

## 9. Removing Barriers through Education and Training

ONISHI Sachiyo

The University of Tokyo announced the introduction in 2017 of a grant scheme to provide ¥30,000 per month as a rent subsidy for 100 female students from outside the Tokyo metropolitan area under certain conditions. Female high school students now tend to choose a local college or university after graduation, and so the university is proactively encouraging a wide variety of students with different backgrounds to improve their education through friendly competition by increasing the number of female entrants from other areas, including widening the recommendation quota for the entrance exam, launched in 2016, to two candidates for each co-ed school – one male and one female. The rent subsidy scheme is part of such efforts.

Education and training geared to the advancement of women help to increase the dynamism of both businesses and universities. Today, the proactive provision of educational opportunities for women, particularly in ICT and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), is critical for creating a wide range of business opportunities.

Based on its own experience in Egypt, the world's leading mobile phone company based in the UK estimated that educating 7.2 million illiterate women through mobile devices by 2020 would improve the female literacy rate by 1.2 points and increase the employment of app and other tech-savvy women, resulting in returns worth \$340 million<sup>1</sup>. Such a grand project would thus produce sizable gains.

Working with a local NGO, a US food manufacturer provides education and training for female small-scale farmers in a flood-prone, raw material-producing area in one of the poorest provinces in India<sup>2</sup>. Over five years, 15,000 women who had lacked the opportunity to receive primary education or learn agricultural production skills, received training on farming techniques. In addition to production training, they also learned how to

respond appropriately to the impacts of climate change and the factors that cause floods. The project also included managerial training to control revenues and increase savings.

The result was increased agricultural productivity and the involvement of women in business management, ranging from production to sale, a role traditionally reserved for men. Following further skill training, these women developed into dynamic drivers of the company's value chain, sometimes assisted by their male colleagues. This initiative may be compared with the development of agriculture into a "senary industry" in Japan.

Nevertheless, further ingenuity is needed to ensure that women, as well as the people around them, recognise their potential through education and training in order to build the foundation for their economic empowerment. Experiments on the evaluation of students' reports and employees' business proposals have shown that works that received similar marks when submitted anonymously tended to receive higher marks when submitted under a male pseudonym, and lower marks under a female pseudonym. This result apparently stems from the stereotypical idea that academia and business should be led by men. Many companies have adopted training programmes<sup>3</sup> to recognise and correct this potentially harmful unconscious bias.

There remains the criticism that education and training specifically for female students and employees constitutes reverse discrimination against men, but this is not the case. Such efforts help to create a society where both women and men can realise their full potential in different ways by focusing on women, who have more to gain from such initiatives, to remove the invisible barriers. In short, they constitute investment in human resources by schools and businesses. There is an urgent need to develop a business model whereby the advancement of women will, rather than depriving male employees of opportunities, actually contribute to their advancement.

<sup>1</sup> Vodafone, Connected Women, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Kellogg Company, 2015 Year-End Sustainability Milestones, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see <https://businessiats.diverse.com/en/12>.