

# Promotion of Gender Equality in Mie and Grass-roots Leaders (Part 1)

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## 〈要 旨〉

男女共同参画は、1999年の男女共同参画社会基本法の制定をもって、国策としての位置づけが明確になった。三重県においてもその2年後、男女共同参画推進条例を施行し、8年がかりの男女共同参画実施計画案を策定、その推進に努めている。本論では、まず、こうした国から県へ至る男女共同参画の趣旨を概観し、現状ではその目的がどの程度実現されつつあるのか、あるいはそれが阻まれているのかを検討し、その後、筆者が行った、三重県各地に点在する男女共同参画推進員のインタビュー調査の結果を分析する。男女共同参画という国策が、そもそも国連を中心とする1970年代、80年代の海外の動きを取り入れたものとして発展してきたということは、日本社会の文化的土壌にそれが根付くに当たって、多くの問題と時間との格闘を要することは否めないだろう。3年間に渡る県の推進員制度は、そうした危惧に根差して発足したと言っても過言ではない。本論では、紙数の関係から、インタビュー調査の一部のみを取り上げる。

**Key words:** Gender equality, national policy, prefectural policy, grass-roots leaders, unstructured interview

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality has been a national policy in Japan. So is the prefectural policy. Mie prefecture has dutifully followed the national policy and been actively engaged in its promotion. In this article, first, we overview the content of policies and the present state of condition regarding gender relationship in Mie prefecture. Then I will analyze the interview results of grass-roots leaders most of whom have been actively involved in promoting gender equality in local communities. Those who were officially appointed to this role come up to almost one hundred persons. However, the number that I was able to interview was limited. Further, in this article, only a few of them will be mentioned because of the limited space. The rest will be published in the second part of this article.

## 2. Gender equality as a national policy

“Gender equality” is a national policy in Japan. In 1994, Gender Equality Office was

established in the Cabinet Office. The Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society was promulgated in 1999 and the Basic Plan for Gender Equality started in 2000.

In the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, a gender-equal society is defined as:

“A society where both women and men shall be given equal opportunities to participate voluntarily in activities in all fields as equal partners in the society, and shall be able to enjoy political, economic, social, cultural benefits equally as well as to share responsibilities.”

The Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society consists of the five basic ideas: 1) Respects for the human rights of women and men, 2) consideration to social systems or practices<sup>1</sup>, 3) joint participation in planning and deciding policies, etc., 4) compatibility of activities in family life and other activities and 5) international cooperation<sup>2</sup>.

### 3. Promotion of Gender Equality in Mie Prefecture

Following The Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society in 1999, the Ordinance for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Mie Prefecture was enforced in 2001. Its four basic goals are:

- 1) To secure opportunities for women and men to show abilities as individuals without being sexually discriminated,
- 2) To improve institutions and practices which based on fixed ideas on division of roles by sex,
- 3) To secure opportunities for women and men as equal partners to participate in planning and deciding policies in all fields, and
- 4) To prepare environment in which both men and women undertaking responsibilities as a member of the family, can balance activities in the family, occupational activities and other activities.

Mie Prefectural Office for Gender Equality established the Basic Plans of Actions for the

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<sup>1</sup> In consideration that social systems or practices can become factors impeding formation of a Gender-equal Society by reflecting the stereotyped division of roles on the basis of gender, etc., thus having non-neutral effect on the selection of social activities by women and men, care should be taken so that social systems and practices have as neutral an impact as possible on this selection of social activities.

<sup>2</sup> Japanese policies toward gender equality have been stimulated and promoted under the influence of the Convention on the elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and a series of international action plans. Further, Japanese international cooperation for economic development in the Third World should be performed based on gender equality.

first eight years starting from the April 1, 2002 to March 31, 2010. The five areas in the Plans are:

- I Consciousness raising and educational enlightenment toward gender equality
- II Promotion of gender equality in policy/decision making procedure
- III Promotion of gender equality in work place
- IV Promotion of gender equality in the family and local community
- V Respect for human rights and support for physical/mental health

In the area of “consciousness raising and educational enlightenment” stand six policies:

- 1 Substantial public relations to cultivate people’s understanding on gender equality
- 2 School education on gender equality
- 3 Opportunities of life-time education
- 4 P.R. to business owners and managers
- 5 Countermeasures to mass media
- 6 Response and support for international movements and activities

In the area of “promotion of gender equality in policy/decision making procedure” stand also six policies:

- 1 Appoint more women in prefectural advisory councils
- 2 Employ more women in Prefectural offices
- 3 Appeal gender equality to cities and towns in Mie Prefecture
- 4 Appeal gender equality to business owners and managers
- 5 Support actions for gender equality in communities
- 6 Spread positive actions

The area of “promotion of gender equality in work place” is divided into two. The first one is the “promotion of gender equality in employment” which is followed by five policies:

- 1 Consciousness raising in work place
- 2 Promotion of equal opportunity and remuneration
- 3 Support for competency development from the point of gender equality
- 4 Promotion of flexible work styles and support for (women’s) returning to employment
- 5 Support compatibility (between family life and work) and to shorten work hours

The second in the area of “promotion of gender equality in work place” is “promotion of gender equality in family businesses in agriculture, fishery, trade and manufacturing” which

includes four policies:

- 1 Gender-equal participation in decision making
- 2 Support of improvement of managerial ability and techniques
- 3 Evaluation of roles in family businesses and prepare better conditions in work environment
- 4 Support persons to start new businesses

In the area of “promotion of gender equality in the family and local communities” contains also four policies:

- 1 Support for the life well-balanced among the family, work and community
- 2 Support for child rearing with diversified needs
- 3 Prepare environment to support the care of seniors
- 4 Support for the making of communities with gender equality

The final area, “respect for human rights and support of physical/mental health” is also divided into two sub-areas. The first sub-area, “measures against violence that impedes gender equality” includes four policies.

- 1 Establish support systems in liaison with related organizations
- 2 promotion of measures against domestic violence
- 3 promotion of measures against sexual harassment
- 4 promotion of measures against sexual crimes, prostitution (both buying and selling) and stalking

The second sub-area, “support for health and life of men and women throughout their lives” contain three policies:

- 1 Support for management, maintenance and enhancement of health throughout one’s life
- 2 Enrich measures for reproductive health
- 3 Support for life with self-reliance

#### **4. Present issues in Mie Prefecture**

##### **a) Changing views on, “The husband should be the breadwinner, the wife should stay home”**

The idea, “the husband should be the breadwinner, the wife should stay home” has permeated in the Japanese society particularly after the war. The labor market was

established based on this idea and men became the nuclear labor force. Young, unmarried women were considered supportive labor force and engaged in subsidiary work with lower salaries until they retired into full-time housewife. The government supported the system with various social policies to treat single income families favorably. The Table 1 shows the changing views over time on this idea among the Japanese in general. According to the Public opinion poll by the Cabinet Office, In 1979, over 70% of the Japanese agreed with this idea. The rate of those who agreed with this idea decreased after 2000. In 2004, women who disagreed with it increased over 50%.

In Mie Prefecture, the first survey was taken in 2000. The result shows that those who agreed with the idea slightly surpassed those who did not agree. However, in 2006, women who did not agree with the idea reached over 50% reflecting the result in the national poll. (Table 2)

**Table 1: Changing view over time on the question, “The husband should be the bread winner the wife should stay at home” (Public opinion poll by Cabinet Office)**

	Completely agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Completely disagree	Don't know No answer
May 1979	31.8%	40.8%	16.1%	4.3%	7.1%
Nov. 2004	12.7	32.5	27.4	21.5	5.9
Women	11.0	30.2	29.5	24.2	5.0
Men	14.6	35.1	25.0	18.3	7.0

**Table 2: The survey result in Mie Prefecture on the question, “The husband should be the breadwinner, the wife should stay at home” (Public opinion poll by Prefectural Office)**

	Completely agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Completely disagree	Don't know No answer
2000	10.3%	38.1%	23.5%	22.9%	5.1%
2006	9.4	36.9	18.9	28.4	6.3
Women	7.5	31.3	22.4	33.0	5.8
Men	11.9	44.2	14.7	22.9	6.2

#### **b) Female participation in the local decision making procedure**

The following four tables show women’s participation in decision making procedures in

Mie Prefecture at present. According to Table 3, only two women participate in the prefectural assembly among fifty-one members. City and town assemblies show better ratio of female members. Nonetheless, they remain around 10%.

**Table 3: Female participation in local politics**

	Number of total members	Average numbers of members	Number of total female members	Average numbers of female numbers	Percentage of female members
Prefectural assembly	51		2		3.9%
14 city assemblies	400	28.6	48	3.4	12.0
15 town assemblies	236	15.7	24	1.6	10.2

Table 4 indicates that female managerial personnel occupy from less than 5% in prefectural office to nearly 27% in Nabari City office. The reasons for such discrepancies have not been reported.

**Table 4: Female local government employees in managerial positions**

	Total number of managerial posts	Number of women in managerial posts	Percentage of women in managerial posts
Mie Prefecture	786	37	4.7%
Tsu City	682	118	17.3
Yokkaichi City	419	43	10.3
Matsuzaka City	351	56	16.0
Suzuka City	254	25	9.8
Iga City	231	54	23.4
Kuwana City	182	21	11.5
Nabari City	172	46	26.7
Other 6 cities	307	38	12.4
15 towns	407	62	15.2
Cities and towns total	3005	463	15.4

As for the advisory councils, Table 5 shows that the prefecture secures almost one female member out of three members. Yet, the female ratio gradually decreases in the cities and towns.

**Table 5: Female participation in advisory councils**

	Number of advisory councils	Total number of members	Number of female members	Percentage of female members
Mie prefecture	79	976	308	31.8%
14 cities	341	5626	1245	22.1
15 towns	186	2418	389	16.1

Women seem to have the greatest difficulties in entries to agricultural committees. Among the nearly eight hundred committee members altogether, female members are only forty-six which occupies less than 6% of all. It does not mean that women are not engaged in agriculture in Mie. The total number of farm households in Mie reaches 59,697 which breaks down to 1) Self-sustaining farm household (19,846) and 2) marketing farm households (39,851). Further, among the marketing farm households, the full-time farm households remain only 6,322 and the rest (33,529) are part-time farm households. The facts that one thirds of the total farm households are non-marketing (self-sustaining) farm households and that over 80% of marketing farm households are part-timers indicate that overwhelming majority of farm households send out their male labor force for non-agricultural industries for stable income sources. Women are actually involved in agriculture on daily basis. Yet, they are alienated from the local agricultural decision making procedures.

**Table 6: Women in agricultural committees**

	Total number of committee members	Number of female committee members	Percentage of female committee members
29 cities and towns in total	795	46	5.8%

**c) Prefectural measures to increase female work opportunities in other industries**

In order to stimulate business corporations so that they will improve the work

environment, the Governor's Awards for excellent Business Enterprises are granted every year. The criteria for the awards are as follows:

- Reconsider old institutions and customs and introduce new systems in order to make the most of female capacities, broaden their work areas and build gender-equal careers
- Enforce institutions to support compatibility between work and family life beyond the standards set by the law
- Support employees so that they can bear and raise children without anxiety
- Recognize CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and try to live with surrounding communities by engaging in environmental activities, supporting volunteer activities and NPOs

The prefectural office also introduced new actions starting the year 2007 to promote women's further social participation. The new actions consist of the **Challenge Support Center** to provide women with ability and volition to work with information for social participation and advising by coordinators, the **Challenge Support Network** to be formed among related national and prefectural organizations, private enterprises, family support centers, NPOs, welfare/volunteer organizations, educational institutions, etc., and finally the **Challenge Supporters** to assist challengers in communities, provide local information to the center and perform case studies by interviewing successful challengers. To what extent these new actions will be able to bring about good results is yet to be seen.

