

# Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2016 in Fukushima Report



The Grassroots Academy Tohoku is a space for gathering next generation female leaders from Tohoku's 3 prefectures (Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima), learning together, and building networks. The first Academy was held in Iwate in February of 2016. This second event in Fukushima, held over 3 days with 17 participants, focused on the theme of "how to engage people in Japan's regions."

## Three Pillars of the Academy

- 1 Everyone will contribute in order to learn from each other's experiences
- 2 Bring skills and concrete measures for tackling issues
- 3 Through inspecting the practices of other areas, learn lessons for one's own area

**Dates** August 5-7 2016

**Participants** 17 (39 including staff, children, and related parties)

**Organizer** Women's Eye

**Support** JEN, Oxfam Japan

## Instructors



### Asako Osaki

Formerly responsible for supporting women in developing countries at the United Nations Development Program (New York), at present she works to support women and girls within Japan. A regular commentator on TBS' Sunday Morning, her publications include 'On Women's Happiness: A Way of Living for a Brighter Tomorrow' (Kodansha).



### Makoto Tajima

Researcher at the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies. With many years' experience working in international cooperation, during the 2011 disasters he was head of logistics for the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC). He is Disaster Prevention Adviser for JANIC and a director of CWS Japan and Women's Eye.



### Dr. Jackie Steele (in charge of research)

Associate Professor, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo. A political scientist originally hailing from Canada, Professor Steele has conducted extensive research on women's political participation and diversity in Canada and Japan. Professor Steele also lectures female college students on elections at Sophia University. She lives in Chikuma City, Nagano Prefecture.

## Program Schedule

### Day 1

- 13:00 Opening: Organizer's introduction, guest and staff introductions
- 13:30 Participant self-introductions, description of facilities
- 14:15 Participants split into three groups and introduce their activities
- 17:15 Administrative messages; Day ends, return to lodging
- 18:30 Welcome reception

### Day 2

- 9:00 Lecture "Engaging People in Japan's Regions"
- 9:30 Group work 1: From problem to cause to solution
- 12:00 Lunch
- 13:10 Group work 2: Coming up with solutions
- 15:00 Group work 3: Making an action plan
- 16:45 Administrative messages; Day ends, return to lodging
- 18:30 Dinner

### Day 3

- 8:30 Tour of Atelier Rensho-an; Relaxation time
- 10:00 Presentation about Rensho-an's activities
- 11:00 Lecture "Examples of Renewable Energy Projects from Japan and Abroad"
- 12:15 Lunch
- 13:30 Reflections on the Academy, sharing lessons and impressions
- 15:00 Tea time, Administrative messages
- 16:00 Close





## Opening, Activities Introduction



The Grassroots Academy Tohoku 2016 in Fukushima opens in Atelier Rensho-an, Tamura City.



◆ Organizer's introduction, guest and staff introductions.

Women's Eye's Sachiko Taura gave the opening address, stating that "this Academy is a space where

everyone participates and contributes. To make our learning meaningful, it's important that we respect each other. And please, have fun!"

Next, Executive Director of Women's Eye Megumi Ishimoto introduced the history of the Academy. The first event was held in March 2015 in Minamisanriku Town as a pre-event of the Third UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. Since then, they have continued the Academy to provide a space for young women active in Japan's regions to gather and learn together. "What to bring is up to you. I hope you will bring your very best", she encouraged everyone.

After introductions of guests and staff from JEN and Oxfam Japan, the participants introduced themselves.



◆ Chiemi Kamada explained about Rensho-an, the former atelier of the deceased painter Shunmei Watanabe. After the 2011 disasters, it became a meeting place for many NPOs through hosting volunteers, leading to an expansion of its activities and the establishment of the NPO Rensho-an School of Life.

◆ After a short break, participants split into three groups (A:5, B:4, C:5) to introduce their own activi-

ties and share the challenges they face.

For example, the following kinds of issues and concerns were raised.

**A Group:** "An issue when managing an NPO and its activities is the difficulty of fund-raising. With funding only available for actual costs and not for wages, member's motivation drops and they quit one after another. How to maintain the organization is a big concern."

**B Group:** "We carry out citizen monitoring of radiation levels. Our worry is the difference of opinion we have with those on the government side. We're seen as a group that stirs up fear among citizens. Also, as we're carrying out our activities with funding from companies, once this is cut we'll become completely volunteer-based. We keep going on faith alone."

**C Group:** "Since high school I've carried out poetry readings about the 2011 disasters in different regions. My current worries are how to balance this activity with work once I get a job, and how to stay connected to Fukushima."



◆ After finishing these introductions, the participants shared their impressions. Amidst a chorus of agreement, these included "Women's issues, regional issues, organizational issues... when you boil it down everyone is concerned about the same things. I'm looking forward to searching for answers with everyone tomorrow"; "I'm glad to have gained a new perspective"; "there are lots of young people, and I'm

inspired by how they're thinking about things". From college student participants: "I learned more from hearing these real stories than in the classroom"; "through telling other people, I was able to reflect on my own activities. Through listening to other people, I saw what I am missing."





