



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
8 December 2017

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by International Women’s Year Liaison Group, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Few Things have changed since 1960**

The latest statistics (2015) indicate that the agricultural population is in decline in Japan. Of 2.16 million households engaged in agriculture, only 0.29 million households (13.4 per cent) are classified as households whose major income is from agriculture, 0.44 million households (20.4 per cent) are classified as engaged full-time in agriculture. Of 3.4 million agricultural population, 1.75 million work as full-time farmers, out of which only 0.75 million (42.7 per cent) are women.

The agricultural population peaked in 1960, 30.2 per cent of the total population. Between 1960s and 1970s, when the country experienced high economic growth, women were essential actors in agriculture and made up more than 60 per cent of the agricultural population, but their role was invisible. They rarely owned land, their labour was underappreciated, and they hardly participated in management and decision-making processes.

### **The Two Basic Laws of 1999 assume women are to bear double burden**

After the Fourth World Conference at Beijing, the Japanese Government established the Headquarters for Planning and Promotion of Policies Relating to Women as the national coordinating machinery related to women. In 1977, the Headquarters produced the first National Action Plan, promoting the welfare of rural women in agriculture, forestry and fishing communities as one of its goals, and enacted the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society. Unfortunately, the phrase corresponding to gender equality in Japanese, i.e. men and women's joint participation in society, does not explicitly deny the existing gender roles while inviting women to participate in workforce and decision-making, implicitly expecting women to bear the double burden of work and family. Also enacted in 1999 was the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas which promotes women's participation in agricultural management and other activities.

### **We lament the dearth of evidence based policies**

In 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, pursuant to the Food and Agriculture Basic Law, conducted a survey of self-employed women working in agriculture and their spouses about the condition of rural women and desirable policies to improve these conditions. Since then, the Ministry has listed policies encouraging women to take courses on management and new technologies, and to conclude Family Management Agreements. Unfortunately, 2001 is the only time, the Ministry nor any other government agencies has engaged in a survey relevant to rural women. We need properly conducted surveys and accurate gender statistics, to plan and implement appropriate policies.

### **Family Management Agreements are no panacea. We aspire all women to be economically independent**

Family Management Agreements project is often mentioned as an indispensable element in empowering rural women. The Ministry started the project in the 1960s to encourage sons to succeed family farms. At that time, policy-makers assumed that an agreement, between the head of the family (father) and a succeeding son, defining their roles, responsibilities and future arrangement in a written form, would help keep young people from leaving family farms for urban jobs. In those days, it was often

called a father-son agreement. It failed, and the decline of agricultural population continued.

Then in the 1995, the program was revived. Its new target was women. It presupposes that the basic farming (and fishing) unit is the family, and that without women's active participation, the primary industry cannot continue to provide even the minimum food supply for the country. The new model differs from the old 1960s model on two points:

- parties are not confined to father and son, but includes women, and could be applied between spouses; and
- the content is not confined to an assignment of farming properties or stipend and compensation for family members. It often includes agreed-upon management policies, arrangements for accounting and other financial matters, (per diem, weekly, monthly or annual) compensations, working hours and holidays, and maternity and parental leaves (as employees), or rules for distributing profits beyond fore-mentioned compensations (as co-owners).

This reflects new types of family relationships emerging in rural areas. But it still expects family members to contribute according to their abilities to the family business. The latest statistics shows that only 56,397 families out of about 0.44 million full-time households (12.8 per cent) or out of 2.16 million households (2.6 per cent) have concluded their Family Management Agreements in writing by 2016. It has been said that concluding family arrangements has been instrumental in empowering rural women, but the number is too small to be complacent.

Further survey shows that compensation for women as defined in these arrangements is very small, 0.6 to 1.2 million yen annually, which is far below the poverty line, and that women are often obliged to use this income not for themselves but for other family members. Even Income Tax Code Article 56 does not classify compensation based on Family Management Agreements and from other family-run businesses as an individual's income, an important point that Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women asked the Government to review in its Concluding Observations in 2016.

### **We need a properly structured National Health Insurance System**

Most people engaged in agriculture are covered by the National Health Insurance. It does not award compensation for out-of-work and lost wages caused by injuries and childbirth. This often forces women, not just rural women but also all self-employed women, women working for family business or employed as part-time, to shorten time necessary to recuperate from injuries and childbirth. Legal protection for women such as maternity and parental leaves are confined to working women employed as full-time workers and do not extend to rural women. This is an important issue that should be dealt with to improve the condition of all women workers.

### **We fear that rural women are becoming invisible again in national policies**

The latest National Action Plan of 2015 does not treat rural women independently but lumps them together with local community development and environment. It recognizes that women make up about 40 per cent of full-time agricultural population but laments that their participation in management and decision-making is still not significant. According to latest figures, there are 1,706 local agricultural committees, administrative agencies governing local agricultural

land usages: 488 or 28.6 per cent of those are still composed of all male members, and 2,671 or mere 8.1 per cent of committee members are women.

There are 660 local agricultural cooperatives and 4.6 million regular members: 21.1 per cent of regular members are women, an increase of 82 per cent since 1999, and of 17,467 board members, only 1,305 or 7.5 per cent are women, an impressive increase of 826 per cent since 1999. These numbers reflect the fact that the National Action Plan and the fore-mentioned Ministry have successfully urged these entities to include at least one woman in their managerial ranks, and have encouraged women to participate in decision-making positions. As the result, we have seen notable changes in this area but, it still is a long way to 203050.

### **There is a silver-lining, women are good at starting new things**

To end with a hopeful observation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries states that, statistically speaking, agricultural entities with women as board members and managers tend to enjoy larger gross sales, greater operating profits, and impressive annual increases in sales and profits. Although the number of rural women who began their own businesses have not increased during the last decade, and almost half of those entities gross less than 3 million yen annually, the Ministry encourages women to realize that they have important roles to play in increasing productivity of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and that they are the ones to lead the next productivity wave.

In fact, the Ministry is proposing to subsidize entities with women in management and entities processing produces, which are considered women's job, and entities with women leaders and new feasible business plans for the fiscal year 2017, the budget is 100 million yen or less than 0.000035 per cent of the Ministry's budget. We must not forget that almost all success projects are the ones which started with their own efforts, women should thank the proposal and decide their priorities themselves.

### **We share our experience with other women**

We should not leave out our international cooperation efforts. Japan International Cooperation Agency has been offering the training course entitled Empowerment of Rural Women. Our goal is to share our experiences and humbly learn from others so that no one will be left behind when we achieve gender equality.

---