

Lessons Learned from the Exchange Program – Comments from Participants

Ms. KUMEI Ayako (NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation)

“What Should Female Journalists Do to Build a Better Society? Breaking away from Machoism”

Memorable words from the three-day conference

- ▶ Women’s participation brings about higher GDP and economic benefits. Women’s voices change society’s perception
- ▶ Roles of female journalists, women’s way of working and women’s speaking out are extremely important
- ▶ At present, newsworthiness is evaluated from men’s perspective. It is very important to incorporate various perspectives into journalism.
- ▶ Digitization has changed the nature of journalism. Stories told from ‘personal viewpoint’ are connected to social issues.
- ▶ Both strategy and conventional wisdom are necessary to break into the mainstream
- ▶ Political measures are meaningless if they are not implemented (like in Japan)
- ▶ Messages should be clear and understandable for men, too
- ▶ Ideal working environment is comfortable for both men and women
- ▶ Change might come from the outside
- ▶ Today’s female journalists are working to reform existing work culture of journalists. It’s a time of transformation.
- ▶ Cast light on unnoticed part of the society. This is what journalists must do.
- ▶ Media organizations are desperate on the back of digitization. Journalists should not lose the sight of its initial goal in a time like this.

A developed country in disaster reduction, yet underdeveloped in gender & disaster reduction

“Japan is lagging 20 years behind other countries in studies on gender and disaster reduction.” It was shocking to hear this.

I thought that coverage of disaster damages and disaster reduction from women’s perspective was gradually increasing. However, presentation by Ms. Sachiko Asano from the Training Center for Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction made me realize how little I knew. Because I have never experienced a disaster myself nor have I covered stories of the disaster-affected areas, I regretted my lack of awareness and understanding on women and disaster reduction/damages.

There are so many stories we must report. Japan has a long way to go to advance in the field of “disaster reduction and gender”. Most of the attention and money were channeled to

public policies for disaster reduction, and thus women's issues have been left behind. What can we do to avoid division and help women to connect with each other and cooperate in a society where women are becoming more diverse and having less connection with the community? What can we do to help women take on the leadership in relation to disaster reduction? First and foremost, we must raise awareness on disaster reduction and on how to protect our lives. But at the same time, I strongly feel that we must think about how to incorporate women's perspective and discuss its importance concurrently. I must say that the hurdle we must overcome is very high. How can we make men think that "gender and disaster reduction" is everyone's issue, including men, and not only women's? We, of course, must report on the issue and send the messages persistently by taking every possible opportunity while also taking creative approaches to get the messages across to everyone, regardless of their gender.

My impression

I had the great opportunity to converse and discuss with fellow female journalists from other countries throughout the program. It was very fruitful to hear about various women's issues and situations in other countries directly from them, which I only knew through the media. It made me reassure that female journalists at news centers share the same challenges and problems regardless of their country, and the issue is not domestic but global. There are so many challenges for female journalists to tackle; increasing the number of women with decision-making authority, reporting on women issues which can only be done by female journalists, and fostering female journalists, etc.

It is also becoming increasingly important to continuously send messages not only for women but also for men, who build the society together. In a time when things are changing so rapidly, we must take this opportunity and discover the best way of sending messages that best suits the digital era. The time has come for women to lead the way, without sticking to conventional ways of thinking and reporting. I know it's very challenging and the goal will not be achieved overnight. It may take years, or maybe generations. But again, it's journalists' responsibilities to make it happen in a shorter time, so we can achieve a better society.

To make everyone happy and to make the world a better place, shed light on different problems from different angles as a female journalist.

Ms. Azreen Hani Binti Abu Bakar (The Malaysian Reserve)

"Gender Equality: Not A Far-Fetched Reality"

The issue of gender equality, especially with regards to female empowerment has taken its momentum in Asian countries, including Malaysia, for the past few years. The #MeToo movement that broke out two years ago, proved to be a catalyst for more women looking to promote gender equality in society, especially in the workplace.