##### 5. Grass-roots leaders for gender equality

The prefecture appointed local activists for gender-equality recommended by cities' and towns' offices to be promoters of gender equality in local communities. The reason why this measure was taken is that gender equality as a policy came down from the central government which was moved by the actions overseas. Thus, it was considered that the policy was hard to penetrate into the communities in provincial districts. Unfortunately, the budget was rather small and lasted only for three years. Nonetheless, the appointment of such grass-roots leaders brought some positive effect in promoting gender equality in Mie. There were ultimately ninety-eight of them all over Mie prefecture. Most of them had been active in one way or other for gender equality. Thus, their official appointments led them to self-recognition, pride and networking among themselves. Their activities were basically considered as voluntary and did not bring them recognizable monetary payments except



minimal transportation and activity fees. Their obligations set by the prefecture were 1) to participate in orientations, meetings and various events offered by the prefecture, 2) to provide information of the local conditions related to the promotion of gender equality, 3) involve in local activities that are gender-related, and 4) send an annual report.

I have interviewed twenty-one of them out of whom six were men. Each interview was unstructured, ran 60 to 90 minutes and was tape-recorded with the interviewee's consent. The interview period was from August 2006 to March 2007.

**a) Case 1: Yasuko (pseudonym) is a woman in her thirties who organized CR (consciousness raising) group for full-time housewives.**

After graduated from a university, she worked in a company for several years and retired for a marriage. She never questioned her decision to quit the work and to become a full-time house wife. She and her husband moved from other prefecture to Mie and bought a house in a new community and started raising two children. She had no friends and no acquaintances in the vicinity, but soon realized that she was surrounded by the young families just like her own. Young full-time housewives have few chances speaking to adults and spending their days in housekeeping and childcare. Their husbands are mostly workaholic leaving the home early in the morning and coming back late at night. They are too tired to listen to their wives whose frustrations are accumulated day by day.

Yasuko felt the frustration or the sense of loss as soon as they moved to Mie. When her eldest child was a few months old, she took her baby to the park in the community to join other mothers. It is called the "park debut" for young mothers and their babies. The mothers gather, let their older children to play with each other and engage in conversations. Yasuko had had some expectations with this socializing opportunities after a long blank of speaking to adults. However, she soon found herself uncomfortable in the group. The topics of the conversation of the mothers were limited to those related to their day-to-day childcare such as weaning, baby food, toilet training, weight gain or loss, baby teeth, etc. Not only that, she felt the mothers' competitiveness underneath the superficial amicability and friendliness of the conversation and realized that nobody is possibly speaking her true heart out in the park society. She was daunted by the situation in which every woman had to face with each other not just as a person but as a mother of somebody. It was as if her children's welfare was up to how she behaved among the mothers.

Then she found a course for free talk on gender at the Gender Equality Center and joined

it. The Center provided childcare so that mothers can participate in the sessions without worries for their children. Although the course was over after five or six sessions, Yasuko realized that she gained opportunities to be able to talk whatever she wanted to talk, her deep concerns honestly. It was a “person to person” kind of conversation that she did not have for a long time.

Yasuko talked to other women in the course and organized a group to continue the opportunity that every participant can talk their heart out and others listen without criticisms. The method of talk for consciousness raising was conveyed during the course from the staff to the participants. The speaker can speak on the topic of her choice and is allowed to keep on talking without being interrupted by other participants. The listeners are expected to listen with sympathy and do not need to make any comments or give advice. Yasuko became the moderator of the talks as new members joined the group. Some members left and new members joined. The group continues to maintain fifteen members in average and meets once a week. It is five to six members who come to a meeting at a time.

From Yasuko's experience, we learn the solitude of young mothers living in a new community today. They live in a nuclear family and engage in child raising without help by their grown-up family members. Their husbands have so little time to share with wives. Their parents, siblings and relatives do not live nearby. So, they depend on books on childcare. It is most important for them that their children grow according to the standards indicated by the childcare books. The “park society” seems to be a good opportunity for the mothers to learn about the variations that each child may have and get rid of the anxiety for the different passages of growth of their own children. However, the mothers are not able to communicate with each other honestly. They are rather driven by worries, competitiveness and jealousy since they feel that they themselves are evaluated by the health and growth of their children. They may smile at each other, but could feel quite unstable in mind. Yasuko told that there are mothers who wander from a park to another called a “park gypsy.” The mothers seem to have needed much more time to get to know each other well as a person before they become possible to talk about their childcare issues frankly.

