World Assembly for Women: WAW!2022 Concept Note

（Reference） Current Situation and Challenges Concerning Women's Health and Economy

The resolution on "United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030" adopted in December 2020 (submitted to the Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly by Japan and Chile as co-facilitators[Note1]) states that between 2019 and 2030, the number of people aged 60 or older is projected to grow from 1 billion to 1.4 billion, outnumbering the youth population globally. It also noted that this increase will be the greatest and the most rapid in the developing world[Note2]. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), one in four people in the Asia-Pacific region will be 60 or older by 2050, and most of them will be women[Note3]. In Japan, half of all women are expected to live to be over 90 (the average life expectancy is 87.71 years old for women and 81.56 years old for men, but the mode of death is 93 years old for women and 88 years old for men, with 69,757 women and 9,766 men over 100 in 2020). This situation is truly embodies the reality of a "100-Year Life"[Note4].

At the same time, it is estimated that the annual economic burden to society due to labor losses and the cost of medical supplies and hospital visits resulting from menstruation and other women's and girls' health issues amounts to approximately 700 billion yen[Note5]. In addition, many women find it challenging to balance fertility treatment and work[Note6]. Given the current aging society with low fertility, giving up fertility treatment or work could have a negative impact on social and economic development. Given this situation, it is important to ensure that women can live and work in good health and vitality to contribute to the development of society and the economy.

In reality, women often lack an access to gain accurate information and knowledge about women's health issues. For example, whereas menopausal

symptoms may cause a decline in the quality of life, a decrease in work efficiency, or even lead to women leaving the workforce due to an inability to continue working, it has been found that treatment improves most of the symptoms[Note7]. In Japan, however, 81.7% of women aged 40-49 and 78.9% of women aged 50-59 do not seek medical care even if they are aware of menopausal symptoms[Note8]. A survey in rural areas of a developing country reported that 70% of girls did not know why they menstruated[Note9]. With estimates suggesting that 1.1 billion women will experience menopause by 2025[Note10], if women's health care is not considered throughout their lives, including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, it may cause a negative impact on the productivity of society as well as on women and girls themselves.

Femtech, a term that combines the words 'female' and 'technology', has been attracting attention around the world in recent years. Femtech refers to products and services, such as software and diagnostic kits that have been developed to solve women's health problems and lifestyle issues. The term was made famous by a Danish female entrepreneur. Femtech companies research and develop various technologies such as the calculation of ovulation dates from big data analysis and AI-based fertility treatment support. This field gradually increases investment in light of the need to solve the health issues specific to women, who account for half of the world's population[Note11].

Support from companies and local governments, in addition to products and services of Femtech companies, is also essential to solving women's health issues. The UK Government issued a report on menopause-friendly work environments[Note12], and the Parliament debates related legislation. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) advocates a 'Life-Cycle Approach' with gender equality at its core. It supports women in all stages of their lives, from childhood, through to adolescence, reproductive age, and old age so that they can age in a healthy, dignified manner, with the skills and self-determination to live their lives to their fullest potential to contribute to society[Note13].

The life events and mental and physical health challenges faced by women are not specific to women. As research on women's menopause and hormones continues to advance, it has been found that men can also experience menopausal symptoms. Furthermore, female hormones are beginning to be used

as an effective treatment for prostate cancer. It is also hoped that knowing and caring about women's health issues will improve overall workplace management to be more responsive to diversity. Considering these leads to the review of diverse work styles. Thus, taking into consideration women's health leads to the creation of a society in which not only women but all people can live easily and work healthily. Human rights issues, including women's rights, are important issues that contribute to economic development.

(Note1) 外務省, "「健康な高齢化の 10 年」決議案の国連総会本会議での採択" (Japanese)
(Note2) United Nations General Assembly, "United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)"
(Note3) 朝日新聞 DIGITAL, "高齢化対応に必要なのは女性の人生のあらゆるステージへの支援だ～国際高齢者デーに寄せて" (Japanese)
(Note4) 内閣府男女共同参画局, "令和4年版男女共同参画白書" (Japanese)
(Note5) 経済産業省ヘルスケア産業課, "健康経営における女性の健康の取り組みについて" (Japanese)
(Note6) 厚生労働省, "不妊治療と仕事の両立に係る諸問題についての総合的調査" (Japanese)
(Note7) 働く女性の健康応援サイト, "更年期" (Japanese)
(Note8) 厚生労働省, "更年期症状・障害に関する意識調査" (Japanese)
(Note9) NIKKEI Asia, "Asia's femtech revolution: the quest for better women's health -Underserved by mainstream health care, women from India to Japan turn to technology -"
(Note10) The North American Menopause Society, "Chapter 1: Menopause"
(Note11) 経済産業省, "政策特集フェムテックで企業が変わる、社会が変わる。vol.1" (Japanese)
(Note12) Department for Work & Pensions, Government of the UK, "Menopause and the Workplace: How to enable fulfilling working lives: government response"
(Note13) 朝日新聞 DIGITAL, "高齢化対応に必要なのは女性の人生のあらゆるステージへの支援だ～国際高齢者デーに寄せて" (Japanese)