If before, women are expected to toughen up, or quit their job because of work pressure, it is heartening to see that the gender equality movement, which used to be championed only by feminist groups, have started to take place in the heart and minds of ordinary women themselves, and even the male counterparts.

The invitation by the Japanese government, specifically Gender Equality Bureau, helps me have a better understanding and approach on how to initiate change in a conservative, male-dominated society. Japan and Malaysia, and to an extent almost all Asian countries, have strong traditional values that put men in "higher position" than women.

I believe, from all the discussions held throughout the programme, we should aim to educate and bring awareness on gender equality in a delicate manner. Our Asian values differ greatly than the West thus using a hard approach, would only alienate the male counterparts to be involved in creating an inclusive society. In fact, it may work in reverse. They may alienate women instead of becoming an ally for the objective of gender equality.

There are various factors to consider before we want to initiate an action plan that is systematic, comprehensive and consistent to create an inclusive society. Like a panellist, KUMEI Ayako said in her talk, gender issue should not be about women's issue only. It should be addressed as a society issue, where we want to achieve a society where both men and women would be able to thrive.

In Malaysia, although women are given equal opportunity to work, it is generally hard for them to continue working due to societal pressure; ie marriage and giving birth. I have learned that this seems to be a common shared problem together with other participating countries in the Hasshin! programme.

Taking media industry in specifics, I also realised that apart from Republic of Korea, there is no dedicated female group that represents women who work in this sector. This puts female journalists at a disadvantage and open to workplace discrimination. Not having a union or network would put female workers at the mercy of the corporation, and in male dominated sector, it is quite difficult to get men to understand women's plight.

Of course, we have discussed and exchanged our views about women's position in the media during the programme. So what should we, as media practitioners do? I believe first and

foremost, we should go back to our main role that is not only to report, but to inform and educate.

How do we do that? Creating awareness on women's issues should be a start. The #MEtoo has given more women a platform to highlight various issues such as sexual harassment, equal pay and inclusive policies, so this is the time for us write or report such matter to the public. I refer to the works of JIBU Renge and TAKEDA Kota whom I have only discovered during the conference, which I believe have helped the Japanese people to not only aware of what is happening, but to also discuss on how is the best way to move forward.

Also, having more female workers in the media industry would help, but only to an extent. Therefore, I think the government or authority should encourage promotion of women in leadership roles. Having female leaders would not only help reduce the stigma or bias one would have on another, it would allow media organisations to look at news from female's point of views thus leading to better reporting.

Additionally, media organisation should not be too protective of women journalists to do their job. They should be allowed to do "hard assignment" like disaster or war reporting, similar to their male counterpart. Again, when we want to talk about creating an inclusive society, it would mean that women should be given a level playing field -equal opportunity, equal pay, equal platform to shine. Therefore, introducing a policy that would encourage work-life balance in an organisation may help not only female but male workers too.

Will the government's interference in media industry help? Yes in the sense that women should be afforded an equal treatment legally. The authority should be cognisant of female workers' right and issues, particularly in the face of discrimination and harassment. The report by female workers should be attended to as everyone is equal in the face of justice. If all of us play our roles right, having an inclusive society would not be impossible.

Hasshin! Declaration

Each woman journalist made a “Hasshin Declaration” based on what they learned during the exchange program. Here are women journalists’ declarations on how to take action by becoming an agent themselves to send out messages of women’s empowerment in the media.

Share experiences in creating an ideal working environment for women in the media

Pay more attention to gender issues

Come up with new ideas to support working mothers in the media

Take action to diversify the newsroom in terms of gender, age and nationality

Write articles that present a role model and stimulate women

Pave the way for those in the same path to move forward and turn the spotlight on the areas which need support

Write articles on the story of stimulating and ambitious women

Turn the spotlight on various social issues from different perspectives as a woman journalist

Take action before doubting yourself

Write articles on the story of men who break the stereotype

Write articles on gender equality from a new perspective such as not using the term ‘gender equality’

HAS

SHIN!

