

Women and Community

Moderator: Man Li Chen, President of National Alliance of Taiwan Womens' Associations

Taiwan has moved into a democratic era since the Martial Law was lifted in 1987. In this new era, the claims of women about themselves are to ask for autonomy, independent thinking and human-rights based point of view. We can probe into the communal phase of these claims in five parts. The first is to meet the intellectual need of women. The second is to develop women's action strategies. The third is to promote the supporting systems in the community. The fourth is to demand for better government policies. The fifth is to stress the importance of weak group's rights. Women manage the community affairs in the same way as they run their family affairs. I think there are three noteworthy directions to achieve to success. Firstly, ask the opposite sex for support and cooperation. Secondly, know where the social resources lie, and bring in the resources. Thirdly, empower the women to become leaders. We should let women show their talents and confirm their contribution in order to make them believe that they are capable of being leader. The community belongs to all. It's not only a satisfying space for human beings, but also comfortable space for the animals; animal rights for living are also protected. To take living, production and ecological protection all into consideration is the real spirit of sustainability.

Panelist

Nadeia Sarte, Consultant of Local Social Welfare Development Office

In establishing a community that is "Mother and Baby Friendly", we need to start with the very grassroots that composes the community and the single unit that comprises it the FAMILY. We have made that significant step by adhering to the programs that benefits both the mother and the child in reaching our goals of securing their health and seeing to it that they are both well and adequately supported and guided by educating them with our reach out stance that emphasizes that there is great importance in protecting their future and eventually that of the nation.

Panelist

Jung - Su Lee, Secretary General of Korean Women's Environmental Network

Korean society is suffering from the side effects of the so called "compressed development. "Today's Korean society is facing with the challenges such as expansion of local politics and democracy, logical communication and discussion in civil society, fair competition and remuneration, gender equality and human rights, and environmental education. These immersing challenges are only possible to be met through the development of civil society and each community member's reflection. This panel introduces one of GO & NGO cooperation models aimed to provide community support through the environmental education and women's leadership development. We have learned from our experience that women's leadership development is quintessential to any kind of community development project particularly for rising community member's awareness on environmental sustainability and education for young children. Women's civil society participation makes changes not only in the community level but in the lives of women themselves. It's been reported that most of housewives who are solely taking charge of children's education and household chores are experiencing melancholia and obsessional neurosis. Making them to think beyond their family care work and well being and to value community development and prosperity is the foundation of civil society's growth. Women indeed are the key agency which makes social changes possible in community.

Naoe Osato, Director of Gender Equality Office, Tokyo Metropolitan Government

With fewer children being born and an aging population, the deterioration of community has become a big social issue in Tokyo as the number of nuclear families and older people who live alone has increased. The number of dual income households has exceeded single income households since 1997 in Japan and has continued to grow. Further, compared to other prefectures in Japan, Tokyo is characterized by low ratio of women who hold jobs, little flexibility in the division of responsibilities within the household, low levels of social tolerance for diversity, difficulties for families to obtain support in bringing up children, and male workers with long working hours. These characteristics have various repercussions on how

women are involved in community activities.

Typical community activities generally include (1) social volunteering, environmental protection, and community development activities, (2) activities as PTA officials or members, and (3) community, women's, and children's association activities. The specific content of these activities might include volunteering to provide services for the elderly, promoting resource recycling, or participating in redevelopment planning for (1), cooperating in school events or in community activities that utilize schools for (2), and cooperating in community festivals, safety policies, or government programs for (3). Looking at how women are involved in these kind of community activities, many women ordinarily participate, but it cannot be said that many women participate as officials who set policies or make decisions. Recent survey results from a certain city indicated that factors as to why there are few women leaders in community organization, just over 40% think that "men becoming leaders is a social custom" and nearly 30% believe that "women themselves do not want to take on positions of responsibility."

These days, when we see community changing and interaction and feelings of interconnectivity between people diminishing, there is a need to create a community in which it is easier to live by encouraging men and women to participate in community activities together as a part of efforts to revitalize the community. Tokyo is entering a period in which male "baby boomers" who have had little to do with community activities up to now will retire en masse and promoting these men's participation in community activities will be important. Further, more women are engaged in community business related to child rearing and care for the elderly, and by supporting these kind of activities, we want to promote participation in new community activities corresponding to changing social conditions.

Jane Chuan Chuan Yu, program Director of Taipei YWCA

The mission of Taipei YWCA aims to inspire the special life natures of women, improve the harmony of the families, adapt to the changing society, dedicate to the local communities and transcend them to new modern women. "Community Life Association" is the service activity that Taipei YWCA has never stopped providing since it's founded in 1949. Taipei YWCA organizes "Loving Care Service Team" that two persons form a small work force to hold Community Life Association in Taipei

area and nearby cities and counties. Two sessions are held each year with 15 courses. In serving practice, Community Life Association joins local devotees in the community and utilizes relevant resources to support community life education containing speeches, activities, traveling, direct and indirect public affair participation, various kinds of programs, etc. These provide women with various knowledge and abilities as modern citizens. Meanwhile, in order to practice charity, the team makes a fundraiser for underprivileged organizations annually and offers the concrete financial support to them as well. There are 33 communities with the total of 1,100 families to be served every year.