

## **WAW! Panel Discussion “Leadership for Regional Development and Job Creation”**

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### **Background and Issues**

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Rural Women was a key issue at the W20 in Argentina in 2018. Local areas face a variety of challenges including urban-rural gap in economy, social disparity in health care and education, population outflow and decrease in population. Particularly, women and girls face even more difficulties in the region where gender roles are rigid and the traditional value system of superiority of men than women is still remain. It is important to secure an inclusive and sustainable environment for local communities in order to build a society where “leave no one behind”, for which SDGs are aiming.

There are serious problems especially for women to have access to health care and education in rural areas in developing countries. In Japan, governmental service such as maternity health record book, social workers and local women’s associations played an important role in creating a safer environment for women.

In Japan, it has been a great concern that excessively concentrated population in Tokyo and how it should be mitigated. The Tokyo metropolitan continues to expand its population inflow more than 100,000 people per year. The majority of them are youth in their late teens and twenties. By gender, women are more likely to move to Tokyo than men. If women and youth continue to move to metropolis and never return to their hometown, local communities are destined to be disappeared in the future. Employment is one of the reasons for excessive population inflow thus job creation is a key factor for regional development. Development of new technologies makes it possible to create “jobs” in rural areas. Telework and cloud work makes it possible for people living in rural areas to work remotely. Utilizing electronic commerce and SNS lowers a hurdle for entrepreneurship in rural areas. And furthermore, new technologies from the Fourth Industrial Revolution have started to be implemented, which will be the new growth mechanism in local cities. Agriculture, forestry and fishery are also the basis of regional economy. According to an estimation by FAO, empowerment of women farmers in developing countries can alleviate starvation for 150 million people. And some research analysis that investing in women is highly likely to distribute their profit as reinvestment into their children, family and local communities.

In Japan, the labor force population in agricultural industry is declining. The number of new farmers under the age of 44 tends to go up and especially the growth rate of women’s participation is high. Their unconventional way of farming by utilizing new technology is expected to bring new value and services to the industry. Tourism is also an important resource for rural development. An increase in foreign visitors to Japan have a positive impact on tourism in rural areas. New forms of information dissemination using the various tools such as SNS and AI spread the attractiveness of the region and bring visitors to rural areas.

Rigid gender roles as “men work outside and women stay at home as being homemaker” and domination of male over women with a notion of “leaders should be men” hinder rural development from creating attractive communities for young women. In Japan, the percentage of female members in the local legislations is less than 10 percent. Women are underrepresented in local governments while working closely with the community. There are some concerns that policies, which are responsive to local women’s needs are not likely to be prioritized. At the community level, only 5.5% of the leaders of neighborhood associations are women. However, in some regions, women’s voices are heard thoroughly to understand their needs and reflected in policy under the head of local government’s leadership. This creates a better environment where women can get employed or start a business and find a good balance of work and child rearing. Women’s leadership and political participation can lead us to inclusive and sustainable society. This agenda is closely linked to the Goal 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) of the SDGs.

## Topics

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- What measures need to be taken for job creation in local areas? What kind of action is needed to promote settlement into local areas and entrepreneurship in there?
- What is the reason for an increase in member of youth and women newly entering in farming business in Japan? Does their participation in agricultural business provoke any change in the industry? What measures can be taken to maintain as sustainable trend?
- What kind of action is needed for rural area to be women friendly? What are the short and medium-term measures to change the awareness related to stereotypes in gender role and male chauvinism in rural areas while understanding and responding to local women's needs?
- What should a leader in local communities keep in mind in order to make their hometown vibrant?