

Established in 1974, JFPF is the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development.

In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various challenges, JFPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentary caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

In the future issues of JFPF Newsletter, we will carry "JFPF Column" on activities and initiatives related to population and development undertaken by JFPF members

News:

JFPF Study Meeting: The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls

JFPF Column:

- Hon. Sadakazu Tanigaki, former Chair of JFPF
- Hon. Kanehiko Shido, Member of the House of Councillors
- Hon. Ayano Kunimitsu, Member of the House of Representatives

[Editorial responsibility: JFPF secretariat]

News

JFPF Study Meeting: The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls

COVID-19 has been raging since spring 2020, and the infection is now surging in what appears to be a third wave. The vaccine has been developed with unprecedented speed, and trial vaccination has begun. Despite these hopeful signs, however, we cannot be optimistic yet about fully containing the infection. Against this backdrop, the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JFPF) has been organizing workshops on the roles of parliamentarians in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly on policies for ensuring people's welfare under the COVID-19 pandemic. On 9 December, Dr. Kiyoko Ikegami, Chair of the Board of Plan International Japan, was invited to speak on the theme of "The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls" at JFPF's third Study Meeting.

[Summary of Address by JFPF Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa]

The global spread of COVID-19 has had a serious impact on various sectors and particularly on those most vulnerable in society. Girls from poor families in developing countries have, in many respects, lost social protections and have become even more vulnerable. To consider what we can do to address such a situation, we have invited Dr. Kiyoko Ikegami, Chair of the Board of Plan International Japan, to give a lecture. Dr. Ikegami was the first Director of the Tokyo Office of UNFPA and a professor at Nihon University Graduate School. She is currently a professor at Nagasaki University Graduate School. As from this year, she is the interim Executive Director of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), which is chaired by Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi. In that role, she is contributing to revive AFPPD.



[Summary of Lecture by Dr. Kiyoko Ikegami, Chair of the Board, Plan International Japan]



The Plan was formerly known as Foster Parents. The organization's name was changed to Plan International, which provides education assistance to children, particularly girls, in developing countries to improve the environment surrounding them. Girls are vulnerable even under ordinary circumstances, and in a world with no gender equality, their talents are not fully put to good use.

Central to the Plan's activities is supporting girls in developing countries to receive education by paying school fees until they are 18. Continuing education until 18 enables girls to find employment and promotes gender equality. This investment has a substantial impact and is also meaningful in achieving the SDGs. Because of the ageing of the supporters, long-term sustainability of the support is a challenge in Japan.

© Q&A Session

[Hon. Tomoko Abe]

I think that these activities that focus on girls' issues are wonderful. What are the important conditions required to enable girls to fulfill their potential?

[Dr. Kiyoko Ikegami]

In my research for a doctoral dissertation, I examined factors for preventing unwanted pregnancies in Cambodia and found that the mother's education level had a strong correlation



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(JPFP)**

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even more than the household income. As mentioned by Hon. Abe, when we think about children's issues, we need to think about issues related to mothers.

[Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada]

I have two questions. First, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a discussion on whether to compensate women employed in the so-called sexual entertainment industry, but in the end, the compensation was shelved for ethical reasons. How do you see this issue? Secondly, in the negotiation for ministries' budget request for the next fiscal year, I was trying to restore Japan's contributions to population-related organizations to previous levels in opposition to a policy to reduce such contributions. In that process, I found it difficult to explain the concept of population and development and how that concept was related to the concept of population and health. Can you elaborate on this point?



[Hon. Shizuka Terata]

Touching on what you mentioned about the number of supporters decreasing due to ageing, I would like to share my own experience. I am supporting UNHCR and it all started when I went shopping with my husband and son in a mall, where we saw photographs displayed of UNHCR's activities. We said to each other that supporting UNHCR was more meaningful than buying something for ourselves. It may be effective to do a PR campaign in shopping malls and other places where you can find young couples and families.



[Dr. Kiyoko Ikegami]

The second question from Hon. Kikawada is a broad question. The concept of population and development is a macroscopic perspective that places population in the context of sustainable development, whereas the concept of population and health is a microscopic approach with a focus on individuals. I think the concept of population and health can be subsumed into the concept of population and development. As for the first question, I hope that they would not bring ethics into a policy question. Doing so in trying to implement necessary measures would only aggravate the situation.

[Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Executive Director/Secretary General of APDA]

Population can be expressed in numbers, but population is not only about numbers. When the number of birth increases by one, it means that a baby is actually born, having a lot of people run ragged with the baby. There is no society without a population. You could even say that population is the society. JPFP was established to create a society in which each individual can live with dignity. In that respect, its activities contribute to building the SDGs. Based on its founding principles, I would like to continue to actively support its activities under the chairpersonship of Hon. Kamikawa.

[Closing Address by JPFP Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa]

I would like to thank Dr. Ikegami for her explanation about the Plan's activities. The population issues revolve around partnerships in diverse fields, and we hope to consult further with Dr. Ikegami in leveraging our respective strengths in creating a better society.





Hon. Sadakazu Tanigaki

Former Chair of JPFP

—Thank you very much for making time for this interview today. First of all, how did you become involved in population issues?

Hon. Tanigaki: As I had served for many years as Chair of the Parliamentary League for UNICEF, I had strong interest in issues surrounding developing countries and in international cooperation. At the suggestion of Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, former Chair of JPFP (the 5th Chair), I became involved in the activities of JPFP.

The mission of JPFP is to achieve sustainable development by solving the issues of population, while the mission of the Parliamentary League for UNICEF is to save the world's children. Even though their approaches are different, the two share many commonalities.

As emphasized by other parliamentarians in the E-Newsletters, the important thing is, first, to secure food and provide adequate nutrition. The second is to prepare a healthcare system and a sanitary environment. This includes access to safe, clean water as well as adequate toilet facilities. The third is to ensure access to education. I think that “food and nutrition”, “health care and hygiene”, and “education” are the three important pillars.

At the end of UNICEF annual report, you can find data on infant mortality rate, literacy rate, GDP, and others. I felt concerned about the situation in countries that data showed were doing poorly, and visited many countries, mostly in Asia, to see the situation with my own eyes. One such country was Vietnam, which had embarked on the Doi Moi reform during the 1980s. At that time, Vietnam was one of the poorest countries in Asia. That is hard to believe now. But even at that time, I was very much surprised to find that the average national literacy rate was over 90%.

In the past, Vietnam conducted imperial examinations, following the example of China, and I was impressed to see the names of successful candidates engraved in the stelae in the Temple of Literature. Some of the names were engraved centuries ago. You could sense that it was a great honor to pass the examinations and that Vietnam had put considerable efforts into education.

Even while experiencing wars against France, China, and the United States, Vietnam never neglected education. I think that the development of Vietnam today is the result of attaching importance to education.

—During its history that spans 46 years, JPFP has played a leading role in the field of population. How do you see its significance?

Hon. Tanigaki: JPFP and its activities to address the issues of population began with Hon. Nobusuke Kishi (1st Chair; 1974-1979) and Hon. Takeo Fukuda (2nd Chair; 1979-1990). Significant efforts were also made by General William Draper, who supported the founding of JPFP, as well as the successive JPFP chairs, executive members, and members.

I have been asked by other parliamentary caucuses why JPFP has been able to continue actively for so long. I think a wonderful thing about JPFP is its partnership with other regions of the world and countries. This kind of horizontal coalition can make an organization strong. I think it is the extraordinary efforts of our predecessors in creating and maintaining such a global network that have enabled us to continuously address the population issues even through changes in the government.

—Parliamentarians from abroad have, on various occasions, expressed words of appreciation for the role Japan has played in the field of population.

Hon. Tanigaki: The Japanese government has promoted international cooperation based on the principle of “human security”. If I may refer to the case in Vietnam again, Nagoya University has led an effort to provide legal technical support. The Vietnamese people have told me that “Japan listens to the voices of the local people when providing support”.

There is convergence between the concept of “human security”, which includes the concept of “ownership” where the local people's own initiatives are respected, and JPFP's activities to address the issues of population. As the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic and a host of other issues, I think that this concept of human security is increasing in its importance. And whenever I see and hear about conflict between nations and tensions and social malaise within individual countries, I feel that respect and tolerance towards others will have a very important meaning.

—COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our society and economy. What do you think is important in guiding our society towards a better future?

Hon. Tanigaki: The coronavirus has had a profound impact. We might succeed in stamping out the infection, but it would be pointless if people's livelihoods are destroyed at the same time. We need to both maintain and secure people's livelihoods and control the infection. Countries' response has varied. Some have prioritized economic policy. Others have taken draconian infection control measures even at the expense of restricting economic activities. The jury is still out on which response is most effective. It will probably become apparent a year or two from now.

We have had important discussions on the Comprehensive National Land Development Plan, which is a comprehensive, basic plan on Japan's national land development and use. Japan's economy is not as dynamic as before, and its population is decreasing. I think we need to discuss this issue on land development and use in conjunction with the issues of work-style reform and

regional revitalization. You might have heard the term "*satoyama* capitalism". There may be new possibilities arising from diversification of lifestyles and initiatives for regional vitalization.

—Lastly, do you have any message for JPFP?

Hon. Tanigaki: JPFP's activities and Japan's initiatives in the field of population is well-recognized globally. JPFP is perhaps the only parliamentary caucus originating in Japan that has a global network. I think this is something we can be proud of globally.

We can expect difficulties to continue in and outside of Japan, and it may not be easy to continue our activities to address these important issues. I hope to see cooperation among the ruling party and opposition parties under the leadership of Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa and also to see our work passed down to the next generation.



Hon. Kanehiko Shindo

Member of the House of Councillors

Japan's food self-sufficiency rate has dropped significantly from 73% in 1965 to 38% in 2020. We are implementing various policies and budget appropriation from the viewpoint of raising the food self-sufficiency rate and establishing food security. Specifically, we are increasing supply of domestically produced soybeans and wheat as strategic crops, promoting measures for replacing imported feed with domestic feed, and subsidizing rice that is converted to rice flour in order to expand rice demand.

Food education (*Shokuiku*) is also important. In preparation for drawing up the Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku*, we are further promoting local production for local consumption and examining in depth the relation between global environmental issues and food self-sufficiency.

To support Japan's agriculture and secure our food supply capacity, it is necessary to maintain our agricultural resources (farmland, water, etc.) and enhance our human as well as technological resources. We also need to take

into consideration local characteristics when we try to reinforce the functionalities of each type of resources. The agricultural resources found in each locality are unique to that locality, and it is of utmost importance to secure a budget for land improvement to strengthen the functionalities of those resources.

I think there needs to be a policy change from one that has laid too much emphasis on price of rice to one that prioritizes maximization of farmers' income. Against the backdrop of a decreasing demand for rice as a staple food, there is a need to adjust production to consumer demand and to promote public and private initiatives, including expansion of rice exports.

It is also essential that we introduce ICT (information communication technology) and AI to cut production costs as much as possible. By raising Japan's food self-sufficiency rate, moreover, we can reduce carbon emissions, have less impact on the global environment, and thereby contribute to addressing the issues of the world's population.

I have conversations on these topics with students in primary schools upwards and with citizens. We should actively send the message that by promoting food security policies with producers in tandem with consumers, we can protect Japan's agriculture, its environment, and society, and contribute to the issues of the global environment and population.

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Hon. Ayano Kunimitsu

Member of the House of
Representatives

I am involved in the response to COVID-19 both as a member of the House of Representatives and a practicing physician. In the current third wave, the health care system is stretched to the limit, and health care professionals are debilitating for having to fight the disease over an extended period of time.

Hospitals are struggling to make ends meet. I am working on expediting support and providing a better environment for such health care centers and professionals. I have also worked on appropriating government budgets for expanding PCR tests and enabling hospitals to redesign hospital space to keep beds ready for COVID-19 patients.

I have been supporting “*kodomo shokudo*” (cafeterias providing free or low-priced meals to children in need), and as the number of struggling households increases

with the coronavirus pandemic, I am also involved in food pantries and other activities for providing food to those in need. In my local district of Ibaraki Prefecture, we have many people growing vegetables, and many are willing to provide support by sharing or donating their vegetables.

I feel on the ground that women are more likely to take the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic. Compared to men, more women are non-regular workers, and there has been an increase in the number of women who have depression-like symptoms and who become victims of domestic violence. Women who were already vulnerable before the pandemic find themselves in greater difficulties. There is a need to address their difficulties as soon as possible.

The burden of childcare and nursing care tends to fall disproportionately on women. It is extremely important to improve an environment so that women can balance care and work. It is essential to change people’s mindset that espouses long working hours and to provide and make accessible a diverse range of third-party childcare and nursing care services that give attention to detail. In my office, we hired a consultant and succeeded in reducing working hours. I would also like to widely share such successful cases in achieving work-life balance.

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