

## Promotion of Gender Equality in Mie and Grass-roots Leaders (Part 2)

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### 〈要 旨〉

本論では、第3号に掲載した Part 1 に引き続き、まず筆者が行った三重県男女共同参画推進員のインタビュー結果（事例5から事例10まで）を紹介する。全10例のうち、男性推進員3名はいずれも退職年齢まで男女共同参画への関心もなく企業社会を生き抜いてきた人たちで、退職後の生き方の模索の中で初めて気付き、活動家となった。比べて女性たちは、就職、結婚、育児、社会参加等々さまざまな機会を通し、自己の生き方に係る問題としてジェンダー意識を掘り下げてきている。推進員の活動は明確な目標や活動指針を持つものではなく、地域社会における草の根リーダー（役割モデル）として一種の刺激となる存在であり、3年という任期にとらわれることなく、ボランティア活動を続けている人達ばかりである。

**Key words:** Gender equality, grass-roots leaders, prefecture, local community

### 1. Case reports (continued from Part 1)

Following the four cases introduced in Part 1, six cases are summarized here.

**Case 5: Masako (pseudonym) is a woman in her thirties who lives in the city where one of the oldest Shinto shrine is located.** She was born in a nuclear family with the father who inherited androcentric (male-centered) norms since his childhood in Kyushu where the tradition has been well known in the country. Her mother dedicated her life to her husband and two daughters as a full-time housewife. Masako went to a junior college in Tokyo and worked in a local bank for eight years even after she married. Yet, she quit her job when she became pregnant. She thought that she should devote herself for her family just like her mother did. However, she was frustrated after she quit the bank and withdrew into the family. Gradually, she came out of the shell of a full-time housewife and reached a resolution that a woman's life is nothing if she will not do whatever she wants to do in society.

She recalls two factors that influenced her thoughts. One is what she learned at the junior college in Tokyo where she was unexpectedly taught that women should also work and have their own lives as men do. She considers the college education was the root of her belief in gender equality.

The second factor is the out-going way of life of her mother-in-law in a household which is rather full of the elements to nail down women inside of it. Her husband has been disabled and nearly bedridden for over ten years. Before her husband fell for cerebral apoplexy she had only one year without a family member in bed since her father-in-law was also bedridden for a long time before he died. In such a house however, she managed to find opportunities to go out for a few days at a time to participate in flower arrangement exhibitions in the cities such as Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka. She is a licensed flower arrangement instructor.

When Masako married into the family to live with her parents-in-law she was first astonished to see her mother-in-law's behavior. But soon she came to agree with her spiritual strength to make her family members understand that she would do what she wanted to do. She has kept herself as an energetic, kind and cheerful wife and mother while she is at home because she was not frustrated at all. She was also an understanding mother-in-law toward Masako. Due to her mother-in-law, there always has been a free atmosphere in the house that everybody has rights to try to live in the way he/she wants while they help with each other whenever it is necessary. The mother-in-law made maximum use of social welfare system available for her disabled family members. She has often been criticized by her conservative neighbors because she did not behave like stereotypical daughter-in-law who was supposed to devote herself to the family. She would not listen to such criticisms.

Masako was deeply impressed when her mother-in-law even went on a trip to Hokkaido with her friends leaving her husband in the custody of short stay in the nursing institution. She realized that it is necessary for a woman to make brave decisions in order to keep her own life. She is grateful to her not just she accepts Masako to be independent but also she influenced her husband and son to become understanding of women's independence. Masako received the most important message from her mother-in-law regarding how to live her own life and it saved her from the frustration after she gave birth to her daughter.

She now works as a part-time reporter for a local newspaper. She basically spends her week-day mornings for her job. Sometimes she needs to go out in the afternoon or even in the evening to make interviews to news sources. In such cases, she takes advantage of the three-generation family. Her only daughter, who still goes to an elementary school, can be taken care of by somebody at home. Further, she noticed the advantage of living in an old quarter in the city where neighbors all know each other. It is a kind of a safety measure for

her daughter that the neighbors always watch the children passing by and paying attention who is where.

Thus, Masako was brought up in a nuclear family in the new part of the city and married into a family to live with parents-in-law in an old fashioned down town where families have inherited traditional lifestyles from generation to generation. Generally speaking, it is considered that people have more individual freedom to pursue an independent life in nuclear families. Nonetheless, Masako was first bound by traditional androcentrism (male-centeredness) in her parents' house and was feared and frustrated to live with an expectedly more traditional family. But in the three-generational family which she married into, she found a good model, her mother-in-law, from whom she learned how she should make up her mind and behave if she wanted to have a meaningful life of her own. Not only that she found the old neighborhood with advantages and livableness. Acquaintances over generations may help each other in good terms.

Besides part-time job as a news reporter, Masako participated some conferences and study sessions on gender equality. She considers her part-time job is her major activity toward gender equality. Through her job, she realizes that women constitutes the basis of city life and that it is women who know better about real problems and issues spread in the city. Nonetheless, women do not sufficiently represent the local decision makings. Masako confesses that she is interested to run for city politics. Her friends and acquaintances also notice such quality in her. But she knows enough the difficulty for women to stand up for city politics. She described it as follows;

I once heard Mr. A said if Mr. B runs for the office I will *collect ballots* for him. Some other time Mrs. C told me, "If you run for the office I will *vote* for you." Men say they collect votes for the one they want to push. Women say they will vote, but will not take actions to involve many more. This makes a huge difference between men and women. Women are hard to be organized.

