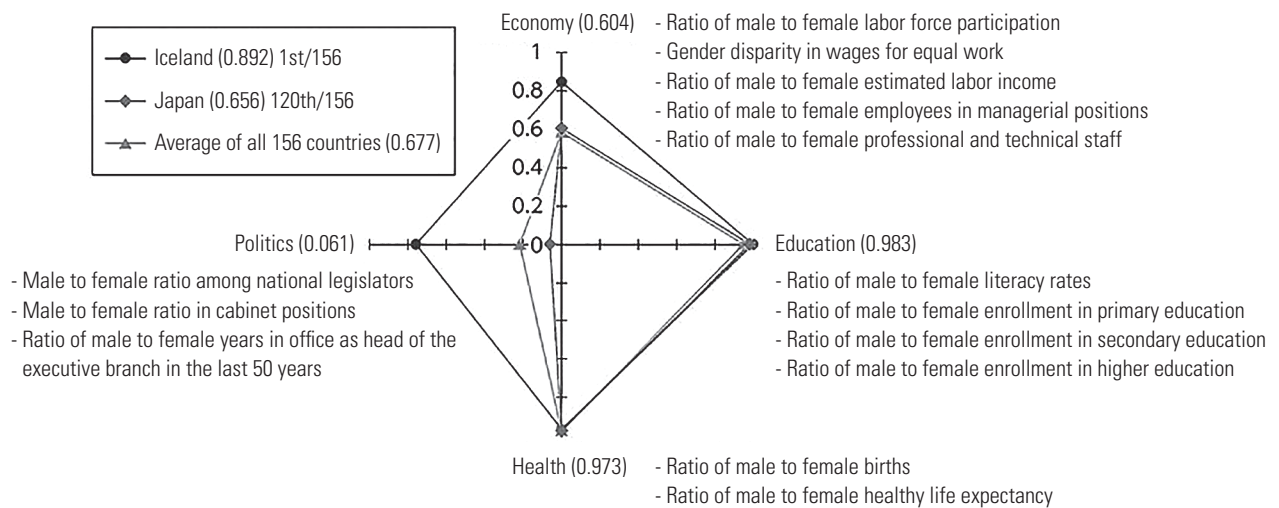
GII (UNDP) ranking			GGI (WEF) ranking		
Ranking	Country	GII score	Ranking	Country	GII score
1	Switzerland	0.025	1	Iceland	0.892
2	Denmark	0.038	2	Finland	0.861
3	Sweden	0.039	3	Norway	0.849
4	Belgium	0.043	4	New Zealand	0.84
4	Netherlands	0.043	5	Sweden	0.823
6	Norway	0.045	6	Namibia	0.809
7	Finland	0.047	7	Rwanda	0.805
8	France	0.049	8	Lithuania	0.804
9	Iceland	0.058	9	Ireland	0.800
10	Slovenia	0.063	10	Switzerland	0.798
11	Republic of Korea	0.064	...	...	...
...	...	...	17	Philippines	0.784
24	Japan	0.094	...	...	...
25	Australia	0.097	23	United Kingdom	0.775
...
31	United Kingdom	0.118	29	Denmark	0.768
...	...	...	30	United States of America	0.763
46	United States of America	0.204	—	—	—
...
101	Colombia	0.428	120	Japan	0.656

Source: Based on UNDP, *Human Development Report 2020*, World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, as cited in the *White Paper on Gender Equality 2021*, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office

A certain percentage of women in decision-making positions and the political sphere is not only important for women's rights, but also provides an opportunity for diversity and the possibility of change in the very essence of governance, unbound by existing conventions and

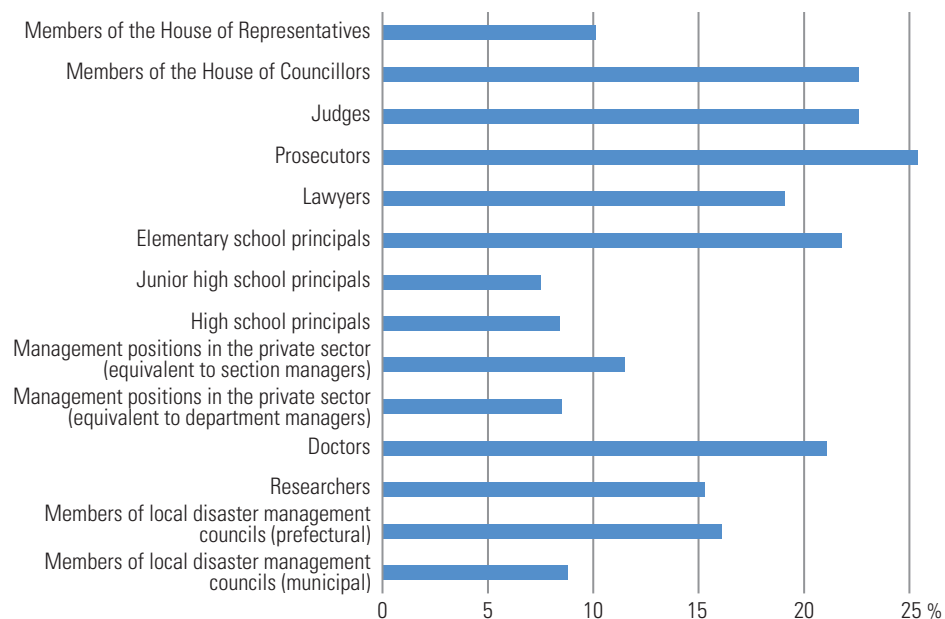
entrenched value systems. As such, women's empowerment is essential to the creation of a society in which no one is left behind (Mutsuko Tendo, *Women's Empowerment and the Future of Education*, Toshindo).

Figure 12-2: Japan's position in the four areas of the Gender Gap Index (WEF)



Source: Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, *White Paper on Gender Equality 2021*

Figure 12-3: Percentage of women in each field in Japan



Source: Compiled by the author based on the *White Paper on Gender Equality 2021* and other sources

3 SDGs and Women in Miyagi: Current Status and Challenges

SDGs and gender equality: As a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Agenda 2030 and the SDGs were developed to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and the environment. In the SDGs, gender equality and women’s empowerment are prerequisites for eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting health, and finding ways to address inequality and violence against women.