Take action to improve the working condition for both men and women journalists

Contribute to the learning process of the community we belong to, through writing articles

State our opinions clearly, believe our colleagues and strengthen solidarity

Promote an equal mix of men and women in the workplace

Write articles for men to change their ways of thinking on gender

Encourage junior women journalists to play an active role by building network, providing opportunity to voice opinion and writing articles on women's empowerment

Now is the time for women to stand up and raise our voice. Hasshin!

Women's rights are human rights

Write more articles which value our own perspectives

Provide opportunities for more women to raise their voice

Aim for equal gender mix in the newsroom, articles and daily life

Create a better partnership between men and women to promote better understanding on gender equality

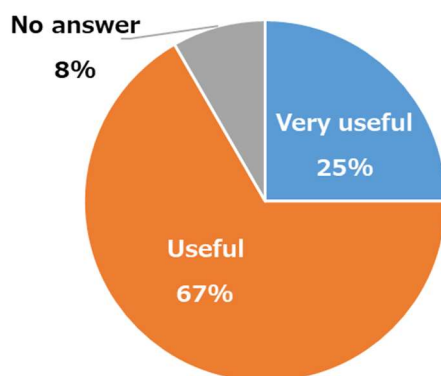
Advocate for the rights of women, elderly and children

Results of the Post-Event Questionnaire Survey

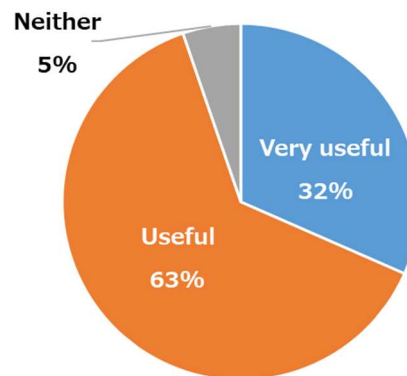
Day 1: Symposium

○ Panel discussion: “Advancement and future of women journalists”

In total, 92% of the Japanese participants and 95% of the non-Japanese ones replied that the symposium was either “very useful” or “useful.” Some commented that learning about the status of other countries or panelist’s perspective were very useful. Others commented they recognized the importance of involving men and men’s perspectives on promoting gender equality.



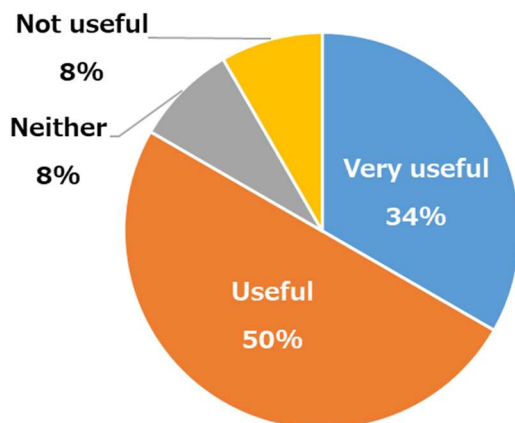
Japanese participants



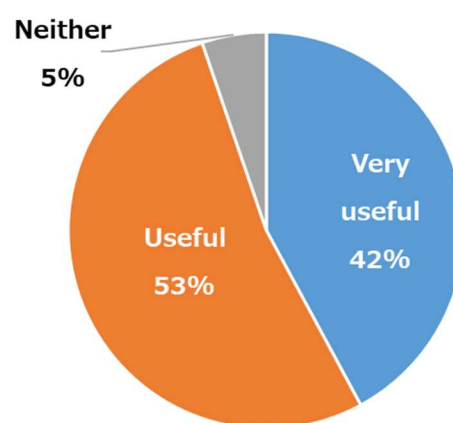
International participants

○ Group discussions

Eighty-four percent of the Japanese participants and ninety-five percent of the international ones replied that the group discussions were either “very useful” or “useful.” Many replied that the session deepened their understanding on the situation of other countries and exchanging opinions among women journalists as well as the general-public participants was very useful.



Japanese participants



International participants

○ International get-together

To the question “Were you able to interact sufficiently with other journalists and the general-public participants?” 83% of the Japanese participants and 95% of the international ones replied positively.

Day 2: Visits

○ Groupings

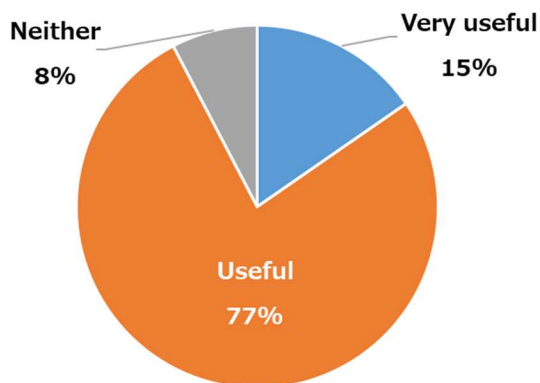
Theme	Japan	International
Declining birthrate and aging population, and elderly care	3 people	7 people
Sports and women's health	4 people	3 people
Barrier-free society	3 people	6 people
Disaster prevention and rehabilitation	3 people	4 people
Total	13 people	20 people

○ Degree of satisfaction on visits

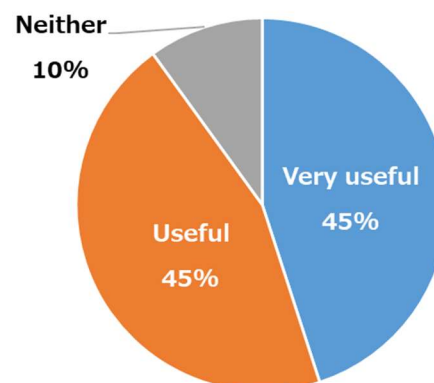
Each group made a field visit one in the morning and one in the afternoon based on a different theme. Ninety-two percent of the Japanese participants and all the international ones replied that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the morning program. Ninety-two percent of the Japanese participants and 85% of the international ones replied that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the afternoon program.²

○ Did you find the field visit and a discussion with other participants useful for your future news coverages/reports?

Ninety-two percent of the Japanese participants and ninety percent of the international ones replied either “very useful” or “useful.”



Japanese participants



International participants

○ Main comments from the participants:

- ▶ I was able to find out the perspectives and awareness of journalists from other countries when covering a story. I am excited to find out what kind of stories they will be reporting about this exchange program.
- ▶ Listening to the questions from international women journalists made me think about what kind of information to put in when writing an article for overseas readers.

² “Group A: Declining birthrate and aging population, and elderly care” visited in the morning an organization that addresses a social concern and, in the afternoon, an organization that has expertise on a social concern.

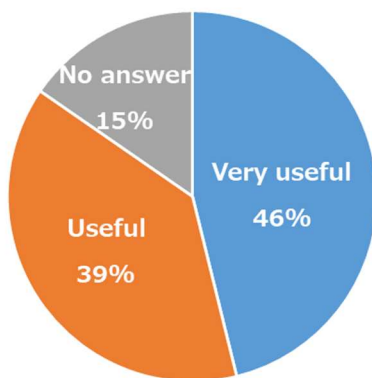
Day 3: Opinion Exchange

○ Review of visits

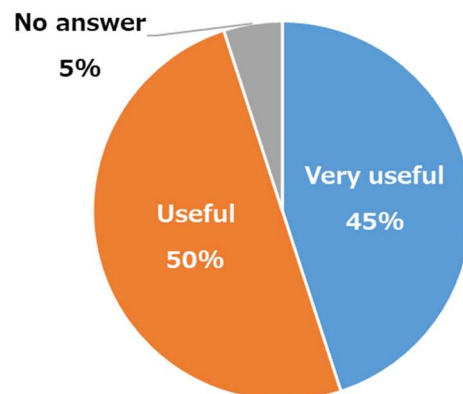
Ninety-two percent of the Japanese participants and ninety percent of the international ones replied either “very useful” or “useful” to the question “Did you find exchanging and sharing opinions with other participants on field visits useful?”

○ Did you find the short presentation of participants useful?

Eighty-five percent of the Japanese participants and ninety-five percent of the international ones replied either “very useful” or “useful.” Some found that initiatives from other media outlet in the same country also useful.



