



Abenomics is Womenomics

“Creating a society in which all women shine” is one of the defining policies of Abenomics. Thanks to the measures introduced under the policy since the Abe administration’s establishment in December 2012, some one million women have newly entered the labor market and the number of female corporate board members has increased by approximately 30%.

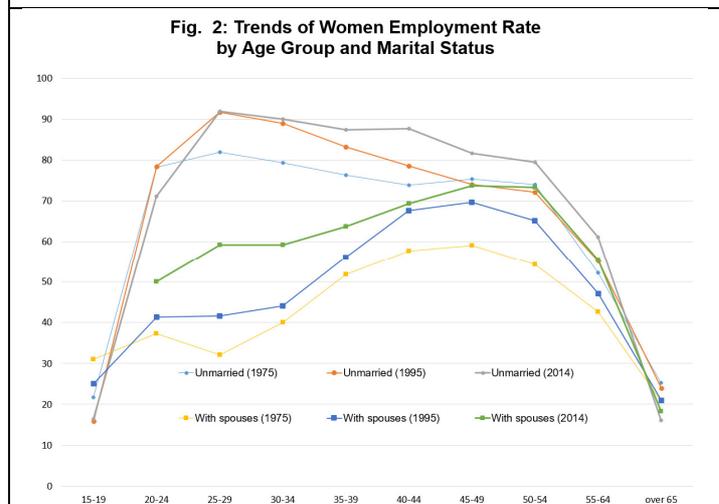
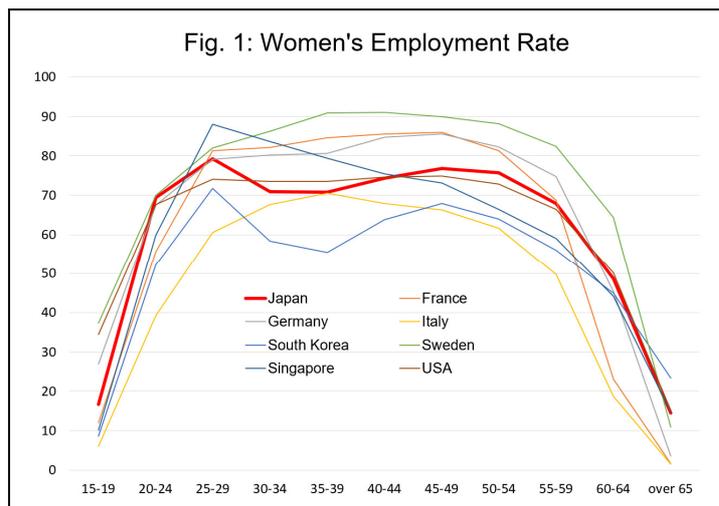
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Women’s social advancement is one of the most important challenges facing Japan today. Traditionally Japanese society has held the view that mothers should stay at home and take care of the family’s children rather than continue or seek employment, and even today about 60% of women quit their jobs when they get married or give birth to their first child. Women tend only to return to the labor market once their children have grown up and left home, a tendency revealed in the downward portion of the so-called M-shaped curve describing women’s employment (**Figures 1 and 2**). Motherhood in other words is an obstacle to women’s empowerment and career building, the M-shaped curve symbolizing the loss to society when women withdraw from the workforce to look after their children.

Since its establishment in December 2012, the Abe administration has been working to increase the employment rate for women age 25–44 and radically change the shape of the curve. The target is to raise the employment rate in this age bracket from 68% in 2012 to 73% by 2020, and to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions to 30%.

On 28 August 2015, at the second World Assembly for Women (WAW! 2015), Prime Minister Abe stated the following in his opening address:

The greatest challenge facing Japan is our declining population, brought about by our aging society and falling birthrate. In the past, there was a widely seen tendency for a higher rate of female labor force participation to cause a lower birthrate. And yet, in the present day, the developed nations leading



Source: Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office



the world in the active engagement of women have both a high women's labor force participation ratio and a high birthrate simultaneously. In particular, the countries of Northern Europe have been superbly successful at reconciling economic growth and rising birthrates under the banner of active participation by women. Japan also wants to emulate this, but our greatest barrier is a working culture that endorses male-centered long working hours. If men themselves do not awaken to this fact and take action, we will not be able to eliminate this bad practice. First of all, we will expand a corporate culture that values working efficiently within a limited number of hours. Husbands will also actively take childcare leave and couples will share responsibility for household chores and child rearing. We will make this the ordinary practice in Japan.

If the proportion of women in their 30s and 40s who are seeking work is brought in line with the figures seen in several Western countries, there will be significant potential for Japan's economic growth. The Abe administration's stated mission therefore is to develop an environment that enables mothers — and fathers — to continue in employment while sharing responsibility for the care of their children.

Specifically, the government has provided tax and other incentives to companies that encourage female participation in the workforce. The government has moreover implemented the Plan to Accelerate the Elimination of Childcare Waiting Lists, which will establish 200,000 new nursery school places by 2015 and 400,000 by 2018. Additionally, to address the issue of after-school care for elementary school students, particularly those in the first grade, the government will create 300,000 more places for them over the next five years.

Such measures under the policy for “Creating a society in which women shine” are itemized in the Japan Revitalization Strategy, the same Growth Strategy which set out the three arrows of Abenomics. Measures to “promote active participation by women” were itemized in the first edition of the Japan Revitalization Strategy of 2013 and have been continuously enhanced year by year (**Table 1**).

Table 1 Promote the social participation of women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to encourage 3 million of women hoping to work to begin working, secure additional childcare capacities, enabling women (and men) to balance work and child-rearing • Encourage women to be promoted to managerial positions (target: 30% by 2020)
<p>Government initiatives to date</p> <p>Support to balance work and child-rearing</p> <p>Secured additional childcare capacities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 191 thousands additional capacities likely to be attained for 2013- 2014 FY (target : around 400 thousands from 2013-2017 FY) <p>Expanded childcare leave benefits (from 1/2 of base salary prior to leave , to 2/3)</p> <p>Created a new certificate system for companies taking innovative measures to realize work-life balance</p> <p>Encourage the promotion of women</p> <p>Bill to require companies to adopt action plan for participation and advancement of women, submitted to the current Diet session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oblige the central and local governments, companies to adopt an action plan for promotion of the women (with quantitative objectives (not compulsory) <p>Women at managerial positions * in the Gov. increased</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 (2013, summer) → 23 (2014, summer) → 30 (2015, summer) *Vice-D.G. level or higher <p>Promoted visualization of the advancement of women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obligation to make public the ratio of female board members in the annual securities report • Made public the situation of female promotion on the website of the gov.
<p>Source: Japan Revitalization Strategy (Growth Strategy) 2015</p>

Private Sector Actions and Achievements

The number of women in the workforce has increased by more than 1 million since the start of the Abe administration (from 26.53 million in November 2012 to 27.72 million in June 2015). The number of women in managerial positions has also increased, from 6.9% in 2012 to 8.3% in 2014. Furthermore, about 440 companies (30% of the 1,300 Keidanren member companies) have announced plans to increase the number of female executives and managers.

To accelerate this trend, a bill on the Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace was adopted by the Diet on 28 August 2015. The Act requires companies with more than 301 employees to make action plans to promote women's participation and advancement in the workplace. Companies must now set numerical targets further to an analysis of (1) the ratio of women workers in the total workforce, (2) the gender gap in the length of service, (3) working hours of the employees, (4) percentage of women in management positions and so on. The Act aims to put more women into positions with decision-making authority and further promote the womenomics principle.

Table 2 Measures to be implemented
<p><i>Support to balance work and child-rearing</i> While securing additional childcare capacities, has emerged the problem of lack of nursery teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage utilization of potential nursery teachers as a part time nursery teacher if they wish (Number of potential nursery teachers (qualified persons): 600 thousands) • Encourage new graduates (qualified nursery teachers) to work for childcare facilities (only half of 38 thousands new graduates become nursery teachers) • Diffuse best practices of childcare facilities where nursery teachers seldom quit (because of the long working hours, many nursery teachers quit their job in a few years) • Execute qualification exam twice a year, and build childcare facilities in urban parks in the Special National Strategic Zones • Encourage the development of house-keeping services through introduction of certificate system of companies) • Examine measures to support balance work and nursing (elderly persons etc.)
<p><i>Review tax and social security systems to be neutral for Enhance QOL of women female workers</i> Current systems have a disincentive for women to work in excess of 1.03 million yen for tax system, and a wall of 130 million yen for social security system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of marital deduction, scope of the social security system, and spouse allowance
<p><i>Promote corporate initiatives to reduce working hours (prevent working long hours)</i> Reducing working hours not only helps balance work and childrearing, but change the way of working of men as well as women, and realize a society where getting back home early will never be a handicap for its promotion in a company. This contributes to the advancement of women. In addition, reducing working hours leads to the enhancement of company's earning power through improvement of labor quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visualize average working hours of companies (Create a social environment where women-friendly companies (taking initiatives on reducing working hours) will receive more job applications) • Modify criteria for selection for various Minister award systems *, in order that companies taking initiatives on reducing working hours will be selected *Award systems of Ministry of health, labor and welfare, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Cabinet Office etc.)
<p><i>Enhance QOL of women</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the quality of toilets (comfort, cleanliness, safety) • Promote international development of Japanese toilets with hot water washing function, sound effect generative device, or water-saving device (international standards, promotion to inbound tourists)
<p>Source: Japan Revitalization Strategy (Growth Strategy) 2015</p>



The Japan Revitalization Strategy 2015 approved by the Cabinet in June 2015 itemizes the measures to be implemented to promote the social participation of women (**Table 2**). Such initiatives are seen in other policies of the ministries and agencies as well as in the private sector. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for example will make a fiscal 2016 budgetary request to introduce a policy to promote paternity leave. In this way the government hopes to increase the paternity leave rate from 2.3 percent to 13 percent by fiscal 2020.

Japan is still some distance from being a gender-equal society, and the challenge of creating a society in which all women shine has really only just begun. One key to the creation of a gender-equal society will be a change in the mindset of men. The recent public and private initiatives in this respect are an important step in the right direction.

Column: UN Women's Liaison Office Opens in Japan

At the first World Assembly for Women in Tokyo: WAW! Tokyo 2014, held on 12 September 2014, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo said, “‘Creating a society in which women shine’ has consistently been one of my highest priority issues since the launch of my administration in December 2012. ... We live in an age in which it is no longer possible to have a society founded on a division of roles based on gender. Women possess a wealth of knowledge and imagination, and I believe that their active efforts in all areas of society will boldly pave the way for the future of humankind.”

At the United Nations General Assembly the same year, Abe pledged that the Japanese government would implement ODA in excess of 3 billion U.S. dollars until 2015 to bring about “a society in which women shine.” In February 2015, the government reviewed the principles underpinning Japan’s ODA and added the promotion of women’s participation to the list. Over the next three years, Japan will implement ODA of more than 42 billion yen toward high-quality education for women and girls enabling them to become economically independent and to determine the course of their own lives. Further, the Japanese government has extended cooperation to UN Women, to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and to other international organizations. Over the past two years in fact, Japan has increased its contributions to UN Women tenfold on a yen basis.

Reflecting the vision of Prime Minister Abe and his administration, which regards women’s social advancement as central to the promotion of Abenomics, on 30 August this year, a UN Women’s Liaison Office opened in Bunkyo City, Tokyo.

Prime Minister Abe had the following to say in his opening address:

Abenomics is womenomics. Over the last two and a half years, I have consistently promoted the dynamic engagement of women.

Over this time, some one million women have newly entered the labor market, while the number of female corporate board members has also increased by roughly 30 percent.

My wishes do not stop at Japan’s borders. As I stated at the UN General Assembly last year, Japan intends to make the twenty-first century a century with no human rights violations against women.

Bunkyo City Mayor Narisawa is the first male head of a municipality in Japan to have taken childcare leave. It is no coincidence that this UN Women’s Liaison Office is being opened in Bunkyo City.

Bunkyo City is home to many educational institutions. I am confident that the opening of the Japan Liaison Office here will serve as a good opportunity to have young people think about and act on the issues surrounding women in Japan and the world.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka stated in her address:

We recognize with deep appreciation, the strong growth in Japan’s financial support for UN Women, which has enabled us to strengthen our response to crises to support and empower women.

Together, we have set up programmes in Mali, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Egypt,



Jordan, Palestine and Syria to support women and girls, including refugees and to empower survivors of gender-based violence.

This is the kind of action we need if we are to reach our goal of a 50:50 planet by 2030.

We must do this so that these young people carrying our flag here today grow up in a more peaceful, equal and sustainable world.”

On the following day, UN Women published the following further remarks of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka:

Under the leadership of Ms. Kayoko FUKUSHIMA as Director, the main responsibilities of the UN Women Liaison Office in Bunkyo City in Tokyo will include strategic partnership building, advocacy to raise awareness about issues that impact gender equality and donor relations.

UN Women’s presence in Japan will include work with a wide spectrum of partners, including all levels of government, civil society, academia and the business community, and will contribute to the long-standing partnership with Japan.

UN Women will work with the UN Women Japan National Committee, a long-standing partner, in addition to new and wider constituencies including youth, men and boys, and parliamentarians, to advance common priority areas such as women’s participation in economic and political decision making and leadership roles, and advocate to end discrimination and violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Concluding his speech at WAW! 2015 on August 28, Prime Minister Abe stated:

The final curtain has been drawn on the era in which people ask why we promote the dynamic engagement of women in society. Now is the time for us to discuss how to bring it into reality. I hope that today and tomorrow you deepen your discussions, leading to the realization of a society in which women shine.

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Translated from an original article in Japanese written for Discuss Japan. [September 2015]

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