As noted in Chapter 1, 1-1 of this volume, SDG 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” has various targets for eliminating discrimination and violence against women, ending harmful practices such as underage marriage, recognizing and valuing unpaid labor such as care and domestic work, ensuring opportunities for participation in decision-making and leadership, and guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. It also targets reforms to provide women with equal rights to economic resources, enhanced use of enabling technologies, including ICT, and the adoption of legal frameworks to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The eight goals set forth in the MDGs to be achieved by 2015 were: 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) Achieve universal primary education; 3) Promote gender equality and empower women; 4) Reduce child mortality; 5) Improve maternal health; 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) Ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) Promote global partnerships for development. Although the MDGs included human rights for women, as well as education, reproductive health, and other areas closely associated with women, they were primarily targets for developing countries. Conversely, the SDGs are universal goals that all countries, including developed countries, should address. It should also be noted that the SDGs aim to “realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” (*Preamble to the 2030 Agenda*) from the perspective of each individual, not just at the national level. If we relate this to the situation in Japan and Miyagi Prefecture, it is also an opportunity to reconsider what was needed and what was left out of the post-disaster reconstruction process, as well as the disadvantages and

pressures that COVID-19 placed on women, particularly in terms of employment and livelihoods.

Women’s Working Group set up for the SDGs Miyagi Model project: The Women’s Working Group was launched in 2020, during a period overshadowed by a looming sense of crisis due to the spread of COVID-19 and the measures put in place to address it. Under the leadership of Megumi Ishimoto of the Indicator Team and using online meetings, women and men living and working in Miyagi Prefecture brought their experience and knowledge to the discussions on women-related indicators aimed at achieving the core objective of the SDGs (see 12-2 in this chapter). What was impressive was that the process of creating the indicators embodied a participatory citizen-led “gender democracy,” with vigorous discussions that took regional characteristics and local needs into account. In particular, gender statistics were examined to determine what was sufficient and what was lacking.

Gender statistics are statistics that make gender disparities and discrimination quantitatively visible, which are necessary for an objective understanding of the discriminatory situation in which women are placed (UN Women, *Strategic Plan*). To obtain objective information on the actual conditions and needs of women, it is vital to develop gender statistics, including the collection and analysis of gender-specific data based on the results of individual and fact-finding surveys. For example, when trying to ascertain the actual conditions facing women, there are cases where the data is grouped by household unit, making it impossible to ascertain differences in the attitudes of women and men in the household or the status of individual women. In the case of “women-related indicators” for Miyagi, it was difficult to obtain gender-specific data on regional movement (inward and outward) and municipality-specific statistics, such as the percentage of women in the medical workforce and the amount of time men spend doing household chores and childcare.

It would also be useful to visualize the extent of women’s participation in disaster prevention and reconstruction. There are interesting findings on gender-sensitive disaster response efforts from a survey of local governments across Japan on disaster prevention (Mari Osawa, ed., *Disaster*

Prevention and Mitigation and Gender Equality, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, 2019). A comparative analysis between municipalities which had no female members on disaster management councils (279 municipalities) and which had 10% or more female members on disaster management councils (294 municipalities) found that municipalities with 10% or more female members showed greater concern about certain aspects of evacuation centers, such as ensuring privacy, providing barrier-free and universal access, preventing violence against women and sexual harassment, and mental health care. In addition, the presence of female members led to guidelines that widely reduced disaster risks and improved their effectiveness, such as including allergy-friendly foods and disposable diapers in emergency stockpiles.

Nevertheless, the proportion of women in prefectural and municipal disaster management councils remains low at 16.1% and 8.8% respectively (in 2020). This is also the case for prefectural disaster management councils in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, with Iwate at 19.7%, Miyagi at 15.5%, and Fukushima at 16.7%. Although the Japanese government has postponed its goal of achieving “30% female leadership by 2020,” perhaps this will serve as a turning point for creating a society where women’s participation and leadership are commonplace in all fields, leading to better community resilience.

4 Women’s Empowerment and “Human Recovery”

As time has passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, I sometimes reflect on the SDGs and the issues facing Miyagi, local communities, and women, and wonder: “Does recovery have a human face?” As mentioned above, the extraordinary nature of disasters brings to light gender inequalities that are usually hidden. Normal times and emergencies are contiguous.

Women’s Disaster Studies emphasizes the need to incorporate women’s perspectives into the process of disaster prevention, disaster, and recovery, but simply “adding women” does not create the power for change. In addition to including women’s voices in the disaster recovery process, it is essential to focus on issues affecting not

only women, but also other people who face difficulties in society, and to engage in future-oriented discussions and proposals on how to create a better society.

How can the example of Miyagi be used? The Human Security Indicators related to women in Miyagi Prefecture, including the dire results, gave me a lot to think about. The low birth rate in the Life Index (32nd) and the low employment rate of women in the Livelihood Index (45th) stand out in particular.

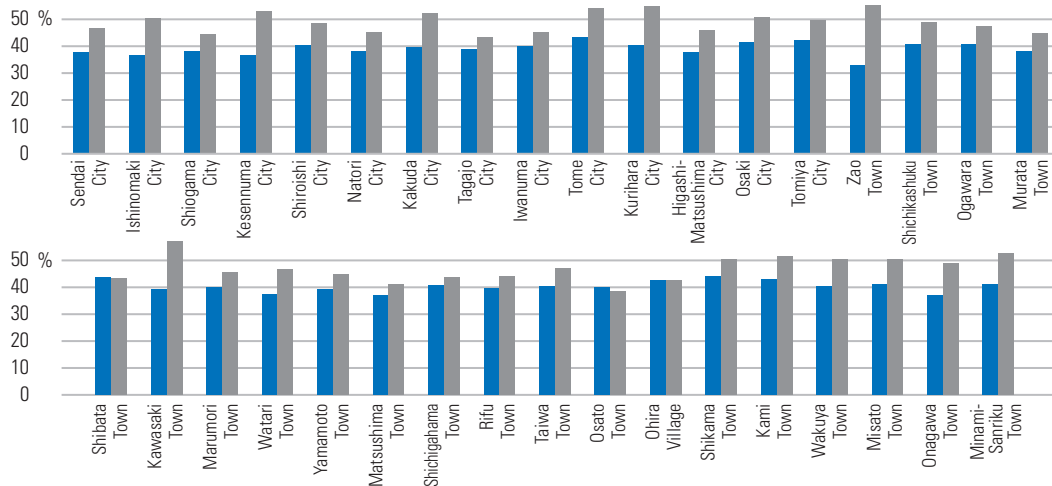
In terms of the Life Index, rather than being pleased or disappointed with the rankings or trying to increase the birth rate, local governments must listen to the needs of municipal and prefectural residents and foster an environment conducive to giving birth and raising children.

Regarding the Livelihood Index, the low overall employment rate of women in the prefecture, as well as the low proportion of women in regular employment, reflect their difficult situation (Figure 12-4). The high rate of women in non-regular employment (54.4% for women and 22.2% for men in 2020) is an issue for Japan as a whole, and as such, we must not only foster a workplace culture that develops female managers, but also create work environments where no one is left behind, create opportunities for employment and re-employment, and maintain a human rights approach that ensures that people can work and live with dignity, even in times of emergency.

In addition, livelihood support for single-parent families, especially single mothers, is also a pressing issue. In a survey conducted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, 60.8% of single parents reported that their living conditions were “difficult” (see 12-3 in this chapter).

In terms of women’s dignity, the number of domestic violence consultations in Miyagi remains high (2,863 cases in 2019). Although the problem of domestic violence existed before, the disaster prompted an increase in the number of consultations, and with the call for people to “stay home” during the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women in the home has become a global issue, dubbed a “shadow pandemic” (UN Women 2021). Preventing and dealing with domestic violence and invisible inequalities within households requires urgent action beyond the boundaries of public/private and local/global.

Figure 12-4: Rate of working females out of total female population (blue, Indicator C10) and percentage of female workers that are regular employees (gray, Indicator C11), for each municipality in Miyagi Prefecture.



Source: 2015 National Census

According to the survey of Miyagi Prefecture residents carried out for this volume, there are also gender differences in subjective evaluations of self-affirmation among the prefecture’s residents. Regionally, there are indications of differences in subjective evaluations (self-fulfillment and social connectivity) between the Sendai Metropolitan Zone, other areas, and areas that were severely affected by the earthquake (e.g., coastal areas) (see Chapter 3, 3-4 and 3-5).

beyond positions and arguments and includes people who make up the community, specifically individual citizens, neighborhood associations, local governments, disaster management councils, people working toward gender equality, disaster prevention leaders, government officials, council members, local businesses, NPOs, people involved in schools and childcare, volunteers, citizen groups, students, and children.

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Initiating change from Miyagi: With regard to gender equality, concrete measures that can be taken promptly by local governments include: 1) promote gender equality, including the prevention of domestic violence and child abuse, in other words, expand “human recovery” at the administrative level while being aware of human dignity; and 2) through community development that harnesses women’s voices, increase the number of female members of public bodies such as advisory councils, and develop local female leaders without being hindered by gender roles.

It is precisely in difficult situations such as disasters that the question of how to achieve “human recovery” based on human dignity and the empowerment of citizens is raised. Discussions and proposals to visualize “women’s experiences” from the disaster-affected areas and to achieve a gender-equal society will be born out of a network of future-oriented collaboration that goes

12-2 Resident-led Development of Assessment Criteria for Gender Equality Promotion by Local Governments

1 Women's Issues from the Perspectives of Those Involved

When asked, “What are the issues that you, as women living in Miyagi Prefecture, have seen and heard about in your own lives,” the eight women who had gathered at our event offered an array of opinions. These women represented different generations, occupations, and communities. A woman in her 30s opened the conversation by saying, “I moved to Sendai a few years ago, and unlike in Tokyo, I am having trouble finding a babysitter.” In response, another woman who had finished raising her child and who was concerned about the other woman’s isolated environment, asked, “It must be hard raising a child knowing so few people. Are you all right?” Yet another woman familiar with information on childcare facilities promised to provide her with information later. A woman living in a coastal area in the northern part of the prefecture said, “Because this is a strongly male-dominated area, I need my husband’s permission even to buy a computer. He says, ‘Why do you need one when I don’t even have one?’” Women living near that area nodded their heads, while those living in urban areas, such as Sendai and its suburbs, were surprised. Even within the same prefecture, the economy, employment, culture, and customs are quite different between the urban area where the prefectural government is located, and the farming, mountain, and fishing villages in remote mountainous and coastal areas. “Women are continually told to give birth, raise children, and provide nursing care, and they are expected to do so. And parenting, too, is often spoken about in terms of men helping more, but instead of helping, isn’t parenting supposed to be something men themselves do too?” Women from all regions of the prefecture nodded their heads repeatedly when they heard these remarks.

I would also like to share some other issues of concern that people raised:

“We hear a lot more about domestic violence in areas far away from the cities, but there are no facilities for victims of domestic violence in these areas.”

“When women have children, the subject of every sentence tends to be ‘the children’, but I think there need to be more opportunities to think and talk about things as a woman, not just through the lens of children.”

“I feel that teenage girls are being left behind in the coastal areas after the disaster.”

“In farming, mountain, and fishing villages where the population continues to decline, there are no obstetricians or places to give birth, and women must drive more than an hour each way to go to the hospital.”

“There are many dysfunctional families where the parents are present, but the family is not functioning. Support for the children is required. These kinds of consultations have been increasing during the pandemic.”

“Teenage births are more common in rural areas. Early marriage and early childbirth can lead to girls being deprived of the right to learn.”

The issues discussed by these women are not limited to the cities and villages of Miyagi Prefecture but are common to all regions of Japan.

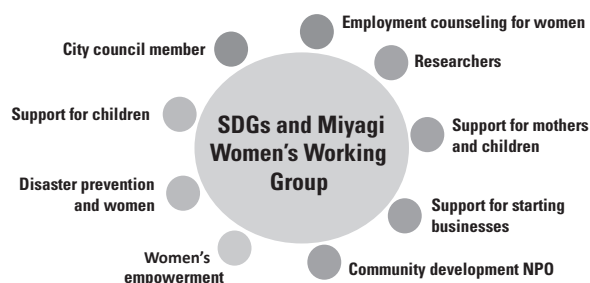
(1) Launch of the “SDGs and Miyagi” Women’s Working Group

The first discussion of the “SDGs and Miyagi” Women’s Working Group was held in October 2020 in Sendai City and online, with invitations extended to women involved in any kind of activities related to women in Miyagi Prefecture. The discussion described at the beginning of this section was from this meeting. Because this was around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the second and subsequent sessions were held mainly online. Despite

being in the same prefecture, the 128 km distance from Kesennuma City in the northern part of the prefecture to Sendai City in the center takes about two hours to travel by car. Holding the discussions online therefore lowered the barriers for people from outlying areas to participate. These discussions were held once a month until March 2021. We identified issues and discussed how we could visualize those issues, and what data we could suggest for indicators regarding women. Several new members were added, including a woman who runs a childcare-related NPO and a male city council member who was concerned about child poverty and support for single mothers (Figure 12-5).

The genesis of these discussions can be traced to when I was asked to propose women-related indicators for the SDGs Miyagi Model (Human Security Indicators for Miyagi Prefecture). To illustrate the challenges facing women based on prefectural data in *SDGs and Japan*, we sought advice from women with expertise and on-the-ground experience in research, NPOs, government, and other fields. To propose indicators which help visualize the issues facing women in the 35 cities, towns, and villages of Miyagi Prefecture, we came up with the idea of having local women create these indicators themselves. This is because most of those involved in decision-making in local government are men, and because we perceived a disconnect between the issues discussed by women in the community and the issues addressed at the municipal government level.

