

Women and Economy

Moderator : Kristy Hsu, Associate Research Fellow at the Taiwan WTO Center, Chung Hua Institution for Economic Research

Enhancing women's participation in and contribution to economic activities has been on high priority of most government's policy objectives, thanks to gender advocates and organizations which have promoted the importance of women's role in economic development in the past two decades. However, though more women nowadays enjoy improved access to economic resources, including land, financing, vocational training, information and markets, women around the world face various challenges emerging from accelerated economic globalization and liberalization. Given increasing economic integration of Asian countries, women in this region share a lot of common difficulties and opportunities. It is therefore of vital importance to enhance international cooperation among like-minded governments and societies to ensure shared prosperity and advancement of women's economic roles.

Women entrepreneurship has become phenomenal in Asian both in industrial cities and rural areas. In each year an increasing number of women start up and run their business, the size being big, small, or for most of the time, micro with less than 5 people. Women owned or operated businesses share common characteristics: they are mostly very small in size, have a short life span, and highly aggregated in low skilled, traditional sectors with low entry barriers.

Women face common obstacles, too. They all have difficulties in getting funding, are in lack of business knowledge or training, and access to markets. Women usually don't have their own business networks where they can share experiences and "communicate" with policy makers. Last but not least, women usually find themselves in gender-biased business environment and general business practices.

What is government's role in this global trend of women entrepreneurship? What can governments do to help entrepreneurial women make profits and reach their full potentials? In addition to regional organizations such as APEC and ADB, a

network such as the Asia Network of Major Cities can work to review and evaluate its members' economic policies with a gender sensitive approach in order to make an enabling environment for women. It can also re-examine functions of financial institutions to change unfriendly practices against women. The governments also need to build a partnership with NGOs and civil societies so that they can work from the grass roots to help facilitate governments' policy and practices.

Panelist

Masanobu Hasegawa, Director of Tokyo Women's Plaza, Citizens' Affairs Division Bureau of Citizens, Culture, and, Sports

The Tokyo metropolitan government has drafted an action plan for gender equality, Chance and Support Tokyo plan 2007, and is engaged in efforts to promote participation the employment sector, which has been cited as an important issue.

The environment surrounding working men and women has been changing in recent years as international competition has heated up, employment forms have diversified as the service economy has increased, and the modes of work people seek have changed.

Part-time and temporary workers have increased in number and women's share is especially large. As society enters a period of actual population decline there are also concerns that labor shortages and declining demand will affect the economy.

However, when it comes to women's share of management positions and male female wage disparities, the situation regarding women's participation in the labor sector cannot be said be sufficient.

Affirmative actions to ameliorate the disparities between male and female workers that in fact occur are important policies meant to promote challenges for women and create workplace environments in which both men and women can participate with aspirations. We need to continue promoting the affirmative actions and actively encourage corporate efforts.

Further, as shown by labor force ratios by age segment, women's employment conditions decline during marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing periods, a

continuing situation that traces an “M curve.” It is important to actively support renewed challenges for women who have temporarily interrupted work to bring up children or care for the elderly as well as to provide environments that enable diverse, flexible choices of working modes in order to create environments in which people can display their abilities, whether male or female, and be able to continue jobs, whatever the changes in life stage, such as childbirth.

The three pillars of metropolitan government policies and Tokyo residents’ and business operators’ efforts are as follows:

1. Active measures to promote improvements
2. provision of working environments that will promote diverse employment modes
3. Supporting women in the challenges they face

Tokyo is reaching maturity as a city and to become an even more functional and attractive city and achieve a gender equal society in which each individual citizen is able to choose diverse ways of living, corresponding to that person’s enthusiasm and abilities, the metropolitan government intends to work together with business operators and city residents to steadily promote this program.

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.

Li Ian Tseng, project Office of Peng Wan Ru Foundation

Peng Weng Ru Foundation (PWRF) established to remember Ms.Peng Weng Ru’s work for gender equality and women empowerment, when she accidentally died in 1996. Research literature indicates disadvantaged women living in unacceptable conditions of poverty with various causes, including structural ones. Employment has been considered in the reality of women’s growing economic insecurity. In order to promote women’s equal access to labor markets, sustainable employment, and adequate labor protection, since 1998, PWRF provided training, counseling and matching services for disadvantaged women. Annually up to five hundreds of disadvantaged women have been trained PWRF for house keeping and home care service. Employed and expatriated by PWRF,

97% of trainees continued in service more than 3 months after replacement. 90% of trainees remained on the job after one year of service. By 28 hours of work per week, higher wages than the average market rate were paid in average. What is the key success factor to promote disadvantaged woman for employment? How is the empowerment procedure developed by PWRF? It will be presented in this panel.