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Overview of Project History and Activities

In the spring of 1992, IIE's Vice President for Education and the Arts held several advisory meetings in New York, Washington, and Boston with women of local and national prominence in order to identify issues for the Dialogue and to help identify possible candidates for the US delegation. In July 1992, IIE and JCIE held a planning meeting in New York to establish the overall framework of the project. Although the project as originally conceived by IIE was meant to provide opportunities for women leaders in the academic, government, and private sectors to meet and discuss issues facing women, JCIE suggested concentrating the focus more specifically on the nongovernmental sector. Since women in both Japan and the United States are a major force for societal change through their activities in voluntary and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and since little attention has been given to exchanges and dialogue among women in the private voluntary sector, JCIE suggested that a more innovative and fruitful dialogue would give greater emphasis to the role women play in societal change through activities in the nonprofit or independent sector, rather than a more general discussion of women's issues in the two societies. IIE readily agreed to this more focused theme of the Dialogue.

This meeting was followed by a series of consultations held in Japan by JCIE with Japanese women leaders and representatives from nonprofit and women's organizations likely to serve as hosts of local programs. The consultations resulted in the selection of institutions in Yokohama, Fukuoka, and Kanazawa to serve as local hosts for the US delegation.

With the more concentrated focus of the Dialogue, IIE began its national recruitment effort in October, 1992, targeting women based at NGOs covering a broad range of social issues. Over 250 letters were sent to various organizations requesting nominations for the Dialogue. By the November 20 deadline, IIE had received the nominations/applications of 42 women, each a leader in her local community.

After consultation with JCIE, IIE selected six women to serve on the US delegation to visit Japan in January, 1993. The delegation members were selected based

on their own outstanding personal qualifications in addition to considerations of geographic, ethnic, and professional diversity. The women leaders selected for the US delegation were:

Ronne Hartfield
Director of Museum Education, Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

Ruth Hinerfeld
Former President, National League of Women Voters
Larchmont, New York

Elizabeth Humstone
Director for Community Stewardship, The Countryside Institute
Burlington, Vermont

Irene Redondo-Churchward
Executive Director, Project Info Community Services
Los Angeles, California

Susan Virnig
Founder and Senior Consultant, Northwest Regional Facilitators
Spokane, Washington

Bernarda Wong
Executive Director, Chinese American Service League
Chicago, Illinois

The delegation, led by Peggy Blumenthal, IIE's Vice President for Educational Services, visited Japan for two weeks, from January 23 to February 5. Accompanying the delegation on the Japan study tour were: Hideko Katsumata, Executive Secretary, JCIE; Shaun Martin, Manager of Asia/Pacific Programs, IIE; Mio Ohta, Program Officer, JCIE; and Terumi Takenaka, Program Officer, JCIE. A staff member of CGP's New York office, who accompanied the delegation during the entire visit, was joined by staff members of CGP's Tokyo office in each of the cities visited on the study tour.

The study tour began in Tokyo with briefings on the current status of women in Japan by women professionals in academia, business, and government. The delegation then traveled to Yokohama, Fukuoka, and Kanazawa, for meetings with women's groups and community leaders, and site visits to NGOs and places of cultural significance. The tour ended in Tokyo with a workshop that brought together the US delegation members and women leaders from various regions throughout Japan. The delegation members discussed their experiences in Japan and their impressions of Japanese society, NGOs, and the women who have become an important ingredient for social change in the country.

Upon returning to the United States, IIE staff and the six members of the US delegation immediately began preparations for the visit of the reciprocal delegation

of Japanese women leaders. Drawing upon what they had learned about Japanese women and NGOs, the US delegation members arranged for meetings with women leaders of their respective communities and site visits to outstanding organizations, which would represent the diversity of activities carried out by NGOs in the United States and could serve as models for Japanese organizations in their efforts to become more effective in their respective missions.