She is currently a member of the local Female Fire Fighters. Natural disaster support is an area which has been monopolized by men. But it is important for women to join in planning and preparation actions. She participated in nation-wide conference on "Women and Disaster Prevention." She learned a lot from the female participants who committed volunteer works in the Hanshin-Awaji Great Earth Quake. She is contemplating that the Female Fire Fighters in her region will be able to plan and take down-to-earth actions in case of actual disaster cases.

**Case 6: Satoko (pseudonym), a woman who just turned fifty, has her own view in persuading gender equality. She has been concerned with the “importance of food and diet” for a long time.** She raised two boys with her husband in a rural suburbs of Tsu City. She quit her clerical job and went to school for a license to teach cooking and dietary issues. Then, she opened her own cooking class and went to teach various places within and even outside of Mie Prefecture. At the same time she has been involved in the social activities to promote gender equality.

Her primary concern was to establish gender equality at home. She started it in her own family. She persuaded her husband and two sons to share housekeeping equally among them all. Her husband was once an avid hiker who does not mind to cook and was willing to give his hand to other household chores. She talked over their dinner table little by little about gender equality that she learned from study classes. When one of her sons had three months without a job, she took the chance to train him all kinds of housekeeping work thoroughly. Today, her family share housekeeping in natural manners from cooking dinners to putting out garbages according to the rigid community schedules.

Yet, Satoko does not consider that her family is outstanding compared to many others. The recent phenomenon that husbands and wives both continue to work even after they have children makes it rather ordinary that they share housekeeping. She recognizes that among those younger than fifties fewer men resist against involving in housekeeping work which had long been ‘female work.’ It is in the families in which older parent(s) in their sixties, seventies and eighties co-reside that men still do not put their hands into even making a cup of tea for themselves.

Satoko’s cooking classes are unique in a sense that her purpose is not just to teach how to cook dishes and nutritional values but also consciously involving men. She does not believe that pamphlets and lectures are enough to change people’s mind. The real first step for men toward gender equality is to experience something new and interesting and to become satisfied with the result. Thus, she offer her cooking class for men and their families. Often, she cooperates with a speaker/lecturer on gender equality who give a talk on what gender equality means in easier terms before her class. Her class is now extended to high school students. Further, she thinks that good food and diet have something to do with preventing domestic violence and child abuse. She sees her future work for the total betterment of the family life.

Another aspect of her activities is related to the farmers' market in the vicinity where she lives. The farmers who provide their products to the market three days a week (Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday) are mostly men in their sixties and seventies. The board members of the farmers coop are also such men. Satoko is one of the few women who participate in the coop since she produces honey at home. Although the market is run by men, she works with another woman at the register.

By the time the market opens at 9:00 there is a long line of local residents who want to buy fresh seasonal vegetables at inexpensive prices. Once the market opens the inside is like a war zone particularly on weekends and Satoko and the other woman must work frantically at the register. Their customers complain if they have to wait long in the line again before they pay. Satoko observes the situation and has her own thoughts about the management of the market.

She pays respect to the expertise of the male farmers as producers. Nevertheless, she realizes that women are better in management of the market. The aged male staff do not pay much attention to the customers' responses but they simply consider that it is enough for them to provide fresh vegetables of good quality. Satoko sees that women can manage various things at a time and provide better services while men are good at concentrating in one thing, i.e., production of vegetables in this case. However, at present the sole management of the farmers' market is in the hands of men who do not realize the accumulation of 'trifling matters' according to them could be the ill-effect to the successful continuation of the market.

Satoko tries to speak up whenever she notices such problems that hamper speedy management of the market. She makes it clear that young consumers are not patient enough to wait but go to the supermarkets even though they have to pay higher prices. Further, she thinks that those who actually cook the products can realize how to use them in a variety of ways or improve the quality of them. She feels sorry that more farm women do not participate in the management of the market. Most of the women still think to let their men do it rather than committing themselves in it.

However, she has not given it up. She knows it takes a time to change the way of thinking and the relationship between men and women particularly in rural areas. Her effort to participate in the farmers' market as a honey producer and cashier has already brought in some good effect. The male board members have come to listen to women and follow what

they say little by little.

**Case 7: Midori (pseudonym) is a housewife in her forties with two children who used to be an elementary school teacher.** She quit her job after ten years when her husband was posted in a branch office with a long distance from home and her health was deteriorated. She does not regret to have quit her permanent job. Rather, she takes an advantage of her free time doing what she really wants to do. She likes to write. She once won a prize in the scenario contest on gender equality based on her experience in charge of children's play club at the elementary school. Since then she was often invited to elementary schools to give a talk on gender equality in front of children.

She is also an editor of information journal for women in the local community. It is an unpaid volunteer work. Most of the female editors experience the work for a few years as a step after their busiest period of childcare is finished to get back to the labor market. But Midori thought that she would be just crushed in the middle of part-time jobs if she tried to find a paid work. So, she stayed years on the editorial board and enjoyed her talent to write.

She was once invited to be a steering committee member for the Community Forum on Gender Equality. However, she found discussing, planning, and preparing various events are tiresome and not enjoyable for her, so she decided to take up anything related her favorite writing from then on. She participated in the study sessions titled, "Let's Make the Women's History of Mie Prefecture!" offered by the Prefectural Center for Gender Equality.

Having successfully finished the study sessions, she was appointed as one of the approximately twenty members of the editorial committee of the Women's History of Mie. Currently, her life goes around this activity. The editorial committee members' work is painstaking to visit every local library to check all the available historical records of the cities, towns and villages. They pick up any descriptions on women from those materials since Meiji Era. Most of those historical records can not be checked out. So Midori and others have to visit the libraries all over the prefectures to make copies of related descriptions. Next, they sort out the materials they picked into different categories including education, political franchise, economy and sexual issue.

They also visit and interview senior women. They must consider and compete with the ages of their interviewees. They choose pioneering women in various fields. So far, they have completed interviews with two women in education; the one who became the principal of an elementary school and another who used to be an active board member of the Japanese

Teachers Association.

Midori is contemplating on the next interviewees. She is most interested in the women in agriculture and forestry, those who have no official positions but demonstrated leaderships in the empowerment of women after the World War II. Just like in Southeast or South Asia, under the flag of “Gender and Development” women acquire economic power and engage in various productive activities, Japanese women after the war lead themselves into similar endeavors. Midori wonders, for instance, actually who began the project to buy sewing machines with the money they collected and organized women’s work team in Ouchiyama Village after the war. Her imagination spreads whether it was initiated by the foreigners or the method Japanese women originally created was later conveyed to those developing countries. She hopes if she continues her research she may find impressive historical facts that women of Mie contributed to the social development.

Midori often spends the whole day in a library looking for tips and hints of the women’s activities. The monetary compensation is almost nil in comparison to her effort. She is not indifferent to her present situation that she has only nominal income and economically speaking she is dependent on her husband. She is proud of herself and her social contribution. Nonetheless, she sometimes irritated by herself particularly when she sees other women strive for their career up and economic independence. She also feels that she cannot completely equal with her husband without economic independence. She finds herself to give in to her husband’s schedule whenever they have time conflicts.

Midori quickly answered to my question, “what is gender equality for you?”

Both men and women either at home, in an economic society or in the local community, can sufficiently and satisfactorily demonstrate their ability without being prejudiced, biased or one-sided.

**Case 8: Kazuo (pseudonym) is a man in his late fifties who worked in a company for almost thirty years and finally opened his own office in his house.** He came to spend many hours a day at home and began to see what he did not see when he was a company man. Surrounded by women (his mother, wife and daughters) in the family, he saw them working hard to keep up with the house work. He was the only one doing nothing.

He realized that he took it for granted as a man and the head of the family. Everything was natural since he was brought up in a male-centered family and during the company life. He never questioned the way he was until he ‘practically returned home.’

First small change occurred by the initiative of the women. His wife and daughters handed him bags of garbage to put out. "Do it if you stay home!" He was not happy with the harsh tone in the words of the women. Nonetheless, he did not resist them. Carrying the garbage bags he asked himself, "Am I forced to do this or am I doing it with my volition?" The answer was negative for him in the first place. Yet, gradually, he understood that there is no place for him in the house unless he would become somehow useful in the house.

He gave thoughts to it and admitted that although he was a socially independent person with some significant leadership he was totally dependent at home and in the local community. If his wife went out on a trip for a few days, she would have left in the refrigerator some ready-to-eat food. Neatly washed and ironed clothes were always ready for him to wear. Hot bath and *futon* bed were waiting whenever he came home from work. About the local community he had no idea who lived there and what was going on.

He murmured to himself, "Well, I must do more work at home." However, his wife and daughters were not patient enough to let him learn housekeeping from the beginning. His clumsiness kept him from joining the women's circle. In addition to putting out the garbage he was just allowed to vacuum the rooms and sweep around the house.

In another occasion he had a chance to think about the male-female relationship in the society again. With a few other men he planned a party for the school alumni association and sent out invitations to the members. They decided to collect as party fees 8000 yen from men and 5000 yen from women. Soon, they met objections from women that they want to pay the fees equally with men. The reason told was that the women could not really enjoy the party unless they paid the equal amount with men. Kazuo and other men were perplexed because they thought they made a reasonable arrangement for the reasons that 1) men normally drink more than women, 2) generally speaking, men are economically well to do than women, and 3) it has been imprinted in them since they were very young that if they invite women it is men's role to pay the expenses. After some discussions, the party was held in the way that women suggested. The incidence made Kazuo realize that there must be many other unfair matters in the society for men and women without being noticed by most of the people.

He then encountered the information journal on gender equality issued by the Prefectural Center for Gender Equality. He began to participate in the study classes and events taking an advantage of his flexible daily schedule. He also confessed that he needed to get away



from home from time to time finding it difficult to change his relationship with his family, particularly with his wife who did not really believe that he could change himself after so many years of self-centered life ignoring family needs and wishes.

Soon, Kazuo found himself as one of the activists at the Gender Equality Center and in local communities. The contents of the lectures and discussions in study classes were convincing for him. He could not believe that he spent most of his life without knowing them. It is a pity for him that his family only half-listen to him whenever he timidly told them what he was learning.

Also in the activist group, he was first overwhelmed by women's power. But he seems rather successful in getting along with those women than with his own family women. Besides the now common cooking classes for men, he planned noodle making with 100% buckwheat in cooperation between men and women. His targets were those of middle-aged and senior citizens whose way of thinking is most conservative and old-fashioned. According to him, older persons as parents and grandparents may negatively influence younger generations who are least resistant toward gender equality.

On this occasion they showed a video and asked prepared questions to the audience who were expected to answer intuitively. Then, the invited lecturer made comments on questions and answers. He thought that the event successfully penetrated the ideas of gender equality to the audience.

In another occasion, they went out to a local community distributing balloons to small children and baking crepes (thin pancakes) using locally grown buckwheat, eggs and honey. Kazuo himself took the lead in baking crepes in front of gathered people casually throwing questions such as "Do you know why I'm baking them here?" and "How do you feel?" His party take questionnaires offer crepes to the respondents. They limit their questions to basic ones including "Do you know the expression, 'gender equality'?" "Have you ever participated any event related to gender equality?" "Are you conscious of being manly or womanly in your daily life?" "Do you consider that 'men should work while women keep home' a common sense?" "Do you feel strange that men cook at home?" "Do you think it natural for women to participate in society?" and "Do you like to participate in any event that is related to gender equality?"

Seeing the results of such on-the-spot questionnaire survey, Kazuo feels that idea of gender equality has been permeated. The term, gender equality, is known by over 70% of the

respondents constantly. Particularly, he is impressed by the men who have lost their wives. According to him, these men accept the idea of gender equality most naturally because they have to take care of themselves, whether they like it or not.

He seems to be quite satisfied with his second life being so active in the promotion of gender equality going one place to another where people gather.

**Case 9: Chizu (pseudonym) is a woman who used to be an elementary school teacher, married into an extended family, gave birth to four children and quit her job when her husband decided to run for the city assembly.** She was brought up in a nuclear family with her sister and knew nothing about the traditional lifestyle in a large family when she agreed to marry the man whom she had known since their college days. She thought that they could talk frankly about any problems they would encounter in their marriage as equal partners.

However, the new family environment was astonishingly different from the one in which she was brought up. The family consisted of the grand-parents-in-law, parents-in-law, her husband, his younger brother and sister. A year after Chizu gave birth to her first daughter. Thus, the family included nine members of four generations. Chizu had difficulty to find her place in this family. She noticed that she had to carefully choose topics to talk particularly with older members of the family.

She left in the morning to go to her work and came home in the evening. Her absence during the day made it more difficult for her to become part of the family. Her mother-in-law turned out to be a wise, respectable woman with whom Chizu could maintain good relationship. At least there was no conflict between the two superficially.

The grand-parents-in-law spoke out their dissatisfaction with Chizu when she bore another girl. It was the first time that she protested openly that she was not to blame. Yet, she realized that she was expected to bear a boy as the heir of the family. Although Chizu herself was satisfied with two daughters because she wanted to keep teaching, she challenged to have another child. She was successful more than she needed; she gave birth to twin boys.

Two girls were brought up by the mother-in-law. However, she withdrew from bringing up the twins due to her old age and deterioration of health. Chizu managed to take a childcare leave for eight months. When she returned to teach, every morning she had to leave her twin boys in the daycare center which was 45 minutes away from home. She came home via the daycare center to pick them up. She kept this lifestyle for six months until she

was found with a stomach ulcer. Her father-in-law offered to take boys to the daycare in the morning so that she did not have to quit teaching. Her mother-in-law died when the boys were four years old. Yet, she managed to continue working with the understanding and cooperation of the family.

She finally made up her mind to quit her job when her husband told her that he would run for the city assembly. She objected him but his decision was firm. She was already forty-two years old. She thought she quit with a clear grasp of the situation. Nonetheless, as the days passed by she had a feeling growing in herself that she did not completed what she should have. That was the time she started to go to the Gender Equality Center in order to look into her mind to find the source of her dissatisfaction. Further, she needed something to hold on as the goal of her own life. She took every opportunity available to participate in study classes, seminars and symposiums for nearly ten years.

One of the seminars she attended was to express one's emotions honestly. She realized that she had always kept her emotions within herself until she could no longer endured and that she exploded with anger. She told herself to practice telling her emotions to make herself understood. Otherwise, her husband might realize that she was angry but could not understand why. It was not easy though. Before she tried to explain herself, she was filled with her emotions which she could not tell in lengthy words. Now she recognizes such of her state as the anger when her human rights were violated. The anger boiled up instantaneously and repeatedly in her life. She felt her body was filled with the raging sea.

Then, she was convinced when she was told to express it somehow. Indeed, nobody would understand it even if she simply said, "you have just violated my human rights!" She had to analyze in what sort of situations she was enraged. For the first time, she realized that she was not sure whether she and her husband had true affection toward each other although they had trust in each other and felt important of each other. They spent a fairly long time together to raise children accomplishing their roles respectively. Nonetheless, to enter into real close relationship was not easy. In her case she struggled just by herself for a long time. Her husband has been composed beside her. He had no doubt or agony about the relationship or affection between the two.

Chizu now feels that it was not just 'her' problem but it was 'their' problem. She can look herself as an object of analysis. She has changed from the person who gives herself into anger and spit it out to another person who makes an effort to express herself in words.

She points out that the Gender Equality Center offers only two kinds of seminars about marriage: The one for those who are getting married and another for those who are in their retirement age to consider how a married couple should relate with each other in their second stage of married life. However, what she was needed was a seminar that takes up the stage between these two. She feels it the most important to establish a seminar which supports the stage when married couples most actively struggle seeking ways to build a true partnership with each other.

She has been through with various humiliating experiences in the family. She often felt that she was not counted as a full-fledged member of the family. For example, a relative or a neighbor comes to visit the house while Chizu is at housekeeping. Seeing there is only Chizu in the house, the visitor confirms with her, "So, there is nobody in the house, isn't there?" Saying in her mind, "Here I am," she tells, "Right. Nobody is in." The visitor leaves.

Her two daughters often complained that the way they were brought up is different from that their younger brothers were brought up. The girls did not mean that their parents were discriminatory. They confirmed that both of them loved the four children equally. Yet, the attitude of their grand-parents and grand-grand-parents were apparently different toward boys and girls.

Chizu always noticed such trifling everyday matters, but her husband seldom did. When she was still in her twenties, one day her mother-in-law told her that she was going on a shopping. Chizu asked her to buy some ginger in passing. Her mother gave her no reply. She wondered she should not have asked such a thing and would never do the same. There were many similar incidences in which Chizu had to guess the meanings by herself observing the subtle attitudes of older household members.

Chizu sacrificed her profession, dedicated herself in her husband's election campaigns and served as his secretary. She had seen enough of the local politics. Yet, she has never thought of running for elections herself. The primary reason was that she did not have her own funding. Her husband spent his own money which had been passed down through the family. Besides, she points out, kinship and local relationship are the two indispensable factors in the election campaigns in the area. Votes are primarily collected among the relatives of candidates. Families rooted for generations in the locality have large kin groups to support candidates. Candidates must have also proven their loyalty to the constituencies by working many years occupying the local official posts including the heads of the Parents

and Teachers Associations and residents' self government councils. The fact that no matter how long she lived in the area, she cannot be accorded with these two basic factors in addition made her indifferent about politics.

Her long-standing social activities spread mainly in two kinds. One of them is a group of women to study environmental issues. Under her leadership they succeeded in raising a movement to decorate the town with flower hanging baskets. More than one hundred women participated in making, hanging and maintaining the flower baskets. The group grew into a non-profit organization to work for the reduction of garbage through composting.

Another social involvement of Chizu is that she has been a mediator at the family court for nearly fifteen years. Her major role with other male mediators is to negotiate with divorcing couples for their children's welfare. She says that it is quite rare that they could work for the restoration of marriages.

Chizu is now concerned about 'coaching,' a new method that she learned recently and is contemplating if she could do something in the near future for the women with problems using the method.

**Case 10: Yoji (pseudonym) is a man in his sixties who was divorced from his wife right after his retirement and returned his home in Mie three years ago.** He was one of the Japanese workaholic company men who firmly believed that housekeeping and child rearing were the roles of their wives.

He accepted the company's order without a question to be posted in another city. He lived in the dormitory of the company by himself leaving his family in Tokyo where he bought a house for the family. His 'company bachelor' life lasted nearly twenty years. Meals were provided by the company and he sent home his laundry in a box. He picked up clean clothes when he went home once a month. He had holidays only twice a month. While he had been away from home, his wife took care of their children and his aged mother. His children grew up in a fatherless house.

It never occurred to him that his living away from home so many years also separated him psychologically from the family members. Later, his grown-up son telephoned Yoji who returned to his home town in Mie and told him that he had no childhood memory to have spent with him.

He first doubted his ears when his wife composedly told him after his retirement, "You have lived your life in the way you wanted, you should go your own way. From now on I

will do what I want to do.” She meant to divorce him refusing her wifely duties for her husband who finally came home. He resisted in his mind, “As a man, I worked hard. If the whole family can live on my salary my wife does not have to work. I wanted her to keep the family. Was not it the understanding between us?” He never thanked his wife since he thought that she was doing her duties just like he himself committed himself in his duties for the company. Cooking, laundry, cleaning the house, childcare, taking care of his mother—all of them were her responsibilities in his mind.

However, when he heard that she would do whatever she wanted to do from then on, for the first time he wondered, “Does it mean she stayed home suppressing her desire to do something?” He gave thought to her life while he was away. She took care of his mother since they married until she died. So, his mother was pushed on her. Their children were pushed on her. There was nobody to turn to even if she had problems and difficulties. Everything was on her shoulders inside the house. He recalled that she liked to draw pictures. Yet, she quit. When? He does not know. He realized that he must have forced her a sacrifice. Thus, without a word he accepted divorce.

It was after he returned to his hometown that he faced for the first time in his life the notion of gender equality. Struggling with his second bachelor life, he studied and unmeshed what was wrong in his life. His effort to look back on his attitude toward his family in terms of gender equality made him also realize many unreasonable social customs in his rural neighborhood. He criticizes retired husbands who spend days watching T.V. ordering a cup of tea to their wives. Even worse, they often kill a time playing mahjong till late at night keeping their wives awake to serve them late meals in case they are hungry. He suggested to stop an old custom of the new year’s day on which the master and his heir of the superior household among the kin group sit in the drawing room to accept greetings from visitors while the wives work in the kitchen all day preparing food and sake for the visitors. He was simply ignored and was never invited since then.

His conservative male relatives criticize him back that he should have kicked his wife out before he was divorced if his wife was such a woman who refused to perform her wifely duties. His guilty consciousness and regrets toward his wife is beyond their comprehension. It is women who come to help when he is out of wits. They teach him how to do household chores and bring in fresh vegetables and eggs from their farm. He now washes his own clothes learning from his older sister in the neighborhood how to sort out machine-washable

clothes and appropriate amount of detergent. However cooking is out of hand for him. He depends on the meal delivery service twice a day.

In spite of the inconvenience and solitude to live alone he keeps his chin up engaging in 'volunteer work' based on what he learned about gender equality. He is one of the active members of a male group which participates in the forums and symposiums on gender equality and serves light meals and drinks on public occasions. He volunteers to make fliers and posters and goes on various occasions even to the cities in other prefectures. In such opportunities he reports how active the men's groups are in Mie in terms of the promotion of gender equality.

He considers that it is important to make it public how men can involve themselves in and influence the activities for gender equality. Such occasions are also the opportunities to exchange opinions and experiences between men and women. He has developed close relationships with several men in the past three years during which they worked together for the making of the various local events.

## **2. Comparisons and characterizations of the grass-roots leaders**

### 1) What are the common aspects and characteristics of the grass-roots leaders?

There are altogether ninety-eight grass-roots leaders all over Mie Prefecture. Thus far, I have summarized the interviews of leaders out of twenty-one whom I had a chance to interview. As revealed in these cases, their backgrounds, concerns and activities are diversified. One thing in common is that they accept the notion of gender equality.

Three men (Cases 2, 8 and 10) share a characteristic compared to the women; Until they approached to their retirement age they led an average Japanese men's life with no particular questions or complaints about the traditional gender practice in society. Hiroshi (Case 2) started contemplating his second life after retirement under the advice of his supervisor in the company. Through the studies at the Gender Equality Center, he thought on gender from the standpoint of men and came across the activities to support men who would have problems in guiding themselves in their second lives. Kazuo (Case 8) had never even dreamt of any doubts about the gender practice until he retired into his family. He recognized the imbalance between his independence and autonomy as a company man and the complete dependence on his family at home. He tried to change himself into autonomous self, the idea of which was shrugged by the women of his family. Instead, he found a way of

activating himself in the management of various public events for the promotion of gender equality. Yoji (Case 10) had to face an abrupt demand for a divorce from his wife when he retired. A thunderclap-like experience brought him into a collapse of his value system which consisted of the clear division of roles between men and women. He studied gender equality from a scratch. Therefore, all three of them actively participated in the promotion of gender equality in their second lives. Once they have accepted the new values, i.e. gender equality, they seem to have no skepticism. They plunge into public activities and openly talk to others into their new values.

As a contrast, in the cases of women they started thinking, questioning and seeking better lives for themselves much earlier than men. As soon as they finished their public education, they faced gender issues in their work life, marriage, or the balancing the two. Their belief in gender equality is the result of their struggles for many years. They have been through individual problems and made difficult decisions in their life histories. It was not necessarily 'gender issues' that they have struggled with. Rather, women tend to recognize their problems as 'personal ones' as typically revealed by Yasuko (Case 1) . Thus, they have spent a long time before they accepted that their problems are not just personal ones but social issues.

2) Were they prepared to become such leaders? Were they informed sufficiently by the prefectural office on their roles and duties?

In the papers handed to the leaders by the prefectural office, their basic obligations were written as a) to participate in orientations, meetings and various events offered by the prefecture, b) to provide information of the local conditions related to the promotion of gender equality, c) involve in local activities that are gender-related, and d) send an annual report to the prefectural office. According to these explanations their leadership roles are ambiguous. The Prefectural Office for Gender Equality did not stipulate specific roles to these volunteer leaders.

Thus, they were not expected to bring about specific results by talking to the local people, organizing events on their own and so on. They might not be addressed as 'leaders.' They are rather role models who grasp their own problems as part of the gender issues, expand their learning by participating in public classes, seminars and symposiums and influence the people in their communities. Compared to the three men who are all activists of the



promotion of gender equality, the women's activities are more diversified.

