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“Abenomics” and Women in the Work Force in Japan

Japan’s Prime Minister (PM) Abe’s economic policy is called “Abenomics” and his policy to encourage more women to participate in Japan’s workforce is called “Womanomics.” Japan is facing a sharply declining population, which will inevitably make the presence of women in the workforce more important than ever. PM Abe would like to see that women occupy at least 30% of the leading positions in government and businesses by 2020; up from the current 11.1%, and in contrast to 43% in the U.S. In following his lead, Japanese companies have begun to appoint women to management positions. As evidence of this, the Cabinet Office posted on their website a long list of practices taken by Japanese companies, including maternity leave and life-work balance, in hopes that more companies will join in exercising similar or new efforts.

One recent example of consciously promoting women in the workforce is PM Abe’s appointment of former Sendai High Court President Nahomi Ichimiya to the Director of the National Personnel Authority. She is the first woman to assume the post. Ms. Ichimiya commented, however, that she hopes that she was appointed not because she is a woman, but she deserves it. Another interesting and related comment was made by Dr. Kayo Inaba, Kyoto University biology professor and one of the L’oréal UNESCO award-2014 recipients. According to Inada, the burden of change for women rests with themselves, rather than employers or the existing social structure.

Women researchers in Japan make up just 14.4% of the total number of researchers. While this is an improvement over previous years, it remains the lowest rate of female participation among 8 major countries, including Russia, U.K., Italy, U.S., Germany, France, South Korea, and Japan.

Women Rate at Universities (Private & Public) by Field	Professor	Ph.D. Student
Engineering	3.1%	16.2%
Science	4.0%	18.3%
Agriculture	4.7%	33.8%
Health	21.7%	33.5%

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Organization	Percentage to the total number of women researchers	Fields for high percentage of women researchers
Universities (Private & Public)	61%	Nursing 90.2%; Home Econ. 81.9%
Companies	33%	Food Mfg. 29.1%; Agri-forests-Fisheries 23.8%; Pharma 23.9%
National Labs.	5%	N/A

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ Statistics Bureau

Japan's goal is for women to comprise 30% of the total number of researchers. In order to fast-track this ambitious goal, the Government has been establishing a number of policies to increase the number of women researchers, including supplemental funding for women researchers so that they can continue their research work during maternity and child-rearing periods, establishing daycare centers at university campuses, and by providing outreach to high school female students to instill an excitement for science.

The number of women researchers has steadily increased, although very slowly, from 11.9% in 2005 to 14.4% in 2013. With the "Womanomics" effort underway, it is likely that there will be even more women researchers in in the near future.