Members of the Japanese delegation were recruited by JCIE based upon recommendations from women's centers, citizens groups, opinion leaders, and others in various regions of Japan. After an initial screening and interview process, the following six delegates were selected to participate in the program:

Yoshiko Hayakawa

Editor-in-Chief, *Ishikawa no Tamago* (Eggs in Ishikawa)

Kanazawa

Yoriko Imasato

Editor-in-Chief, *Living Fukuoka*, West Japan Living Newspaper Company

Fukuoka

Haruko Numata

Coordinator, Suginami Association for Better Lives in an Aging Society, Association to Provide Friendship Lights

Tokyo

Yaeko Suzuki

Chairman, We Love Asia 21

Yokohama

Mitsuko Yamaguchi

Executive Director, Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association/Women's Suffrage Institute

Tokyo

Kimie Yokoyama

Director, Workers Collective "Des Femmes"

Yokohama

The group visited the United States on a two-week study tour, from June 6–19, 1993, led by Hideko Katsumata, Executive Secretary at the Japan Center for International Exchange. They were accompanied by Mieko Iijima, Program Assistant, JCIE; and Shaun Martin, Manager, Asia/Pacific Programs, IIE. Joining the group for a portion of the tour were Peggy Blumenthal, Vice-President for Educational Services, IIE; Karyn Wilcox, JCIE New York; and Yoo Fukazawa, Center for Global Partnership, New York.

The study tour began in Los Angeles with briefings by academics and government leaders on the current situation of women and NGOs in the United States and in the Los Angeles area. The group then traveled to Spokane, Chicago, and New

York for continued meetings and site visits. A final workshop, held at IIE's New York headquarters, brought together all 12 program participants to discuss their experiences, issues of common concern, and how women in both countries may continue to build networks and exchange ideas in the future. At the final workshop, several additional women leaders joined the discussion, including Susan Berresford, Vice President of the Ford Foundation, who gave a keynote address on the role of philanthropy in supporting NGOs and emerging women leaders.

Detailed Summary of the US Women Leaders' Japan Study Tour Activities

January 23–February 5, 1993

The delegation of six US women leaders visited four cities during their two-week stay in Japan: Tokyo, Yokohama, Fukuoka, and Kanazawa (for a list of participant names see page 4). In each of these cities, the delegation members visited local women's centers and community groups where they exchanged views on issues facing their respective communities, measures US and Japanese NGOs have taken to address these issues, and the role of women as a force for social change at the community, regional, and national levels. The goal of these meetings was to create an ongoing dialogue, highlighting areas of mutual concern shared by Japanese women and their US counterparts, and the fundamental differences in the situations faced by the two groups. Brief descriptions of the organizations visited in each of these cities are outlined below.

Tokyo, January 23–26

The study tour began in Tokyo, the nation's bustling political, commercial, and cultural capital. Here the participants were briefed on current issues facing Japan, Japanese women, and Japanese nonprofit organizations (NPOs) by prominent women (and a few men) in government, business, the media, academia, and the nongovernmental sector. The delegation also visited the HELP Asian Women's Shelter and stopped at the *Sensoji* Temple in Asakusa on a brief sightseeing break. At a reception hosted by CGP, the delegation had the opportunity to meet many CGP staffmembers and learn more about their programs and interests.

HELP Asian Women's Shelter (The House in Emergency of Love and Peace):

HELP is a women's shelter that provides refuge, counseling, and legal services to women from many countries, particularly those from Southeast Asia, who have found themselves trapped working in the Japanese sex-related industry. Facilities at the center include single and double rooms, a dining room, kitchen, bath, and a children's room. In 1991 HELP provided shelter for 332 women and received telephone inquiries from over 2,000 individuals seeking advice on a wide range of problems.

Yokohama, January 27–28

Following their stay in Tokyo, the group moved on to the nearby port city of Yokohama, which was one of the first cities in Japan open to the outside world.

The delegation was hosted by the Yokohama Women's Forum. At the Women's Forum and at the Alternative Lifestyles Opportunity Center, roundtable discussions were held with local volunteer groups active in the community on a variety of issues such as the environment, the arts, and battered women.