Yasuko (Case 1) reached the CR (Consciousness Raising) Method which saved her from the blocking up during the early child rearing period and turned to manage the group for younger mothers. Hisayo (Case 3) who started with social activities for the local children and now set her goal on a political career as a city assembly member. Matsu (Case 4), a retired elementary school teacher and the local pioneer of working mothers, spreads her hands in various volunteer works taking advantage of the social network which she had established through her teaching career. Masako (Case 5), who is still in her thirties, is a younger wife of the three-generation family in a conservative community. Yet, she is free from traditional customs to nail women down in the house thanks to her outgoing mother-in-law. She works part-time as a news reporter and an active member of the local female fire fighter organization. She is further interested in a political career. Satoko (Case 6) was determined to introduce gender equality first of all into her own family and with a longer perspective considers to bring in more women's power into the management of the local farmers' market. Midori (Case 7), who is talented in writing, enjoys the volunteer work to compile the Women's History in Mie. Finally, Chizu (Case 9) struggled for many years to establish a satisfactory marriage partnership with her politician husband. Her Extraordinary life experience inside and outside of the extended family empowered her to be qualified for social and/or political leadership. Nonetheless, she had given up her teaching career in her early forties and became a supportive wife of a politician. She still looks for the opportunities and methods to support women who are entrapped in gender discrimination.

3) Did they have clear goals regarding their roles as grass-roots leaders?

Hiroshi (Case 2) has clear goals: 1) to establish a telephone counseling center for men who need help to find how to live their after-retirement lives and 2) to participate in the care system of senior citizens as a man. Yet, he has had these two goals since the time before he was appointed as one of the grass-roots leaders. Further, these goals are not expected to be achieved by the end of his term. In other words, the goals have been with him and will be with him regardless of his term as a grass-roots leader.

Hisayo (Case 3) also have a clear goal to win in the election for the city assembly. But, the next election will be after her term as the leader is expired. Apparently, it is not the goal that she set as the grass-roots leader. She was appointed simply as a socially active person.

Satoko (Case 6) is also ambitious to create gender-equal farmers' market. But, she does not believe that it will realize within a few years unlike her first goal to establish gender-equal relationships among her family members.

Midori (Case 7) tells that she has no idea when the Women's History in Mie will be completed. At least she knows that it will take more than a few years and it does not bother her. She loves to do library research, interviews and compile the data into a readable format.

Other six members do not particularly have goals to achieve within their terms as grass-roots leaders nor any other specific goals in longer periods.

As a conclusion, they do not particularly have goals to achieve during their terms. It is also clear that the Prefectural Office for Gender Equality did not ask them to have any goals.

#### 4) What advantages and disadvantages did they have to function as grass-roots leaders?

Yasuko (Case 1) can share her negative experience as a secluded young mother with other mothers who have the similar experiences. It is the problem of the individual woman/mother who is isolated from the social discourse of adults and is confined into a child-centered small world. The Consciousness Raising (CR) technique that she mastered is an advantage to respond to the needs of the frustrated wives and mothers. Although small, the CR group have continued for years and provided speaking opportunities for the women with various ages and problems. For Yasuko, it might also be an advantage that her social commitment is not limited to this group activity. She now balances part-time job at another gender equality center and the CR group.

Hiroshi (Case 2) has two clear goals and worked eagerly to develop the strategies and opportunities for the realization of the goals in the near future. It was his advantage that he started thinking about his second life and quit the job earlier than the retirement age with a clear vision for what he wanted to do. He is also blessed with an experienced instructor and a number of members to share the goal for the establishment of telephone counseling for men. As for the Care work for senior citizens, he is certainly welcomed by still mostly female workers in the area. His experience to have cared his mother for years with his wife is also an advantage for him.

Hisayo (Case 3) has several advantages. She has the understanding and support of her husband and two children. She has accumulated experiences in various social work in the community. Everybody knows her, which is the primary condition required to run for the

election. She has a perspective to fight for the election campaign without spending large sum of money. The only and tough disadvantage for Hisayo is that in any local elections women are hard to collect votes particularly if they have not any organizational backgrounds. Nonetheless she has a confidence in herself and lessons she had learned in the last election.

Human network in the local communities and the credit she had earned through her teaching career are the extraordinary advantages for Matsu (Case 4). Many of those whom she taught now occupy key positions in the local schools and offices and support her volunteer activities. Further, it is customary that residents see who it is before they listen to her/him. Matsu's ideas and suggestions can be accepted primarily because it is Matsu who suggests them.

Masako (Case 5) has an excellent role model, her mother-in-law who has successfully reconciled her household obligations and personal life as a flower arrangement instructor. Masako had inherited a sense of dedication toward her family from her own mother who was a submissive full-time housewife. Nonetheless, she could not be satisfied with a simple life as a full-time housewife and mother. It was after she married into a more conservative family and community that she started to pursue her own life with confidence. Yet, her political ambition is confined in herself since she has no role model to teach her how a woman could possibly prepare for it.

Satoko (Case 6) has achieved gender equality with her family. Yet, she cannot find effective strategies to bring more women's power into the management of the farmers' market. Her success in the family will not simply be persuasive for the rural men and women who maintain stronger gender roles yet. It may be a disadvantage for Satoko that the farmers' market has been so far relatively successful. Chances for change will come when the market has serious problem(s) in maintaining the present system highly which is dependent on men.

The advantage of Midori (Case 7) is apparently her talent in writing. She has confidence in what she is doing and freedom to withdraw from something that she is not really apt to no matter how strongly she is recommended to by others (ex. Event planning and management). Yet, she feels obligated to give a priority to her husband's convenience since she has not her own income. Economically minor status in the family can be a disadvantage in her case.

At his age Kazuo (Case 8) has a freedom to do whatever he likes. He was straightforward

in exploring his capacity and status in the family and in attempting to change himself and to communicate with the family members. However, when his effort was more or less ignored by the family, he turned to outside. He found a place in group activities for the promotion of gender equality and became one of the activists. Perhaps he feels more comfortable in the group rather than in his own house. The question is whether the fact that he and his activities are not yet well understood by the family will not remain his persuasiveness as a grass-roots leader superficial. He could talk the textbook matters. But, they are not based on his own experience. His relationship with the family may be an advantage or disadvantage for his group activities depending on his continuing effort to re-establish himself as a full-fledged family person in terms of gender equality.

Chizu (Case 9) certainly has many advantages including her intelligence, energy and perseverance to analyze her extraordinary experience in an extended family in a conservative community. She could be a good counselor/advisor for the local women who are troubled with the common issues. Yet, she has a disadvantage as a politician's wife. Her speech and behavior are always evaluated in connection with her husband's status. In order to bring success in his election, she has to be careful and is difficult to establish her social self independent from her husband. Perhaps she has to wait until his political career comes to an end.

Yoji (Case 10) does not intend to hide his painful divorce experience. When he honestly and seriously talks gender equality based on the analysis of his own life he will probably win public respect. Yet, in the rural community in which he lives he seems to be treated as a sort of social failure by the senior men in the community who do not doubt their superior status as the master of the house. It is fortunate for him that through the seminars and activities of the Gender Equality Center he found several friends. It may take some time for him to turn his own experience into his advantage.

##### 5) Were their terms of appointment long enough to achieve goals?

The maximum three years is apparently not long enough for those who have clear goals such as Hiroshi (Case 2), Hisayo (Case 3), Satoko (Case 6) and Midori (Case 7). However, they are not bound by the terms of appointment. They had goals even before they were appointed to grass-roots leaders. They will continue to have those goals even after their terms are expired. The situation is the same with the rest of the leaders.

It seems that none of the ten leaders actually used their appointed title in their activities. Then, what was the meaning of the appointments? It could have increased their confidence in themselves as they were officially recognized. At least one of them inquired if he/she was qualified to be the one when he/she heard about it. Thus, it could have been a personal encouragement to be selected. All of them were careful enough to make sure the obligations before they accepted the offer. They were indifferent or rather satisfied that the term was no longer than three years.

6) Were they successful in achieving goals?

None of them were going to achieve their goals whatsoever by the completion of their terms. They were not bound by the terms. It was only a limited time span in their lives. Apparently, none of them would consider himself/herself as a failure for not having clear goals nor achieving them by the end of the term. They will continue to do what they believe to be done to promote gender equality, respectively.

7) Overall, was the program successful?

In this interview research, I was able to meet with only twenty-one out of ninety-eight grass-roots leaders altogether. Thus my conclusion cannot reflect what those who were not interviewed have experienced. Most of those who responded to my requests for interviews accepted the program positively. It gave them encouragement to know that they are the group of nearly one hundred persons who share the objective in the same prefecture not to mention the actual networking through participation in the same events. They keep contacts and make planning and management of further promotion activities easier. Such acquaintances will be the seeds for supporting from grass roots the future policies of the prefecture.

As afore-mentioned, the doubt and worry of the prefectural government on the permeation of gender equality into the lowest community levels created the program as key roles to connect the local government and each community. Thus, it is required on the prefectural government to grasp the achievements and problems on the side of the grass-roots leaders. Otherwise, the precious experience of them will not be made useful for further policy making of the prefecture. During the interviews there were actually some voices that complain about their disconnection from the upper office. It is a pity if the program simply comes to an end without an in-depth analysis of the results and installation of continuing methods to

pursue activities of the grass-roots leaders.

### 3. Conclusion

Nobody except super-optimistic politicians believes that gender equality can penetrate into the every corner of the Mie society in a few years. A number of grass-roots leaders certainly pointed out that today it is only the older generations who insists on gender discrimination and that other generations in their thirties or younger are not resistant to gender equality. However, they are not conscious of the fact that at Japanese school boys and girls are still navigated into different courses without consciousness; more boys take interests in natural sciences and most of the girls prefer other subjects. Their role models become clearer as they proceed from elementary to high schools; Male-female ratio is strikingly uneven among the teachers of natural sciences and administration. Further, the problem of male overwork in business corporations leaving housekeeping and childcare in the hands of their wives has not been resolved.

The grass-roots leaders are not necessarily keen on these problems which clearly appear in statistics. They are not completely free from gender bias that exists in the society in which they live.

Many of them tend to emphasize favorable changes that they see in their communities rather than becoming pessimistic by only seeing unchanging customs. They look at the people surrounding them and want to be optimistic about the future. To keep good relationships with others is vital for them if they want to positively influence the people in terms of gender equality.

The grass-roots leaders are not employees of the prefecture. They are free agents who are not obligated to engage in specific work under the instructions of the prefectural office. They are the men and women who live in the local communities and have been engaged in voluntary activities in broad terms related to the promotion of gender equality. They will continue their activities indifferent to the termination of their official terms as the leaders. The impact or influence of what ever they say or do in the local communities is not clearly measurable at this stage. Yet, each person is unique, assertive and positive about their commitment. Obviously, the gradual increase of such persons will lead to bring a gender-equal society to Mie Prefecture in the future.

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