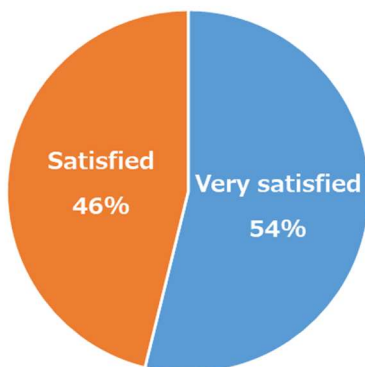
Japanese participants



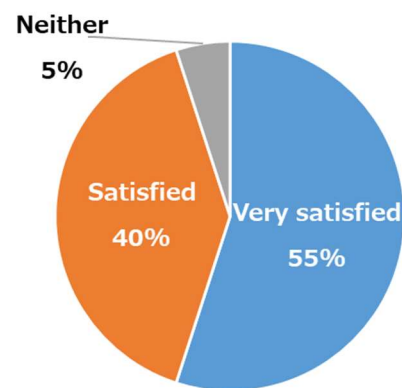
International participants

○ Degree of satisfaction on group discussions

All the Japanese participants and 95% of the international ones replied either “very satisfied” or “satisfied.” Many participants commented that group discussions made them realize differences with other countries.



Japanese participants

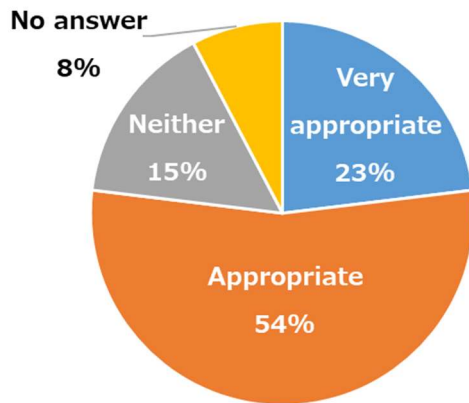


International participants

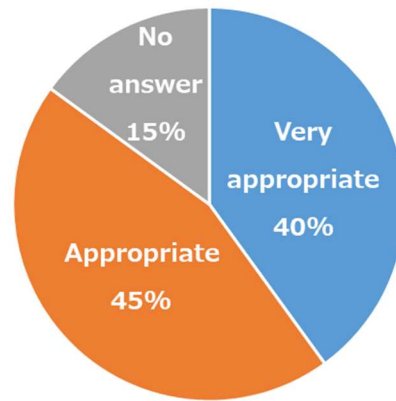
Overall Exchange Program

○ Did you find the theme and the content of the exchange program appropriate?

Seventy-seven percent of the Japanese participants and eighty-five percent of the international ones replied that the “theme and content of the exchange program were appropriate.”



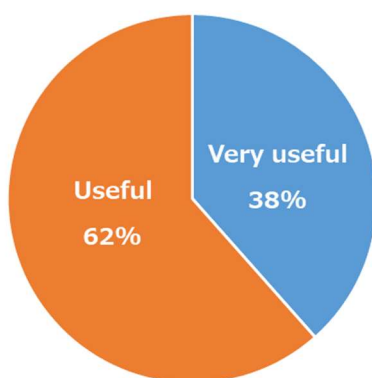
Japanese participants



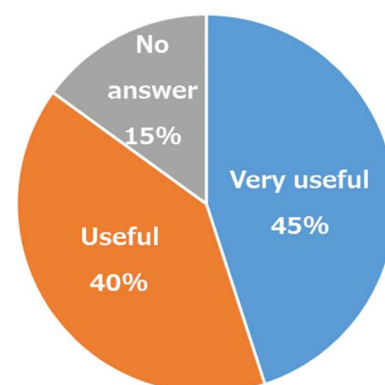
International participants

○ Do you think the knowledge and experience gained from the exchange program will be useful for your future news coverages/reports?

All the Japanese participants and 85% of the international ones replied that the “knowledge and experience gained from the exchange program will be useful for the future news coverages/reports.” Many commented that the program gave them an opportunity to review and rethink about their work.



Japanese participants



International participants