



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

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Japan's Extremely Low Fertility

Declining fertility and ageing population are inseparable issues. While the rapid population increase in Africa is a major global issue, so too is declining fertility combined with an ageing population in developed countries. Populations need to be stabilized to achieve sustainable development set out in the SDGs.

The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which serves as the secretariat for the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP), conducted research on ageing from 2014 to 2017, supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO). With the aim of contributing to policymaking by Asian parliamentarians, this research project included literature review and analyses by distinguished experts in Japan and compilation of knowledge and wisdom gained through parliamentarians' conferences and field visits on ageing, conducted by APDA in Japan and Malaysia, into the booklet "Policy Brief on Ageing in Asia" (http://www.apda.jp/pdf/p06_koureika/policy_en.pdf).

This booklet was presented, and won praise from the participants, at the Global Symposium on Ageing, which was co-hosted by UNFPA and Statistics Korea (KOSTAT) in October 2017 in Seoul, the Republic of Korea.



For this year, APDA is hoping to start discussions among experts, parliamentarians and policymakers focusing on the issues of the second demographic transition and extreme low fertility, which also provide important perspectives on the issue of ageing. As part of this effort, Hon. Yasuo Fukuda (Chair of APDA and Honorary Chair of JPFP) proposed a meeting on Japan's extremely low fertility and ageing. The meeting was organized with the participation of Dr. Kei Takeuchi (Member of the Japan Academy; Professor Emeritus at the University of Tokyo; and Professor Emeritus at Meiji Gakuin University), Dr. Makoto Atoh (Member of APDA's Board of Councillors and Director Emeritus of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS)), Hon. Mamoru Maekawa (Vice-Minister for Policy Coordination of the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan), and Dr. Osamu Kusumoto (Executive Director/Secretary General of APDA).

At the opening, Hon. Fukuda pointed out, "When we think about sustainable development within the context of limitations imposed by the global environment, population decline is not a bad thing. However, it becomes a problem when the pace of population decline is so fast that social systems cannot adapt to it or address the issue of low fertility, and as a result young people cannot set concrete goals in their lives".

Dr. Takeuchi shared Mr. Fukuda's views on where the problems lay and, referring to his book *Jinko mondai no aporia* (The Aporia of the Population Issue; published in 1996 by Iwanami Shoten), commented, "We must not forget that humans are the subject matter of the issue of population, and as such, it is difficult to adopt manipulative approaches. Humans are the object of research as well as the subject that makes up a society". He expressed strong concern that as a result of a decrease in the population of 18-year-olds, the

number of universities and new academic posts has to be reduced, which is making it difficult to nurture researchers, a dire situation that could lead to a decline in Japan's international competitiveness.

Dr. Atoh then touched on his experience of becoming a target of various criticisms as a policy advisor on declining fertility, and noted that such criticisms came mainly from the following three groups: (1) feminists, (2) conservatives, and (3) neoliberal economists. The main thrusts of their criticisms were as follows:

- (1) Feminists argued that women are viewed only as a means to reproduction and the burden is being forced on women;
- (2) Conservatives claimed that the traditional family system and the value of matrimony should be protected and that social intervention in these matters would be totally unacceptable; and
- (3) Economists who belong to the neoclassical school, including neoliberal economists, referred to the research achievements of Milton Friedman and other economists of the Chicago School and claimed that declining fertility was a result of individuals' choice and that intervening in such choice would be economically inefficient and inappropriate in terms of economic policies.

Dr. Atoh said that the issue of declining fertility can only be solved if society as a whole transforms itself and embrace gender equality, and observed that there is a need to promote a policy that combines the three elements of policy response to declining fertility, gender equality, and work-life balance.

Another issue that was pointed out was that there is little research on low fertility and population decline because such issues were unanticipated in the past and that it was important to address these issues in the future, including through research. Hon. Fukuda stressed that policy response to very low fertility and regional revitalization are absolutely important for Japan's future. As a concrete example, he explained that the true intent of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's plan for remodeling the Japanese archipelago was regional revitalization through infrastructure development, and said, "Concentration of young workers in Tokyo is promoting a further decline in fertility. Regional revitalization, moreover, is necessary from the perspective of maintaining government functions when a major earthquake or other natural disasters strike the capital Tokyo".

Dr. Kusumoto suggested, "As for regional revitalization, we might be able to consider a fresh approach of combining telecommuting to enable people in rural areas to engage in farming, fishery and telework such as IT software development, so that they can make the best use of their natural environment and live prosperous lives with sufficient disposable income, but without relying too much on cash income".

As the meeting drew to a close, Hon. Fukuda concluded by expressing expectations for government officials to consider various conditions, establish basic ideas, and make efforts to enable politicians to develop a long-term perspective, and calling upon scholars to take leadership in making proposals that contribute to policymaking.

