

Research, discussion needed to devise effective plans for promoting women

①Both the public and private sectors should accelerate their efforts to realize a "society where all women shine," a key policy being pursued by the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The government has approved a bill to promote women's active participation in society at a Cabinet meeting and submitted it to the current Diet session. If it passes, the bill will oblige companies with 300 or more employees to compile and announce an action plan that includes a numerical target for promoting women.

②Companies will set their own numerical targets, including what categories those targets will apply to. Likely choices include the percentage of women in managerial positions or who are hired overall. Numerical targets can also be expressed roughly, such as "we will double the number."

Although the Abe administration has set a target of increasing the percentage of women in leadership positions to 30 percent by the end of 2020, the bill does not contain a numerical target to be uniformly applied to companies.

③The circumstances and challenges of utilizing the female labor force differ by company and industry. It is therefore realistic to allow companies to set their own numerical targets in line with their situation.

Some people in the business world were unenthusiastic about the idea, but setting numerical targets will become obligatory at the insistence of the administration. We believe this will be a step forward for promoting women.

④Before compiling their action plans, companies will ascertain and analyze the situation of their female workers, including hiring, promotion to managerial positions, and gaps between men and women in the length of their employment. It is essential for them to hold thorough discussions with labor unions to work out effective plans.

⑤There will be no punitive measures for companies that fail to meet their targets, nor any obligation to report on how they are faring. How they handle this issue will be evaluated by their shareholders and market players, so the leadership of top corporate leaders will be tested in this regard.

⑥Utilizing various human resources, including women, is indispensable for enhancing the creativity of companies. They should take the compilation of an action plan as an opportunity to sharpen their competitive edge.

⑦It is important to change the perceptions of companies and men. Leaving most of housework and child-rearing in the hands of women will not help them advance in society. Workplaces will have to change how employees work, including shortening long working hours and introducing flexible working styles, such as telecommuting.

⑧Of course, promoting women to corporate managerial positions is not the only way to encourage women's active participation in society.

⑨A majority of working women are part-timers and other nonregular workers. It is urgent for companies to improve their working conditions and switch their status to regular workers.

⑩Many women can contribute to their community in the fields of child-rearing and nursing care. Helping full-time homemakers to volunteer or become active in nonprofit organizations will be an effective way of revitalizing communities.

⑪The government needs to have multifaceted policies that take into consideration women in various situations. We hope our society will allow men and women to play active roles in the workplace, the home and the community. 【2014/10/20/Yomiuri Shimbun】

③obligatory 義務的な insistence (断固とした)主張 ⑦telecommuting 在宅勤務

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. Why does Japan have to formulate this kind of special bill promoting equal rights for women? What is the rationale behind it?
2. Have you ever felt inequality between men and women? Cite an instance.
3. What do you think is the biggest contribution of women in the workplace or in the society?
4. Can you imagine a workplace without women? What do you think the productivity would be like?
5. Japan is notorious about having small percentage of female politicians. What will be the effective way to increase participation in politics? Can you imagine a day where Japan will have a female Prime Minister?
6. There are many working styles including regular, contractual, part-time and telecommuting. What type of working style would you like to have? Why?
7. Make sentences using the following words: punitive, ascertain, competitive edge, revitalize, multifaceted, obligatory and insistence.

「男女雇用機会均等法」は1986年4月施行。その後職場での男女格差が少しずつ改善され、1999年6月には男女の家事や社会での共同参画を目指した「男女共同参画社会基本法」が施行。2001年1月には担当大臣が置かれた。2012年の女性管理職の割合は11.1パーセントまで改善されたが、他の先進国（アメリカ43.1パーセント、フランス39.4パーセント、スウェーデン36.4パーセント、イギリス34.5パーセント）にははるかに及ばない。残念ながら、衆議院の解散の中、安倍政権の「二枚看板」の「まち・ひと・しごと創生（地方創生）」関連法案は成立させる一方で、女性活躍推進法案の今国会成立は、断念する事となった。