Yokohama Women's Forum for Communication and Networking: The Yokohama Women's Forum (YWF) is an ultramodern women's center financed and built by the City of Yokohama. The Women's Forum provides a place for women in the community to meet and discuss women's issues. Among the facilities at YWF are a library; conference and seminar rooms; a 380-seat auditorium complete with a sound-proof listening room for parents with small children; a workshop and kitchen; a fitness room; a childcare center; a counseling room; a health education room; and a fully equipped, state-of-the-art video studio available to members of the community.

Women's Place: In 1984, the group's founder translated into Japanese *The Adventures of Princess Alice*, a fairy tale told from a woman's perspective. After several major Japanese publishers declined to publish the book, Women's Place found a helping hand in the Yokohama Women's Forum. To date 70,000 copies have been sold, and an annotated English version of the book is now used in high school English classes. In addition, a picture book version is available for young children. A series of tapestries depicting scenes from the tale has been made from old clothing and is used in a travelling show that tells the story to children.

Naka Ward Women's Forum: Supported by the Yokohama Women's Forum, this group was founded by concerned housewives who believed that city planners did not take into consideration the needs of women and senior citizens. They produced a video showing what a city would look like if it were planned by women. The video was shown at a festival held at YWF and ultimately led to some changes in government planning. Recently, the group responded to the city's growing waste problem by initiating a successful clothing recycling program in which donated clothing is sent to developing countries, used in the making of carpets or industrial cloth, or used to wrap machinery.

Artnet: Artnet is a group composed of any two or more arts groups that come together for a common purpose. Artnet has no fixed number of member groups. The Yokohama Women's Forum supports these groups and asks them to perform and exhibit their work at the Forum. The majority of Artnet members are women. Currently, YWF and Artnet are promoting feminist art, which receives very little support from the public.

Michaera House: This is a women's shelter run by a group of Roman Catholic nuns and is the only such facility in Yokohama. The women who come to Michaera House are those escaping abuse from their husbands or parents, runaway pregnant teenagers, and girls referred to the shelter by juvenile courts. Although it receives almost no outside assistance, the shelter has been forced to accept more and more women each year—from 98 women in all of 1990 to 135 in the first quarter

of 1992. A television network has offered to make a drama series based on the stories of the women; however, the sisters at Michaera House are reluctant. In spite of the much-needed increased public awareness, they are afraid that the stories may endanger women seeking refuge.

Alternative Lives Opportunity Center: This is an umbrella organization that provides space for the activities of its member organizations, some of which are described below. Members include consumer cooperatives, information clearing-houses, and workers collectives. The directorship rotates among the member groups.

Seikatsu Club: The Seikatsu Club is a consumers' cooperative group that was founded in 1965, when a Tokyo housewife organized 200 women to buy milk collectively. This strategy to save money eventually evolved into an entire philosophy encompassing all aspects of life. In addition to cost-effective collective purchasing of basic food items, the club is committed to a host of social concerns, including the environment, the empowerment of women, and the improvement of workers' conditions. Today the Seikatsu Club has over 153,000 members in 10 prefectures throughout Japan. Beginning in 1979, the club became active in local politics. Campaigning on the slogan of "Political Reform from the Kitchen," in 1987 the club succeeded in getting 31 housewives elected to municipal assemblies in the Tokyo area in a single election. The cooperative movement has now spread to Korea.

Association of Workers' Collectives: This unique organization is a network of 60 "workers collectives" engaged in a wide variety of activities including restaurant management, care for senior citizens, manufacturing soap from recycled cooking oil, and publishing newsletters. Members of the collectives are volunteers, not paid professionals. A collective is started by women interested in working for themselves, not for others, and interested in making a contribution to the betterment of society. One example is the restaurant "Des Femmes." Staffed by eight volunteer women who had no prior formal training, the restaurant is committed to serving only homemade foods using fresh and natural ingredients produced by cooperatives. Kimie Yokoyama, proprietor of "Des Femmes" and an active member of the Association, was a member of the Japanese delegation which visited the United States in June, 1993.

Kanagawa Network Movement: After an unsuccessful attempt to persuade local assemblies to ban the use of synthetic detergents, the Seikatsu Club formed its own local political party in 1984 called the Kanagawa Network Movement (NET). Today, with a membership of over 2,500 housewives, NET has successfully seated 29 women in local assemblies. NET promotes grassroots citizen participation in solving local problems in the environment, community welfare, education, and peace, etc. As a principle, all women elected through NET are required to donate their entire legislator's salary to the NET party and are limited to two four-year terms, at which time they must step down to allow other candidates to run. Members

take turns caring for the children and doing household chores for those women campaigning for and serving in office.

Alice Center: Alice Center is an information clearinghouse that aids citizens in promoting volunteer activities in such areas as the environment, peace, and the elimination of racism. The main function of the Center is to refer citizens groups to experts, not to provide answers directly. Alice Center also publishes a bimonthly newsletter, provides management seminars to citizens groups, and recently advised the government on how it could best support citizen activities.

Fukuoka, January 29-30

In Fukuoka, a booming industrial city on the island of Kyushu, the delegation was hosted by the Fukuoka Women's Center, AMIKAS. After a tour of the city and a visit to Fukuoka's new city museum, meetings were held with representatives from local volunteer groups and with women prominent in the media, academia, government, and business.

Fukuoka Women's Center (AMIKAS): AMIKAS (from the Latin word for friends) is a social facility aimed at facilitating women's independence and their equal participation in society. Funded by the City of Fukuoka, AMIKAS provides space for both women and men to meet, discuss issues, study, and train. At the facility are a library, skills classes, counseling services, fitness facilities, and lectures on women's studies and women's self-development. AMIKAS also conducts research on women's issues and publishes information on local events and organizations in the city.

Living Fukuoka: This newspaper was founded and is run by a woman for women of the area. Fukuoka is known as a city of branch offices. Many men are transferred there temporarily by their companies, bringing their wives with them. These women are unfamiliar with the area and may not have family or friends in the city. This newspaper serves as a medium by which women in Fukuoka learn about local activities and events. The paper also features stories on women's issues. The editor-in-chief of this newspaper, Yoriko Imasato, was a member of the Japanese delegation that visited the United States in June, 1993.

Workers' Study Group on Garbage: This study group was established in 1990 by a group of 20 housewives in order to raise public awareness of the issue of ever-increasing garbage and to pursue the potential of recycling. Their activities include field studies on garbage, making postcards from milk cartons, and organizing recycling bazaars. They also have produced and sold six hundred reusable cloth shopping bags.

Hakata Yume Matsubara no Kai: This environmental citizens' group, comprised mostly of women, was founded in 1987 in order to create a greener Fukuoka. Their primary activity is to plant pine trees along a stretch of artificial beach on Hakata Bay.

Island Summit: Island Summit promotes cooperation and the exchange of people living on small islands in Northeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Among the islands included are Kyushu, Taiwan, Saipan, Guam, and Cheju.

Kanazawa, January 31-February 2

From Fukuoka the delegation moved on to Kanazawa, a snowy city on the Japan Sea known for its remarkably well-preserved traditional architecture and culture. The delegation was hosted by the City of Kanazawa. The group visited the traditional Japanese garden, *Kenroku-en*; the Utatsuyama Crafts Workshop Center; Shijima Elementary School; the workshop and gallery of the world-famous pottery maker, Chozaemon Ohi; the Kanazawa Art Museum; and *Zenrinkan*, a senior citizen center.

Utatsuyama Crafts Workshop Center: The Utatsuyama Crafts Workshop Center is a school dedicated to teaching, exhibiting, and preserving the traditional crafts of Japan, particularly those of the Kanazawa area. The school has programs in pottery, *urushi* (laquerware), dyeing, glass-making, and *zogan* (inlaid metal work). Student works are exhibited at the school's gallery. Because of the stringent entry requirements and the individualized attention given to students, the school is able to accept only about 30 students each year. Applications are accepted from foreign students provided they can demonstrate the necessary Japanese language skills. The school also provides workshop sessions for Kanazawa residents.

