

## 5. Expectations for Women as Driving Force for Economic Growth

### ■ Updates of Approaches and Discussion in Japan

Basic policies in the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality enhance expectation and the need for women to exercise their ability from both qualitative and quantitative aspects, not only to cope with the decrease of the working population in the aging society with a low birth rate, but also to create new values in globalization and diversified consumers' needs.

In May 2012, a ministerial conference was set up to facilitate economy revitalization through women's active participation focusing on possible approaches to be specified and promoted. In June, "Action Plan for Economy Revitalization through the Promotion of Women – A Grand Strategy for Working Nadeshiko –" was compiled. This action plan was reflected to the "Strategy for the Rebirth of Japan" adopted as a cabinet decision in July and examination was started immediately.

"Japan Revitalization Strategy," approved by Cabinet approval on June 14, 2013, places women at the core of its

growth strategy saying that the creation of an environment which encourages women's active participation should be promoted in light of a recommendation summarized on May 19, 2013 by the Forum for Promoting Active Participation by Young People and Women. In order to eliminate the "M-shaped curve problem," the target for female employment rate for women between the age of 25 and 44 in 2020 is set at 73 % (an approximate 5 point increase from the 2012 level), and specific measures are determined as follows: "Granting incentives to companies that strive to promote active participation by women and to support balancing work and family, etc.," "Supporting active participation by women in accord with the life stages of women," "Creating an environment in which both men and women can strike a balance between work and child-rearing, etc.," and "Promoting initiatives to expand employment/promotion of women in public employees."

### ■ Problems in relation to promotion of women's active participation

The background behind those measures is described as below.

#### (Difficulty for women to continue working)

Employees' position and wage tend to be closely linked with their career and skill that formed through continuous work experience. It is not easy for a female employee to continue working in the current situation where employees have to work for long hour and childcare, caregiving and housework are mostly performed by women. With low level of labour mobility at present, women, who spent some years for childcare, often restarts working as a non-regular employee – the status with a flexible work shift but unstable and less-paid than a regular employee.

Demand for nursery care has been increasing and is anticipated to reach a peak at the end of FY 2017. In urban areas, in particular, the capacity is not sufficient

both qualitatively and quantitatively and the waiting list for nursery service is getting longer. As the society get aged further, how to coordinate women's work and caregiving will be more critical if role sharing by gender remains unchanged.

#### (Women's participation in the decision making process stagnated)

Fewer women become regular employees than men immediately after graduation from school. Female candidates for manager, who are mostly regular employees, are small in number. Since career and skill formation are prerequisites to be promoted to a manager, a female employee who discontinued working due to childbirth, childcare etc. is to experience disadvantage compared with men, who generally continue working.

Under the review criteria based on long working hours, it could be difficult for women during the childcare period to be evaluated appropriately. Working mothers with a small child, who go home after working intensively for a limited time, are hardly appreciated when compared with male employees who are at the workplace for long hours while leaving housework to their spouse.

A woman may quit job and suspend her carrier and skill formation, or may continue to work while caring her family. For either case, the conditions are not favorable enough for women to participate in the decision making process as a manager or executive.

#### (Education and starting of business for women)

Education is the basis for the acquirement of knowledge and skills for life, and it is one of the keys for men and women to continue to be active at all life stages.

If a company tries to hire female engineers, it may face difficulty in recruiting new graduates because few women are studying science and engineering at colleges, universities, graduate schools or the like.

The ratio of non-regular employment among women is higher than that among men even in the case of new graduates in their twenties. Considering that non-regular employees often have disadvantages in career formation and skill development in comparison with regular

employees, women's high ratio of non-regular employees will broadly influence employment, position, wage, asset formation and many other factors throughout their lives. Starting business is one of the ways of working. Women are expected to promote growth of business or innovation of the society with their original viewpoint, and thereby facilitate recovery in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. On the other hand, when women with little work experience plan to start business, problems in fund-raising and management know-how may be more serious than men.

#### (Problems in voluntary approaches by companies)

When considering a severe management conditions that businesses are experiencing in and out of Japan, companies which make the best use of diverse human resources including women are believed to be more successful in the medium to long term than those which cannot do so. However, various costs will be temporarily required in many cases to develop a system to promote women's active participation and improve the workplace environment. It is necessary therefore to convince stakeholders that promoting women's active participation can have preferable effects on their businesses and workplaces.