Yasuko was lucky to have found the consciousness raising group to get out from her problems. The opportunity to be listened by others with sympathy and without interruptions and criticisms is something that most of these young mothers whose frustrations must have accumulated needed. It can be said that such an opportunity is quite rare even for

those who live with their grown-up families. It requires artificial arrangements and rules to guarantee the opportunity. “Consciousness raising” seems to be the *creative* method to let a person raise her/his consciousness through the processes of talking herself/himself out rather than being taught by somebody else. Yet, the primary purpose of the group work seems to let one’s frustrations out and to relax. Yasuko told that she could not accept at all when the staff told her that her problem was not particular to herself but a social issue. For her, she was troubled so much because it was nothing but “her own problem” and did not want to broaden it as if it could be shared by everybody else. She says, she did not have any understanding of “gender” at that time and every problem was just personal.

Today, she found a part-time job at a gender equality center in the city where she lives and is actively involved in the management of the consciousness raising group. The group accepts not just troubled young mothers but also middle-aged women with, for example, an empty nest syndrome. It is just a small group that she manages, nonetheless, the attempt should be highly evaluated in terms of working on people’s mind and making an important one step toward enlightenment and realization of the gender issues.

**b) Case 2: Hiroshi (pseudonym) is a man in his fifties who obtained an early retirement from the company and is energetically working toward establishing supportive systems for men in their senior lives.**

Hiroshi was first advised by his supervisor in his company that he should have at least five hobbies in which he could devote his energy when he turns to sixty. He realized that his thirty years thus far was confined in the service to the company and was not able to describe his life away from it. He learned the importance to exchange with people in various fields and started participating in the courses at the Mie Gender Equality Center, one of which was to think about retirement from work in one’s life. Then he found another course for men to study skills of telephone consultation for men’s problems. The male instructor for the course actually serves as a consultant for men through telephone once a month at the Center. At present, consultation opportunities offered at public places are mostly for women. Nonetheless, Hiroshi thinks that the more baby boomers retire from now on, the more men need consultations and advices for how they should spend their second lives.

Hiroshi and his group who participated in the same course continue their training as a consultant under the instructor/professional consultant and plan to take the role in turn in the near future. They intend to open an independent office from the Center with a telephone

for consultation. They will work in cooperation with the Center so that the Center will offer more courses in which retired men can participate. The ten members, meeting once a month after the training courses, established an organization called "Men's Support Room Mie." After such preparation for a few years, he quit the company.

Hiroshi and his fellow members are also active in various public events for gender equality opening a cafe or pizza shop managed all by men. Apparently, he enjoys all these activities in his second life and confident about his role and ability to support other retired men who are not sure what to do.

Further, his plan for his second life does not stop there. He says, his next goal as a part of the promotion of gender equality is senior people's care by men. He has an experience of having cared his wife's mother for twelve years at home until she died. He tried to share the hard times with his wife as the old woman's senile dementia progressed and finally she became bed-ridden. He confirmed that senior people's care could not possibly be done only by women but needs men's physical strength. Once he made up his mind, he is quick to take actions. He joined the three-month course for the home helper's license and also acquired a special driver's license to transport people with money. He plans to secure another qualification, the Social Worker for Senior Care, by 2011.

Thus, Hiroshi has two specific goals in his second life, telephone consultation for men and senior people's care by men. At the base of his two goals, he maintains his agreement with the notion of gender equality. He and his wife do not have a child. He recalls, although he was the breadwinner and his wife stayed home, since the early stage of their marriage they shared a sense of equality between themselves. He did not mind helping his wife in housekeeping. The time he spend in it has steadily increased since he retired from the company. Now he does all the house cleaning work and dishes after meals. Laundry is something that his wife still keeps to herself. Otherwise, he would be happy to share it also. Hiroshi and his wife cook and entertain together whenever they have guests at home.

Looking around himself among his relatives and neighbors, he notices husband and wife relationships are not equal in most cases. He thinks that wife's rights to speak up should be more accepted and makes it his role to mildly persuade men to listen to their wives.