Shijima Elementary School: This elementary school has a total of 613 pupils in grades one through six, with 13 female and 6 male teachers. The school has a very progressive educational philosophy, which challenges the norms often associated with Japanese society. Children are encouraged to speak their own minds, express their ideas clearly, and to listen to the opinions of their peers. Boys and girls are paired together for many activities. Schoolwide activities allow the mixing of age groups.

Ishikawa no Tamago: This bilingual publication was started by a woman who saw the need for greater mutual understanding between Japanese citizens and the foreign community living in Ishikawa Prefecture. The publication is a means for non-Japanese residents to share with Japanese readers the problems they encounter while living in Japan, a medium to provide useful information on daily living to foreign residents, and a way to introduce other cultures to Japanese citizens. All articles are printed in both Japanese and English, with many of the readers speaking only one of the two languages. The publication has a total readership of 2,250. The editor of the newspaper, Yoshiko Hayakawa, visited the United States in June, 1993 as a member of the Japanese delegation.

Tea Time: Tea Time is a forum for residents of Kanazawa to discuss issues of the day. It was founded nine years ago by a woman who opened her home to friends and neighbors to have tea and informally talk about issues such as nuclear energy, the environment, and AIDS. The group has had many activities, including the publishing of an environmental newsletter (circulation 1,000), and the making

of a "Friendship Quilt," which has travelled to New Zealand and to refugee camps in Thailand. The group was successful in stopping the development of a golf course near the city reservoir. The group's founder published a collection of essays she wrote about many of the topics discussed at Tea Time. The open house movement is now spreading across Japan, with many similar groups springing up in other cities.

Ishikawa Environmental Network: This group was founded by citizens of Kanazawa who were troubled by Japan's voracious appetite for tropical wood products. After learning that most tropical wood in Japan is used for laying concrete and then discarded, they developed an environmental picture story for children that is currently travelling around Japan. They also publish a monthly environmental diary that is circulated to 100 individuals and 37 organizations. Recently the group has been focussing on preserving Japan's own forests.

Izumi Kyoka Translation Society: In 1977 this group started a movement to open Kanazawa to the outside world and began with volunteers teaching the Japanese language to non-Japanese residents of the city. More recently, the group translated six works by the Kanazawa author, Izumi Kyoka, and made the published books available to university libraries abroad. The group aims to promote the culture of Kanazawa through literature.

Zenrinkan: *Zenrinkan*, which literally means "good neighbor house," is a social service facility for senior citizens and is unique to Kanazawa. It is run almost entirely by volunteers, most of whom themselves are elderly. Among the various activities in which volunteer seniors are engaged are making handicrafts and preparing box lunches for homebound elderly citizens. One unique feature of the *Zenrinkan* is the intergenerational contact built into its design—services are provided for 60 senior citizens inside the same building that houses a daycare center for 50 young children.

Tokyo, February 3-5

Finally, the group returned to Tokyo where a workshop was convened at International House of Japan for the members of the US delegation, Japanese women who participated in earlier meetings, and selected guests, to discuss how the experience of the Dialogue might be shared more broadly and how the experience could strengthen community development efforts by women in the two countries. The following day the participants had the chance to follow up on their personal interests with individual visits to organizations of their own choice.

Summary of Major Findings of the US Women Leaders' Japan Study Tour

The reports from each US delegate reflect the depths of their learning experiences and the wide-ranging findings of their discussions. Below are summarized the key findings of most delegation members.

- 1. The nonprofit, nongovernmental sector as known in the United States is nonexistent in Japan.** The delegation members soon discovered that the

concepts of community spirit, volunteerism, grassroots citizen participation, and NGOs had very different connotations than what is assumed by these terms in the United States. Although these concepts do exist in Japan, for the most part Japanese society seems to have developed other mechanisms for dealing with societal problems. It is true that many Japanese women have taken initiative to better society through voluntary activities, while at the same time adapting these activities to work harmoniously within the framework of Japanese society. Still, to the members of the US delegation, it seemed that Japanese women might be much more effective in their roles as community leaders if their efforts were bolstered by a healthy nonprofit sector.