Figure 12-5: Main participants in the “SDGs and Miyagi” Women’s Working Group



Indicators are an effective tool to convey disparities and issues in terms of specific standards and objective data. However, the hurdles regarding indicators and data can be high, even for women who are aware of the issues. Sometimes indicators have difficult names, and are handed down from above to people who are not familiar with

them. No matter how important the indicators are, they do not have an instinctive connection to the issues women face in their daily lives. That is why we needed a working group to perform a series of tasks: to communicate the issues women experience in their daily lives in their own words, to find municipality-level data representing the issues to communicate them to others, and to use that data to develop indicators. As the work was done in a short period of about four months, many issues and indicators could not be included due to time limitations and lack of data. However, the most valuable aspect of this effort was the discussion and decisions made by residents engaged in a wide range of activities throughout the prefecture, and the process of generating ideas, researching, and discussing was worthwhile in itself.

It was this working group that drafted the parts relating to women in the Miyagi Human Security Indicators, which were published in March 2021. In this section, I would like to elaborate on the “criteria for evaluating the promotion of gender equality,” which was proposed as one of the indicators relating to women.

(2) Assessment Criteria for Gender Equality Promotion by Local Governments

The “SDGs and Miyagi” Women’s Working Group proposed criteria to evaluate the promotion of gender equality by local governments to visualize how committed they are to that goal. There are still many areas, not only in Miyagi Prefecture but throughout Japan, where gender roles are divided and misogynistic attitudes and customs persist. To resolve the issues faced by women living in a given community and to eliminate gender disparities, it is necessary not only for women themselves to change their attitudes and behavior, but also for the environment and institutions surrounding women in the community to change. This has been keenly felt through the 10 years of experience on the ground at Women’s Eye, an NPO based in Tome and Minami-Sanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, that has continued to pursue women’s empowerment since the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

The “SDGs and Miyagi” Women’s Working Group created seven assessment criteria to compare the status of gender equality promotion efforts in the 35 municipalities of Miyagi Prefecture (Table 12-2). All assessments were scored on a 3-point scale.

Table 12-2: Criteria to assess gender equality promotion

		3 points	2 points	1 point
Criterion 1	There is a basic plan for gender equality	There is a plan and it includes at least two of both current and target values	There is a plan and it includes at least one current or target value	There is no plan
Criterion 2	A survey on attitudes toward gender equality and the actual gender equality situation has been conducted (in the past 5 years)	Conducted regularly	Not conducted regularly, but has been conducted	Not conducted
Criterion 3	There is a basic plan based on the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims	There is a plan	—	There is no plan
Criterion 4	There are gender equality ordinances	—	Yes	No
Criterion 5	There is a center for gender equality activities. Gender equality-related initiatives are actively conducted (lectures, events, training sessions, consultation services, etc.)	There is a center and initiatives are active	There is a center but initiatives are sporadic/ There is no center but initiatives are active	There is no center and no initiatives/There is a center but initiatives are not active
Criterion 6	Gender equality is publicized in government information magazines (in the past 5 years)	Frequently every year/Every year	Frequently some years	Some years/Not at all
Criterion 7	Gender equality awareness materials and publications are published (in the past 5 years)	Frequently every year/Every year	Some years	Not at all

(3) Our Approach to the Assessment Criteria for Gender Equality Promotion by Local Governments

<Criterion 1> There is a basic plan for gender equality

Initially, the plan was to use the presence or absence of a plan as the criterion. However, after comparing the plans of the 23 cities/towns, we found significant differences in content, leading us to conclude that the assessment could not be based solely on whether a plan existed or not. One example would be a plan that only states abstract ideals such as the goal of a gender-equal society, but does not include specific figures or measures. There were also plans that only set numerical targets for “citizens’ awareness of the term ‘gender equality’” and “degree of realization of gender equality,” but no figures on things like the percentage of women in decision-making positions. Several plans provided current values, such as percentages of women on councils and committees, but no target values. On the other hand, some plans included a number of figures and specific measures to capture the current situation. As this indicates, despite all of these being “basic plans for gender equality,” their content varied significantly. As a result, it was decided that in addition to the presence or absence of a plan, the criteria would also cover whether and to what extent the plan included current or target values on

issues. We compared the extent to which the plans of the 23 cities/towns that had them included current and target values, using a three-point scale: (1) existence of a plan, (2) inclusion of at least one current or target value, and (3) inclusion of at least two of both current and target values.

As of 2020, the national percentage of municipalities with gender equality plans was 98.3% for cities and 69.4% for towns and villages (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office). In Miyagi Prefecture, the percentage of cities with gender equality plans was 100%, but the figure for towns and villages was 42.9%, 26.5% lower than the national average (Table 12-3).

<Criterion 2> A survey on attitudes towards gender equality and the actual gender equality situation has been conducted (in the past 5 years)

We established a hypothesis that a municipality that is serious about resolving gender issues would first survey its residents’ attitudes toward gender equality and make efforts to understand the actual situation. In the past five years, 14 cities/towns had conducted surveys and 21 cities/towns/villages had not. Of the 14 cities/towns that had conducted a survey, 3 did so annually, and 11 had done so in the past but not annually. The period of “the past five years” was set based on the assumption that attitudes and conditions may change significantly after more than five years pass.

Table 12-3: Assessment of gender equality promotion in the 35 municipalities in Miyagi Prefecture (municipalities with plans, %)

		Cities (14)	Towns/ villages (21)	Total (35)	Cities	Towns/ villages	Total
Criterion 1	There is a basic plan for gender equality	14	9	23	100.0 %	42.9 %	65.7 %
Criterion 2	A survey on attitudes toward gender equality and the actual gender equality situation has been conducted (in the past 5 years)	10	4	14	71.4 %	19.0 %	40.0 %
Criterion 3	There is a basic plan based on the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims	14	9	23	100.0 %	42.9 %	65.7 %
Criterion 4	There are gender equality ordinances	10	2	12	71.4 %	9.5 %	34.3 %
Criterion 5	There is a center for gender equality activities. Gender equality-related initiatives are actively conducted (lectures, events, training sessions, consultation services, etc.)	13	12	25	92.9 %	57.1 %	71.4 %
Criterion 6	Gender equality is publicized in government information magazines (in the past 5 years)	10	6	16	71.4 %	28.6 %	45.7 %
Criterion 7	Gender equality awareness materials and publications are published (in the past 5 years)	10	7	17	71.4 %	33.3 %	48.6 %

**<Criterion 3>
There is a basic plan based on the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims**

In recognition of the fact that domestic violence is a violation of human rights, the 23 cities/towns that have a plan to prevent domestic violence received the maximum score of 3 points, while the 12 towns/villages with no plan received the minimum score of 1 point.

**<Criterion 4>
There are gender equality ordinances**

The 12 cities/towns with ordinances received 2 points, and the 23 cities/towns/villages without ordinances received 1 point. While appreciating the importance of enacting ordinances, the score did not use the maximum of three points in recognition of the hurdles that municipalities face in enacting ordinances.

**<Criterion 5>
There is a center for gender equality activities
Gender equality-related initiatives are actively conducted (lectures, events, training sessions, consultation services, etc.)**

While there were some municipalities where gender equality-related initiatives were inactive despite having a center, there were also those with no center but active initiatives. Therefore, although the Working Group agreed that it is important to have a local center for gender equality initiatives, it was decided to differentiate the points

according to the state of the initiatives. Accordingly, the results were divided into three categories: (1) 4 cities with centers and active initiatives, (2) 21 cities/towns/villages with centers and occasional initiatives, or no center but active initiatives, and (3) 10 cities/towns with no centers and no initiatives, or with centers but no active initiatives.

**<Criterion 6>
Gender equality is publicized in government information magazines (in the past 5 years)**

We compared the number of times in the past five years that information on gender equality had been published in local governments’ information magazines, or when newsletters on gender equality had been issued. There was considerable variation in publicity regarding gender equality: frequently every year; about once a year but every year; frequently some years; once only; and not at all. Accordingly, the results were rated on a 3-point scale: (1) 11 cities/towns/villages that engaged in publicity frequently; (2) 5 cities/towns that did it occasionally; and (3) 19 cities/towns that did not do it very often. Although websites are very important from the viewpoint of access to information, not everyone visits them. Therefore, in terms of outreach to households in the local community, we decided to focus on whether or not gender equality was publicized in sources that are reliably delivered to each household, such as local governments’ information magazines.

<Criterion 7>

Gender equality awareness materials and publications are published (in the past 5 years)

The working group considered it important not only for a basic plan for gender equality to be established but also for it to be publicized and awareness raised accordingly. A comparison of the frequency of publication of promotional and educational materials and publications on building a gender-equal society over the past five years showed considerable variation: frequently every year; about once a year but every year; not every year but some years frequently; only once; and not at all. Accordingly, the results were rated on a 3-point scale: (1) 7 cities/towns that frequently conducted public awareness campaigns; (2) 10 cities/towns/villages that occasionally conducted such campaigns; and (3) 18 cities/towns that did not conduct such campaigns very often.

(4) Issues to Be Addressed

The members of the Working Group agreed to include gender budgets in the assessment criteria for local governments' promotion of gender equality. However, the process of identifying budget items that fell under the category of gender budget was time-consuming, so this could not be included in the assessment this time around. In the discussion on why gender budgets are important, we thought that since solving problems always involves policies, a comparison of whether a budget is gender-related or gender-conscious would be a symbolic criterion for gauging whether a municipality is serious about promoting gender equality, now or in the future. We also discussed the idea of holding a public study session for the "SDGs and Miyagi" Women's Working Group once the pandemic subsided, as well as compiling a list of items for which gender-disaggregated data could not be found.

Written by Megumi Ishimoto

12-3 Impoverishment of Single-Mother Households during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Report from the Research Project on Single Mothers in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Economic Situation of Single-Mother Households

As COVID-19 spread in Japan, there were widespread reports of impoverishment among single-mother households. It is estimated that there are 1,419,000 single-parent households in Japan, of which 1,232,000 are single-mother households and 187,000 are single-father households. Although the employment rate of single mothers is high at 81.8%, about half of them (46.5%) are in non-regular employment, their average annual income from work is 2 million yen, and the rate of receipt of child-support payments is only 24% (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), *FY2016 Nationwide Survey on Single Parent Families*). The poverty rate for single-parent households is 48.3% (MHLW, *2019 Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions*), and many households were in a difficult financial situation even before the pandemic.

2 "Single Mother Survey Project" Launched during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The "Single Mother Survey Project" was initiated in the hope of gathering data on the current situation of single-mother households in the COVID-19 pandemic so that the necessary support could be provided as soon as possible. Although a state of emergency was declared in April 2020 in seven prefectures and there were reports of a significant number of single-mother households falling into poverty, it was necessary to collect data on a broader scale and on an ongoing basis. This project was therefore launched in May 2020, together with members of organizations that had been providing support and policy advocacy for single-mother households from before the pandemic, researchers specializing in women's

employment and poverty among women and children, and those who have long worked on gender issues in Japan.

The survey was sent by e-mail to single mothers who subscribe to member organizations of the Certified NPO “Single Mothers’ Forum” and the “National Council of Single Mother Support Groups.” An initial survey was conducted in July 2020 (referred to hereinafter as the “1,800-person survey”), focusing on questions about the impact of COVID-19 on employment, daily life, and children. This was followed by a panel survey with 539 respondents, drawn from the 1,800-person survey, who had expressed their willingness to cooperate over the course of the next year. The panel survey was conducted monthly from August 2020 to July 2021. Approximately half of the panel survey respondents lived in Tokyo and the other half in other areas of Japan.

3 Collecting Data during the COVID-19 Pandemic

First, the survey team developed draft questions for the 1,800-person survey. They discussed the importance of understanding the current situation as soon as possible and conducting ongoing surveys to determine the economic and social situation of single mothers whose incomes had been reduced or who had lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, and how their children had been affected. Discussions led to an investigation focusing on changes in income, employment status, living conditions, and children’s situations. In addition, the emphasis of the survey was to collect data that would be useful not only for emergency assistance but also for addressing structural problems.

Poverty among single-mother households is directly related to underlying structural gender issues in Japanese society. Even if a woman is the breadwinner in a single-parent household, she should not be in poverty as long as she earns sufficient income. While the social security system should guarantee a minimum standard of living for those who are unable to earn enough to support their children, the reality is that this is not the case. Discussions were held on what needs to be identified to change the current situation so that single-mother households do not fall into poverty, whether in normal times or in emergencies.

4 What the 1,800-Person Survey Revealed (July 2020)

A total of 2,119 responses were gathered in the 1,800-person survey conducted in July 2020, of which 1,816 were valid. Many conveyed how difficult daily life was in painful detail, such as not having enough food to eat three meals a day.

(1) Reduction in Income

About 70% of the single mothers who responded indicated that their employment and income had been affected by the pandemic. The most common impacts were “reduced income” and “reduced working days and working hours,” with the impact particularly severe for those working in non-regular employment. The percentage of single mothers who were in work in February 2020, but reported “no employment income,” increased with each passing month after February. Excluding those with “no income,” average employment income showed a downward trend from February onwards, for both regular and non-regular workers. It was also revealed that about 10% of households were always in arrears for the payment of rent and essential utilities.

(2) Impact of School Closures

Single parents are responsible for care work in addition to their jobs, and the temporary closure of schools and children staying home from school had a very significant impact on their jobs and incomes, as well as on their children’s nutritional and academic needs. About 30% of the respondents “voluntarily” took leave or resigned from their jobs due to the fear that they would not be able to care for their families if they themselves became infected. More than half of the single mothers with children in elementary, junior high, or high school indicated that their own work was affected by the temporary school closures, such as having to take time off work, reduce their workdays or hours, or quit their jobs. Furthermore, only about 20% of respondents, a very limited number, indicated that they were paid their full salary in response to the workload restrictions imposed by the temporary school closures.

School closures also meant that children did not eat school lunches (provided by public schools), and consequently an increase in household food expenses, with more pronounced increases for families with more children. In terms of the impact on children’s eating habits, about

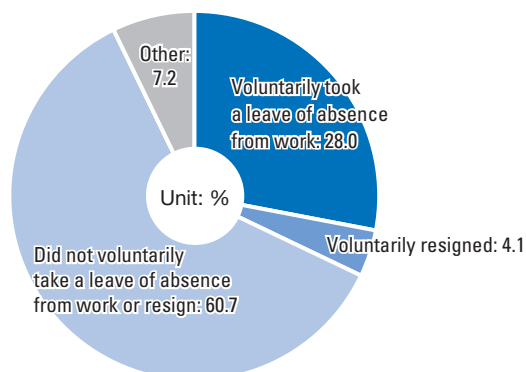
20% of households reduced the number of meals they ate. Meanwhile, about 40% of households with children of junior high school age or older did not own a computer or tablet for use at home. The fact that approximately 30% of households were unable to access the internet at home or had to limit their internet usage raises concerns about the impact of the pandemic on children's learning.

(3) “Voluntary” Leaves of Absence and Resignations at over 30%

Approximately 30% of the single mothers who responded said that they “voluntarily” took a leave of absence or resigned due to the pandemic. If a leave of absence is “voluntary,” it is deemed to be for one’s own personal reasons and is therefore not covered by compensation for temporary absence from work (compensation paid when a person cannot work due to reasons such as work-related accidents). Those people who were providing support for single mothers heard that voluntary absence from work due to anxiety about becoming infected, or having to “voluntarily” quit due to lack of child care or infection anxiety, would be treated as personal reasons by the system.

Of the 1,603 who were in work, the 449 people who “voluntarily took a leave of absence from work” (28.0%) and the 66 who “voluntarily quit work” (4.1%) together accounted for 515 (32.1%) “voluntary” leaves of absence or resignations (Figure 12-6). Furthermore, those in service positions, where there is a high risk of contact with an indeterminate number of people, had the highest rate of “voluntary” leave or resignation compared to other industries, at 37.3% (Table 12-4). The fact that more than 30% of single mothers “voluntarily” took leave or resigned from their jobs is indicative of the challenges they faced.

Figure 12-6: “Voluntary” leaves of absence and resignations



Source: 1,800-person survey

Table 12-4: “Voluntary” leaves of absence and resignations (by sector)

	People who voluntarily took a leave of absence from work	People who voluntarily resigned	Total
Administrative	27.1%	2.9%	30.1%
Service	31.8%	5.5%	37.3%
Specialized/ Technical	27.3%	3.6%	30.9%
Retail	28.1%	1.5%	29.6%
Production processes	19.1%	3.4%	22.5%
Transportation/ Cleaning/ Packing, etc.	29.4%	—	29.4%

Source: 1,800-person survey

The following reasons were given for the “voluntary” leaves of absence and resignations:

“I was forced to take time off work because I couldn’t leave my children at school or nursery, but they fired me at the end of June for poor attendance.”

“I was very anxious because if I contracted COVID, there would be no adult at home who could care for my children. But I was also very anxious because if I took time off work and stayed at home all the time, I would lose my income.”

“I live with my elderly mother, so I asked to take a leave of absence from work on the understanding that it would be without pay.”

Of the 1,816 valid responses in the survey, 83.4% (1,514 respondents) answered that they “do not have” anyone living with them other than themselves and their children. Many single mothers who “voluntarily” took leave or resigned were not connected to people or systems they could rely on in normal times and had no other options during the pandemic. In other words, the “choice” to take leave or resign was a passive one, taken to protect their families.

5 What the One-Year Survey Revealed (August 2020 to July 2021)

After conducting the 1,800-person survey in July 2020, the research project conducted a panel survey of 539

people every month for one year from August 2020 to July 2021. Of these 539 subjects, about half lived in Tokyo and the other half in other regions of Japan.

(1) Precarious Work and Low Income

The employment rate among respondents as of February 2020 (considered to be before the start of the pandemic) was very high at 87.7%. However, only 32.0% of the respondents worked as regular employees, with 61.6% in non-regular positions. Therefore, only 34.7% of the workers were paid on a monthly basis, while 62.8% were paid on an hourly, daily, or commission basis, indicating that precarious working conditions had existed even before COVID-19.

The pandemic had a variety of effects on the workforce, including requests for leave, restrictions on attendance, and layoffs. Looking at monthly employment income, almost half of all respondents (44.2% of those in Tokyo and 44.7% of those outside Tokyo) had lower income in April 2021 than in February 2020 (before the pandemic). For those working on an hourly or daily basis, the reduced numbers of shifts and hours worked due to pandemic-induced restrictions on work appear to have led directly to reductions in income. Since the start of the panel survey, monthly employment income (including tax) has averaged around 130,000 yen, reflecting the challenge of raising money to pay for childcare.

(2) Household Finances Strained by the Pandemic

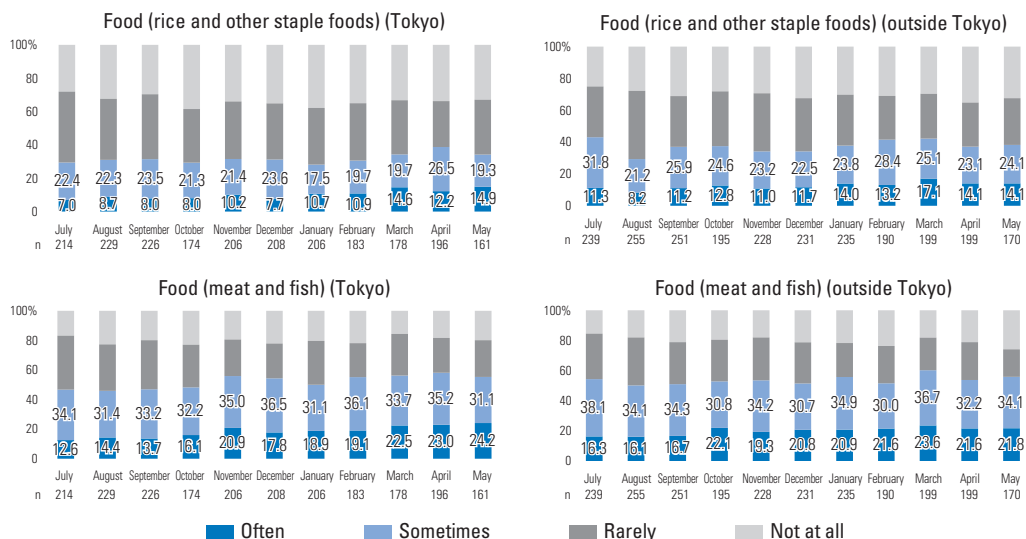
About 10% of households were in arrears for monthly payments related to utilities such as rent, electricity, water, gas, and telephone/communication bills. For some months, about 30% of respondents both in Tokyo and elsewhere were behind in paying their water bills.

In response to the question, “Please tell us specifically which expenses you found difficult to pay,” one answer in the June 2021 survey read, “It was difficult to pay school expenses and utility bills. I couldn’t pay the bills for things like gas for the previous month, and they would get cut off if I didn’t pay this time, so I had to prioritize them.” This highlighted the situation of households that pay bills on alternate months so that they can somehow keep their essential utilities running.

Another response in the September 2020 survey said, “When you prioritize things that need to be paid first, like rent, utilities, and loans, you have no choice but to put off or cut back on food, hospital bills, and school expenses.” This shows that beset by payments for necessities, people were forced to cut back on food expenses, which should ordinarily be the last thing to skimp on.

They were also asked how often they were unable to buy food or clothing their families needed for financial reasons. When asked about the situation for the month prior to the survey (May 2021), 34.2% of respondents in

Figure 12-7: How often have you been unable to buy food? (July 2020 to May 2021)



Source: Panel survey conducted with 539 respondents from the 1,800-person survey

Tokyo and 38.2% of respondents outside Tokyo answered that they “often” or “sometimes” could not buy “rice and other staple foods,” while 55.3% of respondents in Tokyo and 55.9% of respondents outside Tokyo reported that they were sometimes unable to buy meat and fish. Since the survey began, the percentage of respondents who even have difficulty purchasing staple foods such as rice has remained at approximately 30% in Tokyo and 40% elsewhere.

(3) Declines in Children’s Diets and Weight

In order to understand how this situation was affecting children, the July 2021 survey asked respondents who had children of elementary school age what changes they had seen in their children’s eating habits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this question, 18.6% of respondents in Tokyo and 15.4% of respondents outside Tokyo said their children experienced a “decrease in the number of meals per day,” 29.4% of respondents in Tokyo and 27.6% of respondents outside Tokyo said their children experienced a “decrease in the amount of food per meal,” while 28.4% of respondents in Tokyo and 32.5% of respondents outside Tokyo said they were unable to provide enough food to meet their children’s increasing food needs as they grew up. It was confirmed that about one out of three children ate reduced amounts of food during their elementary school years (normally a period of rapid growth and development), and that they were not eating enough food to meet their needs as they grew older.

Furthermore, when asked about concerns they had about their children during the previous month, respondents in Tokyo who selected “lost weight” hit the highest level at 12.2% in Tokyo (based on June 2021 survey) and 10% in areas other than Tokyo (based on September 2021 survey). While the pandemic also highlighted insufficient exercise and weight gain among children, it is notable that mothers were concerned that their children were losing weight during their elementary school years, when they would normally be on the growth curve.

In this research project, surveys were conducted through organizations throughout Japan. Going forward, we hope to see surveys conducted in every region and measures implemented in line with the results. As part of this effort, the Human Security Forum decided to survey the living conditions of single-parent households with

the cooperation of Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture (see 12-4 in this chapter). To obtain a thorough grasp of the actual situation in other regions, surveys need to be conducted there as well.

I would like to thank the “Single Mothers’ Forum” and the “National Council of Single Mother Support Groups” for their cooperation in writing this section.

Written by Hikari Igarashi

12-4 Project to Achieve a Kesennuma Where No One Is Left Behind

1 Local Women’s Discomfort: Women’s Employment

Some of the comments from women who participated in the workshop “Thinking about Women’s Work” in September 2020, co-hosted by three NPOs and citizens’ groups active in Kesennuma and Minami-Sanriku in Miyagi Prefecture and Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture, included the following:

“Even though I had been working normally before, when my child was born, I had to ask if I could work.”

“Maternity and paternity leave is referred to as a ‘blank,’ but is raising a child a blank [period from work]? I think parenting is an important job too.”

“When you give birth, you’re given the attribute of ‘mom.’ I want to keep my own identity.”

“Women are seen more in terms of their children and family than their own abilities.”

“In job interviews, people keep asking, ‘How many children do you have?’ ‘How old are your children?’ They don’t even bother asking what I think about the company.”

“I want to work more.”

An article covering the workshop was published in the *Sanriku Shimpo* newspaper on September 30, 2020, under the title “Daily ‘Discomforts’ One After Another - Thinking about How Women Work.”

Town development plans in every region of the country often use catchphrases such as “easy to have children,” “easy to raise children,” “women can play an active role,” and “balance work and childcare.” However, women living in these communities face a reality of employment that is far from the proclaimed ideals.

2 Workplaces Where Women Can Work Comfortably and Work Involving Data

It is May 2021, and about 10 women are sitting in front of laptop computers and working in an apartment in Munakata City, Fukuoka Prefecture (Figure 12-8). Lupinus Network was founded in May 2018 and successfully became profitable in three years. It currently employs 22 people. What is notable is that the organization is committed to establishing a workplace environment and systems that are comfortable to work in for women who are raising children. The women are unanimous in their praise of the company, saying that they can take time off at their convenience even if their child suddenly develops a fever, and that it is a comfortable place for them to work. One woman who has only been working at Lupinus for a few months said that at her previous workplace, she always felt weary because people resented it if her child was unwell and she suddenly had to take time off. “Here, everyone’s in the same situation, so I can take time off without worrying.” Many women find it difficult to continue working through stages of life such as parenting, nursing care, illness, and age. Even if they want to continue working, they are not allowed to do so, and as a result, they have been excluded from the workplace and kept away from opportunities to gain job satisfaction, work experience, and earning potential. Having experienced setbacks and difficulties when she, herself, continued to work while parenting, Akemi Fujitani, the company’s president, is strongly committed to creating a workplace where women can continue to work.

The women working here are mainly engaged in corporate data maintenance, which involves searching for information and entering and processing data. Employees are given the opportunity to meet individually each month for career counseling regarding their data processing skills, areas for improvement, and concerns about the workplace. To provide better data maintenance, the women who work here have developed mechanisms

to share what they have learned. This data work is commissioned by Tokyo-based True Data Inc., a big data platform that handles information on the purchasing behavior of 60 million people, one of the largest such platforms in Japan. President Hiroyuki Yonekura says he wants to create jobs that allow women living in outlying regions to get involved in ICT, such as data handling, just as they can in urban areas. The company is also working to train data marketing personnel to help not only urban areas and large companies, but also regional communities and SMEs to make use of data. Accordingly, in November 2019, it began outsourcing the task of the maintenance of purchasing data to Lupinus Network, in an effort to give women in outlying regions who want to work the opportunity to do so.

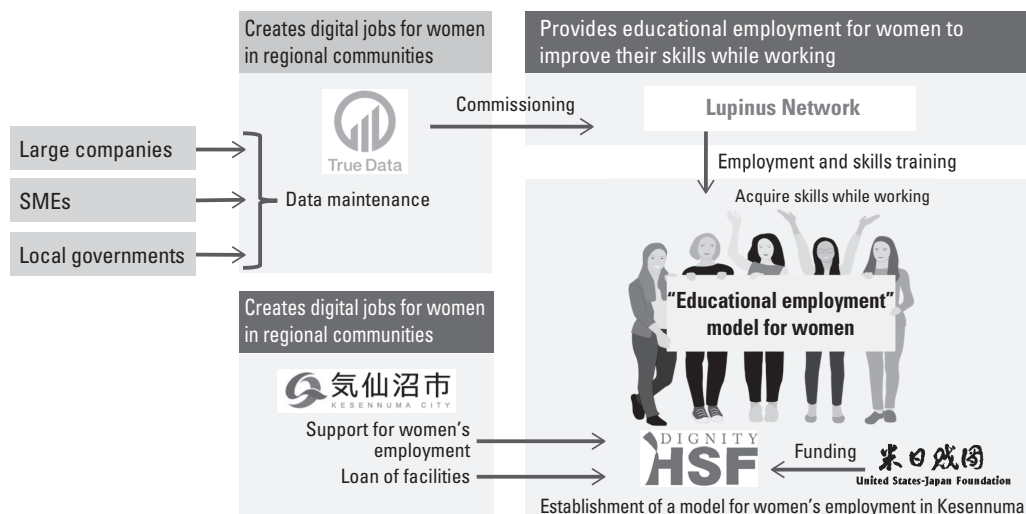
Figure 12-8: Lupinus Network (Munakata City, Fukuoka Prefecture)



3 A Model for Women's Employment in Regional Communities, Developed in Kesennuma

In cooperation with True Data and Lupinus Network, the Human Security Forum held discussions on what kind of workplace would be more valuable to the women of Kesennuma, devising an “Educational Employment” model for women in November 2021. This “Educational Employment” model (Figure 12-9) aims to create opportunities for single mothers and women raising children to improve their skills while working, develop their motivation, and create welcoming workplaces where women can work happily and enthusiastically. By creating a work environment where women raising children can work free of worry, women can acquire expertise in data maintenance while earning an income. Those who wish to do so can also gain professional work experience in accounting, general affairs, labor relations, and other areas that Lupinus Network offers, or they can use their knowledge of database building to pursue careers in data-driven marketing. The idea is that after a few years, the number of highly skilled women in the workforce will increase, producing local female talent for local companies and entrepreneurial ventures.

Figure 12-9: Educational Employment Model for Women



4 Project on Building a Kesennuma Where “No One Is Left Behind”

The Women’s Educational Employment Model has been incorporated into a project pursued by the Human Security Forum in partnership with the city of Kesennuma to realize a community where no one is left behind. This project is a collaboration between the government, NPOs, and businesses, funded by the United States-Japan Foundation. It aims to solve specific issues to realize the SDG philosophy of “leave no one behind” in Kesennuma, which was chosen because the Human Security Indicators for Miyagi Prefecture (the SDGs Miyagi Model) showed that the city was facing many issues, especially involving women and children. To this end, in addition to providing IT employment opportunities for women (initiative (1) on the Educational Employment Model for Women, described above), Kesennuma City, the Human Security Forum, and True Data are implementing the following projects through a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement (August 30, 2021):

- (2) Provision of opportunities for children to learn programming
- (3) Surveys of single-parent households
- (4) Promotion of understanding about the Convention on the Rights of the Child

More specifically, for (2) “Provision of opportunities for children to learn programming,” a programming workshop was held for elementary school students in Kesennuma in November 2021, followed by a two-day

workshop in January 2022 where children could enjoy learning programming, with online participation by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) students under the MIT Japan Program.

With regards to (3) “Surveys of single-parent households,” preparations are underway with the cooperation of Kesennuma municipal government to conduct the first survey on the living conditions of single parents in the city. In November 2021, consultations were held with representatives from single-mother and single-father households.

Finally, (4) “Promotion of understanding about the Convention on the Rights of the Child” is a project to publicize and raise awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is a valuable opportunity for children facing various challenges such as poverty, non-attendance at school, bullying, and disabilities, to gain self-confidence, improve their sense of self-affirmation, and develop a better awareness of their own dignity. Specifically, along with children’s study groups at schools and in the community, the project conducts awareness-raising activities aimed at the general public. In December 2021, a study session on the Convention on the Rights of the Child was held at Kesennuma Ohya Elementary School and received a positive response from the participating children and teachers. The project plans to continue workshops at elementary and junior high schools in the city, as well as training sessions for teachers and staff. In addition, as an educational project for citizens, an event on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, titled “A Child Friendly City - Thinking about the Happiness of

❖ Figure 12-10: Convention on the Rights of the Child Event (December 4, 2021, Kesennuma Central Community Hall)



Figure 12-11: Examples of comments received from children (from the Kesennuma Children's Rights Consultation, November 2021)



Children Growing up in Kesennuma” was held at the newly opened Kesennuma Central Community Hall in December 2021. Experts explained the Convention on the Rights of the Child in straightforward terms to the general public, including caregivers of children, and then shared comments from children who use the city’s childcare centers and after-school facilities. Roundtable discussions were also held between support groups and city government officials involved with children in Kesennuma.

Through this series of projects to achieve a Kesennuma where no one is left behind, we hope to continue our efforts to realize the SDGs in the local community.

Written by Megumi Ishimoto