Hiroshi says, men wear "armor" and work in a company. When they retire, they are supposed to take it off. Yet, many of them do not know how to take it off. It is the primary role of the course for retiring men at the Gender Equality Center to teach them how to take

off those “armors”. However, the vast majority of retired men do not join such public courses and many of them could be at a loss to find a way to start a new life. It is also the case for those who would call for telephone consultation, said he. They have a step forward toward solutions. The question is how the rest of the men could find a way to their meaningful second life. Hiroshi is fully aware that men’s courses at the Center and their telephone consultation for men are just a small step. He thinks how he and his fellow members will be able to approach others is going to be their important next step. If men do not take off their “armors” they cannot proceed with women to achieve a lively second life. Thus, they must take off their “armors”. Hiroshi says, “It is my final destination how to approach to let them take off their armors.”

**c) Case 3: Hisayo (pseudonym) is a woman in her forties who works with her husband in their tea farm and ran for the city assembly in the last election.**

Hisayo and her husband manage full-time farm household which has been minority not just in the area but also in the whole Mie prefecture. When Hisayo married into this farm household, it was a big family of three generations. Yet, as time passed, the family size shrank and now it consists of the married couple and their two children. In the mean time tea farming has been mechanized. The most busy harvesting can be carried out by Hisayo and her husband without help.

Hisayo has been spending her flexible time in community work particularly for children. She has been an active members of PTAs for years. Further, she established a center for children to spend their after-school time and to learn various things that they cannot learn at school. The center is subsidized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports as one of the local activities for children and supports mainly two elementary schools in the area. Further, when other schools send their children’s groups to the camping ground in the area, the center introduces them various extracurricular activities including cloth dyeing using plants, observation of the stars at night and traditional *udon* (noodle) making. She keeps herself busy coordinating such classes with experienced local people as instructors. She is also a general manager of the center who is responsible for all the paper/computer work.

Her activities spread to the area of gender equality last five years. She started participating in the meetings. Seeing local matters being decided through local meetings in the absence of women, she suggested both the husband and wife to be able to attend. She herself began to understand the local decision making procedure little by little by attending such

meetings. She was also selected as the vice chairman of the community meeting which overrules the local meetings. Further, her commitments extended to the matters of amalgamation of cities, towns and villages, administrative planning and reforms.

Based on these experiences, she decided to run for the city assembly and lost. Although she had been very active in various aspects of community life, she learned that election had a different way to fight for. Also, she realized that it was one of the hardest matters for a woman to win in an election. Hisayo and another female candidate, who also lost, had no organizational support for the election. She did not know that it was important to acquire the recommendation by the local self-administrative entity. It has been the custom that most of the winning candidates receive such recommendation although it lacks a lawful basis.

However, she is not disappointed nor given up. She is determined to work toward the next election for four years. She has no doubt that it is better to have female members in every decision making system which thus far has been managed without reflecting women's opinions. Her confidence is unshakable that women are more involved in the local community matters compared to most of men who are away from home and community for everyday work.

Hisayo spent only a small amount of money in the last election while there are men who spent millions of yen. Hisayo and her husband agreed that she would spend from the savings she kept since before her marriage. She said that it was not easy to persuade her husband. Yet, now she smiles that her husband has changed his mind to say, "The half of the city assembly should be occupied by women!" Her husband still believes that men are superior in decision making and that the mayor must be a man. Hisayo would not challenge what he says now. Rather, she relies on him as he is now and expects him to cooperate her in the next election.

The energy and challenging spirit of Hisayo is truly respectable. In a traditional community public election has been believed as "men's business" not just by men but also by most of women voters. While the few female assembly members who have been elected were supported by political parties, the woman like Hisayo who had no organizational back up is told as difficult as a camel goes through a needle hole. Her confidence must have come from the accumulation of her contributive work for the community in years. Also, the senior women who found her ability and pushed her back to public commitments was indispensable. These women, many of whom were local school teachers, tried their best at difficult

times in the male-centered society to open up chances for women. Hisayo has always been encouraged by these women to appeal her presence by speaking up at least something whenever she attended the public meetings. She says she will accept the role of PTA chairperson next year which will add to her career an important step. It is apparent that she is firmly rooted in the local community life and politics. Having learned the method to win in a local election in the most realistic way, she can be expected to become one of the pioneer women in the city assembly in next four years.

