Joint Symposium on “Womenomics” Held at Stanford

The JSPS San Francisco Office co-sponsored this year's Stanford Silicon Valley US-Japan Dialogue on a theme of high relevance within the Japanese economy: “Womenomics, the Workplace, and Women.” Held on 4 November, the symposium was organized by Stanford University's Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Shorenstein APARC) Japan Program and also co-sponsored by the university's Clayman Institute for Gender Research and the United States-Japan Foundation (USJF). It brought together the brightest minds from a variety of related sectors, including academia, business, government and technology for the purpose of creating both a vision and a concrete plan for women’s empowerment in the Japanese workforce economy.

The symposium came at a critical time for Japan, when a decreasing birth rate and aging society are creating a hurdle for sustaining economic growth. In a pointed effort to advance an economy in which every individual can participate fully, in 2013 the Abe Administration made a commitment to promoting women’s economic empowerment. After that, the National Diet passed a law requiring large companies to set numerical targets for female employment in their workplace and to make related hiring policies public. Even though “womenomics” was made a key pillar of the “Abenomics” economic reform plan, Japan still ranks 111th out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum. So, many issues remain to be solved. Across the globe from Japan in California’s Silicon Valley, venture capital is still said to be a “boys club,” where gender inequality persists and female attrition rates are high.

Against this backdrop, over 70 people, including 21 distinguished speakers, from the US and Japan came together to participate in four panel discussions, themed “Women in the Silicon Valley Ecosystem—Progress and Challenges,” “Women in the Japanese Economy—Progress and Challenges,” “Women’s Advancement in the Workplace,” and “Work-Life Balance and Womenomics.”

A diverse range of male and female panelists, ranging from Silicon Valley leaders to Japanese professors, brought an equally diverse range of viewpoints and expertise to the discussion, as they shared ideas and considered conceptual frameworks. The discussion outcomes included the articulation of a need for a bidirectional rectification approach in which bottom-up education, such as mentoring programs and unconscious-bias training, is balanced against top-down policy initiatives, such as labor reform, external labor market development, and employment quotas.

JSPS sponsored two key contributors to the symposium: Prof. Machiko Osawa of Japan Women’s University and Prof. Nobuko Nagase of Ochanomizu University. Prof. Osawa presented data on shortfalls in employment trends of highly educated women and offered insights into possible causes underlying them, while suggesting ways to reverse the trends. Prof. Nagase focused her comments on labor law and its effects on female mobility, while suggesting key labor policy changes to improve women’s status in the workforce.

An open dialogue between leaders and experts in the field of women’s workforce empowerment, coupled with the diverse backgrounds of the participants, made the symposium an incubator for new and highly innovative ideas, which if put into practice can have a very large and positive impact on the societies and economies of both countries.

Please visit the following website for more information about the San Francisco Office: http://www.jspsusa-sf/index.php

Japanese–Swiss Colloquium Held on Ecohealth

On 11-12 January, the JSPS Bonn Office held its 13th Japanese-German Colloquium, this time titled “Japanese–Swiss Ecohealth Colloquium.” It was cosponsored by Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) and National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU).

Beginning with Swiss TPH director Dr. Jürg Utzinger, representatives from Switzerland and Japan offered remarks to kick off this colloquium on the theme “Ecohealth.” Five sessions were held in which frontline Japanese and Swiss researchers gave presentations on the session topics, which were “Ecohealth in the 21st century,” “Transdisciplinarity,” “Food and health,” “Africa,” and “Environmental risks and long-term effects on non-communicable disease.”

This closed event was carried out amidst a highly collegial atmosphere among the participants. At the end of the first day, the Africa session was open to the interested public including Swiss TPH doctoral students, whose questions demonstrated a riveting interest in the presentations. The latter part of the second day featured a science café session, in which three groups of six participants exchanged views in a discussion of the ideas that emerged from the presentations in the previous five sessions. They, then, reported their discussion results from a perspective of ecosystem approaches to health in a following closed session. Throughout the event, spirited discussions and opinion exchanges followed each presentation in not only the Q&A periods but also the coffee breaks.

After all of the sessions had been completed, JSPS Bonn Office director Prof. Keiichi Koduiro offered a closing message to the 17 participants from Switzerland and Japan, thanking and congratulating them on the success of the colloquium. He voiced high expectation in the continued advancement of Japan-Swiss scientific collaboration in the future.

Please see the following site for more details about this event: http://www.jsps-bonn.de/veranstaltungen/kolloquien/2017-ecohealth/