

Event Report

Title: **Women in Japan: Breakthroughs in Female Business Leadership**

Date: 13 July 2022 18:00-19:30 (JST) / 11:00-12:30 (CEST)

On 13 July 2022, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Japan held 'Women in Japan: Breakthroughs in Female Business Leadership', focusing on the business aspects of the gender situation in Japan. KAS Japan also focused on Germany, a country whose views on gender roles are historically similar to those of Japan, particularly the view on the gender division of labour. However, Germany is more advanced in terms of gender equality than Japan. This webinar aimed to gain insights for Japan and learn how the country can improve the current situation for future female business leaders.

Rabea Brauer (Country Representative, KAS Japan Office) opened the session and began by introducing the moderator Shiori Kanno, Chair of the International Humanity Platform (IHP) (lawyer/former Member of the House of Representatives).

She mentioned former PM Abe's shooting, which had happened the previous Friday, and his policies to support women in the country. She expressed hope to gain insights into why Japan's situation has not changed despite the huge attention it has received, by comparing it with that of Germany.

Shiori Kanno (Chair of the International Humanity Platform (IHP), lawyer, and former Member of the House of Representatives) introduced two speakers, **Keiko Hamada** (Journalist and Former Editor in Chief, Business Insider Japan) and **Alexandrea Swanson** (Managing Director #SheTransformsIT, Federation of German Industries (BDI)).

[Introductory Presentation]

Summary of **Ms Swanson's** presentation on Germany's current situation:

- **The current situation in Germany:**

The female employment rate is relatively high at 70%, but the full-time employment rate of women working more than 30 hours per week is low. After having children, women often work part-time. There is a 20% wage gap between men and women. In Germany, the percentage of women in management is 29.4%, meaning that women account for only 1/3 of the leadership positions. This figure is not something to be proud of considering that Germany ranks 20th in the EU, going below its average.

- **Historical timelines of policy aspects related to women:**

- 1) 1918 Women were granted suffrage.
- 2) 1957 Women could have bank accounts under their own names.

- 3) Until 1977, women needed their husband's permission to have a job, where 3K (Kinder/children, Küche/kitchen, Kirche/church) was the role expected of women.
- 4) 1980 The Policy of Equal Pay Equal Work was instituted.
- 5) 1994 The Equal Rights Act, which stipulated that jobs be offered to both genders, was passed.
- 6) 2001 Companies voluntarily tried to increase the number of female managers.
- 7) 2015 30% female management ratio was set by law—after 15 years of no change due to voluntary actions, the law made it mandatory to increase female managers, thus increasing the number of female managers.
- 8) 2019 International Women's Day becomes a public holiday in Berlin.
- 9) 2021 A rule was made stipulating that if a listed company has four or more executive officers, at least one of them must be a woman.

- **Social Aspects:**

There is a movement to use more gender-neutral words and diversified language in German language expression. Some young women are against the quota system. As for balancing career and housework, in Germany, women perform chores and engage in childcare; they spend 87 minutes longer than men on care work every day. There is a call for 'daycare for all' as someone needs to come home and take care of the child after school hours.

59% of Germans believe that digitization is effective in balancing work and care work.

[Discussion]

Ms Hamada toughed upon the Gender Gap Index Ranking 2022 released the same day, pointing out that Japan is falling behind, especially in the economic aspect.

The discussion centred on the 'lack of female human resources in managerial posts', the social pressure from the 'mothers should stay home' culture, how Germany tries to overcome the 'Mommy Track', 'whether quota is acceptable in Japan', etc.

Summary of **Ms Swanson's** comments:

- In Germany, there is no difference in the level of human resources between men and women nowadays. Meanwhile, the social pressure for mothers to stay at home for the sake of their children is significant, and laws that allow mothers to return to work after their parental leave of up to three years are in place. The attitude towards women's return to work differs greatly from that in France, for example, where women are encouraged to return to work as soon as possible after childbirth.

- In the 2000s, despite the awareness that all people are equal, no progress in the ratio of female managers was observed. Therefore, the quota system was made mandatory.
- Women in their late 20s to early 30s often worry that the company they work for will think that they will have a baby and then quit the job. Because the difference in pay is greatest before and after a woman gives birth to her child, companies need to let female employees know that they want them to return to work after maternity leave, and they also need to promote childcare for men. During the lockdown, the amount of care work was visualized.
- Large companies in Germany partner with other companies to create a network of women and hold workshops. You may hear people in Germany say 'they must be managers who entered through the quota system (not because of their capability)'. Therefore, this area needs to be enlightened, and what we can do is steadily increase the number of female managers.

Summary of **Ms Hamada's** comments:

- Since the 2000s, companies have been enhancing their systems to support work and childcare/nursing care balance. The problem, however, is that only women end up using these systems due to Japan's deep-rooted gender division of labour. In this regard, a survey found out that 40% of women, including even those in career-track positions, are on a 'Mommy Track' and have to give up their careers. A useful solution to this would be making the systems easier for men to use to help them balance work and family life, as well as to provide career support for women.
- Some people say that the problem is that women do not want to be in management positions, but measures must be taken to look into why women do not want to take on management positions.
- The most common reason for leaving a job for Japanese women is a feeling that their workplace does not expect anything of them, rather than childcare or other reasons. Japan is quite resistant to the political quota system.
- The Japanese government set a goal of 30% women in management positions by 2020 but gave it up easily. There is also strong resistance to a quota system in the corporate sector. This is because if a numerical target is set, some may claim 'preferential treatment for women' or be critical of 'appointing people who are not capable enough'. However, if the efforts are kept voluntary, the current situation will not change. Capable women will not be discovered unless it becomes mandatory.

[Q&A session]

The session focused on 'making quota system mandatory', 'benefits of having women in managerial positions', 'making 30% mandatory may ensue misunderstanding it as the maximum', 'motivation for work', etc.

Summary of **Ms Swanson's** comments:

- Male CEOs in Germany know that their companies will benefit from more female managers. Subordinates will also enjoy many things when there are more female managers.
- It is true that companies are often satisfied with achieving 30%. Two solutions: 1) Have companies voluntarily commit, say 50% is good, or even higher. 2) Set steps, such as 40% by 2026. Society will overall improve in the future as a result of companies achieving gender equality

Summary of **Ms Hamada's** comments:

- If a company decides to increase the number of female managers, they need to make more efforts to search for female managers. For example, when recommending candidates, they should submit twice as many female candidates as male candidates, or if male candidates are approached once for a managerial position, female candidates should be approached thrice.
- The premise is that men and women should be equal in terms of human rights. Additionally, in today's uncertain future, having diverse people in a company increases the possibility of responding to diverse needs and leads to sustainability within the company. This is especially important to avoiding homogeneity in Japanese organizations.
- The sense of accomplishment that can be experienced through child-rearing and work is different. From my personal experience as well, I can feel a sense of contribution to society when I'm at work. Additionally, economic independence is important, especially for women. The poverty of single mothers immediately ensues poverty of their children. Women's economic independence is the key to their well-being.

[Closing Remarks]

Ms Kanno concluded by expressing her hope that it will become even more possible in the future to go beyond the framework of gender issues in business and discuss them as issues of freedom to design one's own life. She also expressed her gratitude to the panellists and the audience for their participation.