**d) Case 4: Matsu (pseudonym) is a woman in her seventies who has been spending her second life in a variety of volunteer work after she retired from an elementary school as a teacher.**

Matsu and her husband who lost all of his family's property in the war started their married life with her parents-in-law in the area where they still live. Her life as a young female teacher was difficult as she recalls. As a typical Japanese man of his age her husband, who was employed by the local government, did not help housekeeping or child care. She gave birth to three children all of whom were taken care of by her mother-in-law while she was at work. Since Matsu had sufficient breast milk, her mother-in-law insisted that she should breast-feed them. The mother-in-law brought her eldest to the school everyday at lunch time for Matsu to breast-feed him. For the second child, Matsu went home by bicycle and for the third child, she acquired the license of a motorcycle. She knew it would have been much easier to feed them with artificial milk, but she could not argue with her mother-in-law.

Then, she had many years to nurse her father-in-law and mother-in-law in their old ages. In the area, working women except in agriculture was still rare. It was considered as the duty of the wife of the eldest son to care old parents-in-laws at home. When Matsu and her husband put her father-in-law in a nursing home just for a short period of time, a letter without a signature was thrown into the house. The letter said that Matsu should quit her job and take care of the parents-in-laws full-time. She took the letter to the board of education and received an encouragement from the chairman to continue her job. There were a few other times that she had almost given up her job. Each time, she was persuaded and encouraged by the school master and so she finally reached her retirement age.

Matsu felt that she was very lucky to be able to work until her retirement. She wanted to do something to change the working environment for women. She worked at the community

center for several years organizing various life-time education courses. Then she became the first person to start volunteer social activities in the area. The first volunteer group was for the physically handicapped, which followed by those for the disabled by age. It was her advantage that she lived and worked in the area for a long time so that she knew most of the people. Many of the local government officials and school teachers were once her pupils. She was trusted and respected by the people and became a natural leader of them.

The local branch organization for gender equality was also started by Matsu. The organization is now managed by the women of younger generation. Yet, she complains that women in their twenties and thirties are not active in volunteering and studying about gender equality. Another unique volunteer group which she started is to conserve a historical house on the old street which used to lead pilgrims to the Grand Shrine in Ise. The group acquired the budget of three million yen from the local government and had it renovated. The project has been supervised by the specialists at Mie University and the young students also participated in renovation. Matsu enjoys the house attract different peoples, men and women, young and old, local and visitors. The house is open to public on Sundays and was visited by five thousand people in five years.

Matsu is the woman who has lived in the area since the time when a married woman rarely took up a job outside her home. As a pioneer working woman, she fully experienced the hardship of balancing her family duties and the job. Yet, her long teaching career prepared her to be a social leader in the community after the retirement. Her energetic commitment in starting a number of volunteer works were based on her local reputation accumulated among her co-workers, grown-up pupils and their families. She is one of the persons in the area known to almost everybody. Because of this popularity, she was able to build the foundations of completely new group activities by women in the localities in which such activities had been unknown and socially unacceptable. She truly deserves the name of a grass-roots leader to promote gender equality.

Here, because of the limited space, I introduced only four among twenty-one cases that were interviewed. In Part 2 of this article, I will introduce several other characteristic cases and present the analysis of the whole cases in the following perspectives:

- 1) What are the common aspects and characteristics of the grass-roots leaders for the promotion of gender equality?



- 2) Were they prepared to become such leaders? Were they informed sufficiently by the prefectural office on their roles and duties?
- 3) Did they have clear goals regarding their roles?
- 4) What advantages and disadvantages did they have to function as grass-roots leaders?
- 5) Were their terms of appointment (maximum three years) long enough to achieve their goals?
- 6) Were they successful in achieving their goals?
- 7) Overall, was the program successful?
- 8) What are the major issues and problems which still hamper the development of gender equality in Mie?

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