



国際女性会議
World Assembly for Women

WAW! 2017



Scene from a panel discussion titled, "Women and Entrepreneurship"
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka

World Assembly for Women: WAW! 2017

From November 1 to 3, the Fourth World Assembly for Women: WAW! 2017 was held in Tokyo under the theme "WAW! In Changing World." Participants from both Japan and overseas held animated discussions on women's empowerment.

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WAW! stands for World Assembly for Women, and it is an international conference that has been organized every year since 2014 by the Japanese government, which regards the realization of "a society where women shine" as an important policy. This year as well, a range of participants, including the directors of international organizations and governments, scientists, corporate managers, journalists and university students, got together and held lectures and panel discussions on a variety of topics, such as starting business for women's empowerment, technical innovation, volunteer work, security, media and disasters.

Throughout the three-day conference, numerous participants pointed out the substantial impact of

female participation in the labor market on society and the economy and the importance of realizing a diverse and inclusive world that "leaves no one behind," which the sustainable development goals (SDGs) aim to achieve. Kristalina Georgieva, Chief Executive Officer for the World Bank, who gave keynote speeches at the opening and closing ceremonies, referred to three aspects of gender equality – females entering school and pursuit of learning, access to capital and the acquisition and training of accounting knowledge and organized dedication to "HeForShe (SheForHe)," that is, a commitment to gender equality. In addition, she introduced the World Bank's



Kristalina Georgieva,
Chief Executive Officer
for the World Bank,
speaks at WAW! 2017.
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka



support for women in developing countries as a specific example and stressed the significant effect of women’s economic empowerment on children, homes and communities.

Many participants pointed out that Japanese measures for female participation are insufficient, but commended the results of reforms in recent years. In particular, they praised the improvement of female employment rates, which was a significant issue for Japan for many years. Due to the government’s active measures to create an environment in which women can work more easily and comfortably, the number of working women has increased by about 1.5 million people in the last five years. It is known that the rate of the Japanese female workforce (percentage of workforce [employees + unemployed people] to the population of people who are fifteen years old or more) declines temporarily at the ages of marriage and childbirth, and rises again at the ages when child care becomes stable. This is the so-called M-shaped curve. It can be said to be the result of the government’s measures for solving these issues (see pp. 6-7).

In addition to the issue of employment rates, the participants also held animated discussions about women starting business. It is noted that women starting business may yield high added-value products and extremely convenient services that have not been seen before, as well as female independence. The participants mentioned the issue of female entrepreneurs in developing countries facing obstacles, such as access to capital and legal systems. The “Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative” (We-Fi), whose funds were set within the World Bank by the G-20 Summit in Hamburg in July this year, is a powerful supportive measure. The Japanese government vowed to provide support of 50 million dollars. Foreign Minister Taro Kono, who attended WAW! 2017, stated, “Japan will support We-Fi as much as possible so that the initiative can be run smoothly and help women around the world reach their full potential.”

Other participants included Ivanka Trump, Advisor to the US President, who is a well-known entrepreneur, and Susi Pudjiastuti, Minister of Marine Affairs & Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia, who founded a

fishery company and an airline. They introduced

their own experiences and sent a powerful message toward a society where women all over the world shine. Young people, who will create the future, joined a special session entitled, “The Future of Women’s Empowerment from the Youth Perspective.” Six young people who are involved in multiple activities, such as the management of media for young people and student organizations, spoke passionately about the importance of both male and female young people acting on their own ideas for a better society. A high school girl who attended the session said, “I want to act by making decisions in accordance with my own will, rather than choosing actions from among the options given,” which prompted loud applause in the hall.

On the last day of the conference, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appeared on the stage and introduced measures for promoting women’s empowerment both in Japan and overseas, and the results. He said, “We will expand throughout the world the network for enhancing women’s participation and advancement in society. When women around the world rise up, we will surely be able to resolve poverty and various other issues facing the world.”

As the results of WAW! 2017, the main proposals made by the participants were compiled in the form of the “WAW!2017 Tokyo Declaration.” Five pillars, including “raise awareness through education and training” to promote women’s empowerment, “collect, analyze and share gender-related data” and “actively use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT),” were included in the declaration.

At the fifth WAW!, which will be held next year, the participants will discuss measures based on these proposals and new issues. WAW! created a stir in global change through the promotion of women’s empowerment. As the phrase “To go on is to go up” shows, positive effects are expected to expand by sharing the same recognition and passing on their experiences by the people concerned, including the participants. 