## Lecture & Group Work



We welcomed Asako Osaki, an expert on gender who has worked for the UN, to tackle the problems raised the previous day.

◆Ms. Osaki gave a lecture on the theme of “how to engage people in the regions”: “those of us gathered here today are trying to affect some kind of transformation and change in the various sites we’re working in. For example, what kind of approach should one take when seeking policy-change from the government of a developing country? Firstly, one could emphasize that ‘this is the right thing to do from a moral standpoint, so please do it’. This is a head-on method, but you’re unlikely to be listened to. Next, one could point out that ‘you have a duty to implement domestically international agreements and international law’. Since lack of implementation can lead to a reduction in aid, this can be effective in its own way. Another method is to highlight the economic benefit; to emphasize the economic merits and value of change. In fact, this method is the most effective, and common in all countries.”



◆Next, we carried out group work to consider strategies for the ‘women’s’, ‘regional’ and ‘organizational’ issues while bearing in mind Ms. Osaki’s talk. First, we sorted the issues raised into problems, causes and solutions. Next, we split the problems into individual issues, regional issues and organizational issues.



◆Individual issues discussed were enforced femininity and the difficulty of making connections. Among the solutions raised were connecting with networks, communication, and cultivating the skill of accepting help.

The problems working in the regions raised were how to engage people with different values, and how to work in societies that don’t value diversity. Looking for common values to break down barriers, realizing there are things you can do because you’re an outsider, and acting with self-belief were solutions shared.



Finally, for those who’ve been acting for several years, organizational management was a big issue. Five years after the 2011 disasters,

fund-raising and the necessity of reconfirming the vision and aspirations of one’s organization came to the surface. Also, since there are limits to volunteering and good will, discussion focused on ensuring organizational sustainability through paying staff and making responsibilities transparent.

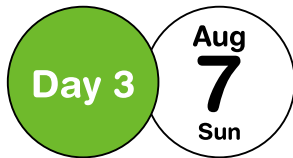
◆In the group work after lunch we made lists of what the various participants could offer as part of the effort to consider solutions and make efficient use of the assets people brought to the Academy. From PR and project design advice to facilitating team building and skill-up workshops, the large amount of experience and assets among Academy participants was clear, and we could see the potential for connecting with and supporting each other.

◆In the final group work, each member made an action plan. Plans to make business cards, start a blog and put out information; to make evaluation forms for their activities; to plan events for young people, with experienced Academy members invited as instructors: participants presented a variety of action plans.

Regarding the future of the Academy, voices were also raised in support of continuing it as a mentoring community and forum for skill training in organizational management.







## Reflecting on and Sharing Lessons



After an introduction of sustainable living-themed activities in Fukushima, we reflected on and shared the lessons of the past 3 days.

◆In the morning, we began by listening to a talk by Jinko Watanabe, director of Atelier Rensho-an. The participants began their day by walking through this space brought to life by the mind of Shunmei Watanabe, who built his life alongside artisans.

◆Chiemi Kamada gave a presentation on the work of the NPO Rensho-an School of Life. Ms. Kamada, who has been working to connect people since the nuclear meltdown, first visited Atelier Rensho-an one year after the disasters and was impressed that such an important place remained in Fukushima. She is working there towards economic sustainability and place-making through holding participatory workshops and, little by little, renewing a neighboring folk house. They also intend to generate their own electricity.



The issue they face is how to use the old folk house in order to sustain their activities. Ms. Kamada received a lot of questions on operational management and building relationships with the local community from other participants, as well cries of support.



◆Next Makoto Tajima, researcher at the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies and disaster prevention adviser for the Academy, gave a lecture on the necessity of renewable energy for building self-reliant, sustainable

and resilient societies. Beginning with a discussion of misconceptions about renewable energy as well as global trends, he pointed out that Japan is behind in its activities. Giving examples of areas in Japan that have introduced regional energy systems, his discussion of 'people's electricity' and home generation received a lot of attention and many earnest questions.

◆For lunch, participants sampled the delights of Rensho-an's exquisite handmade cuisine, from vessels decorated by Shunmei Watanabe himself. Gasps were heard at the beautiful layout.



◆In the afternoon, participants wrote down and shared their personal reflections. For one hour, they were free to go where they wanted and reflect quietly, composing their thoughts on the 3 days. Also, memos with each participant's strengths were handed out to them. Finally, each participant said a few words about a change that had occurred within



them through taking part in the Academy. The younger members said they gained a lot of tips for the future.

The Grassroots Academy Tohoku is a 3-year program running until March 2019, with events planned in the 3 prefectures of Tohoku. In February of 2017 a study tour of North America is also planned.

### Grassroots Academy Tohoku Contact



Women's Eye

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JEN is an international NGO that provides support for people stricken with hardship due to conflict and disasters at all levels from emergency to reconstruction support. They support women, children, and young people through partnerships with local organizations in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures.