Actions to Empower Rural Women and Girls

Date: 13th March (Tues.) 1:15-2:30 pm
Venue: Ex-press Bar, 3rd Floor, GA Building

Co-sponsored by
Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations
JAWW (Japan Women’s Watch)
The National Women’s Committee of the United Nations NGOs
The International Women’s Year Liaison Group (IYWLIG)

Introduction:

The overall purpose of this event, reflecting the ideas of SDGs, in particular goals 2 and 5, is to foster discussions on mainstreaming empowerment of women in government policies and social practices in the course of planning rural development. By enrolling panelists into a discussion through exposure of different cases what their countries had achieved or failed as for innovative practices or policy-making, economic empowerment of women, redistribution of unpaid domestic labor in the family, as well as women’s participation in decision-making on a local, national and regional level of their community, the issue of empowering rural women will be highlighted.

As the FAO proclaims that “women produce between 60 and 80 per cent of the food in most developing countries,” a quarter of the world’s women workers are engaged in agriculture, while rural women represent a quarter of the world’s population. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal 2, therefore, recognizes that women in rural areas play a critical role not only for agricultural production but also for food security and nutrition. Rural women, on the other hand, play an indispensable role in adaptation measures on climate change and in preservation of bio-diversities. Rural women are thus the key agent for realizing sustainable and resilient societies.

Despite international recognition, however, rural women, both in developing and industrialized countries, face multiple problems they have to challenge. There are persistent discriminative norms and customs against women which had been long observed in the villages. Women often lacks in accessing to knowledges and skills for advanced technologies, even worse to fundamental education in developing countries. Not only are they isolated from health care and hygienic services and education for their reproductive health and rights, they are also vulnerable to gender based violence. Their hard works in both paid and unpaid labor are less evaluated in terms of payment, and they are far from economic resources to get economically independent. In addition to these handicaps, women are not fairly represented in the body of decision-making even in their local community.

Furthermore, in case of industrialized countries as such as in Japan, advanced age population is highly concentrated in rural areas, since a migration of younger people moving for urban cities have been fostered. As a result, a lack of working force was caused, which brought extra burdens heavily on women as for farming, environmental preservation, and even responsibilities of holding a community tie in their regions. Despite these burdens and responsibilities, however, a leadership of Japanese woman in agricultural society is tremendously low, as shown in the figure that women in their major decision-making body remains only at 7%, while 43% of 1,750,000 core farmers are women.

In order to tackle these problems, the Japanese government has promoted various policies and measures to achieve gender equality as such as a program to aid women for setting up agricultural business to gain income, or a capacity building program for women to be engaged in management and leadership in the communities. A measure to promote sharing household responsibilities by the family has been likewise promoted. As a result, some women have actually started their business and have taken a leadership in their rural communities. Such examples, however, are only but a few and its impact is unknown due to the lack of data.
With such a social background of rural women still dominant in reality, panelists as well as participants are all invited to develop ideas to remove the obstacles. In order to realize a just and sustainable society as aimed at in the SDGs, it is essential and fundamental to stabilize the policy of empowerment of rural women in the mainstream of politics and social understandings.

Program (tentative)

Welcome remarks:
- Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations
- A person responsible to organizing the side event

Panel Members:
- Ms. Kozue Yuki, Owner of “Yamagata Goodies”, dry fruits production in Tendo, Yamagata, Japan/ Director, Subcommittee of young women of JA Tendo Agricultural Cooperative/ Member of “Nougyo-Joshi (Agricultural Women) Project” supported by Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan.
- Mr. Kiva Francis Mbemba, Agricultural Tutor, Ministry of Agriculture Training Institute-Ukiriguru, Training Division, Ministry of Agriculture, The United Republic of Tanzania/ Facilitator of Gender Training, Project for Supporting Rice Industry Development in Tanzania (TANRICE2), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- Ms. Shanta Laxmi Shrestha, M. Phil (Education), Chairperson, Beyond Beijing Committee (BCC), Nepal/ Convener, Women Major Group for Sustainable Development in Nepal (WMG-SDN)/ Steering Committee member, Asia Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW)
- Ms. Martha Osorio, Gender and Rural Development Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Yukiko ODA, Vice-Convenor, Japan Women’s Watch (JAWW), a moderator presenting overview of rural women in Japan