There are many disincentives to the development of a strong nonprofit or "independent" sector in Japan. The group was surprised to find that, in a country with half the population of the United States, there are only 700 nonprofit agencies with the equivalent of 501(c)(3) status.

The first major legal hurdle an organization must overcome when seeking nonprofit status is that it must receive official approval from one or more related government ministries, a process that requires an enormous investment of time and resources. In addition, a prospective NPO must show capital reserves of around \$1,000,000 before it can be considered for nonprofit status!

In addition to the huge capital requirements placed on nonprofits, there are other obstacles that limit their ability to raise funds. Philanthropy as known in the United States is an only recent phenomenon in Japan, and many corporations prefer to give to communities abroad rather than at home. Furthermore, there are no incentives for individuals or corporations to make donations to NPOs, as contributions to charitable causes are generally not tax-deductible. This situation severely restricts the potential number of donors. While the Japanese corporate community has developed some mechanisms for tax-deductible contributions to agencies approved by the *Keidanren* (Federation of Economic Organizations), there are very strict constraints on the amounts and the kinds of agencies approved.

A third factor limiting the growth of the nonprofit sector is the traditional relationship between the government and the citizens and their respective roles in society. In the United States private voluntary organizations are often seen as a way of filling the gap when government services are inadequate and thereby serve as a vehicle for social change when the government is unresponsive to the needs of the community. The situation is quite different in Japan. Since the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, it has been the government that has served as *the* driving force in bringing about societal change—in its mission to ensure that Japan catch up with (and even surpass) the West. Today, government ministries still vigorously guard their respective spheres of influence. It is still a widely held notion that if a service is needed in a community, it is the government's responsibility to provide that service, and that the involvement of local citizens is neither necessary or desirable. In fact, many nonprofit

agencies in Japan are actually funded almost entirely by the government. This top-down approach to responding to the needs of society is seen as a significant inhibitor to the growth of a truly independent sector.

Finally, work in the voluntary sector in Japan is not widely regarded as a true profession. From our discussions it was learned that this situation has at least two effects. First, it means that married women make up a large proportion of the voluntary sector, as they often have more free time to serve as volunteers while their husbands toil long hours in the office; these wives for the most part are not dependent on their own incomes. Secondly, the lack of a nonprofit profession means a group founded by one or two individuals would probably not continue to function without the participation of its founding leaders. This is especially true in the case of small local groups. When the executive director of a US nonprofit leaves her organization, there are trained and experienced professionals who can be recruited to fill her place. The lack of professional status for persons working in the voluntary sector means this is not the case in Japan. This fact, combined with the legal and financial obstacles facing voluntary groups, serves to prohibit the institutionalization, and therefore the longevity, of NPOs.

This is not to say that there is no nonprofit or independent sector in Japan. The Dialogue co-sponsor, JCIE, has played a crucial and effective role in legitimizing and expanding the NGO sector in Japan. In spite of the many barriers described above, there are countless examples of private voluntary groups successfully bringing about significant change in their communities—groups that would be recognized as 501(c)(3) organizations in the United States. However, these barriers do limit the number and size of Japanese voluntary organizations and the scope of their activities. Many groups work on only a single issue, have influence in only a very small geographic area (such as a city ward), and many probably do not survive their founding leaders.

2. **There are many examples of activities in Japan from which the United States could learn a great deal.** The fact that Japanese voluntary groups face enormous challenges made the women who lead those groups seem all the more remarkable. The delegation was impressed with the creativity with which obstacles were overcome, the innovative ways community support was enlisted, and the fresh solutions that were being tried in dealing with common problems. Particularly noteworthy is the consumer cooperative movement, which was founded by housewives and has evolved into a successful political party, environmental movement, and major promoter of grassroots citizen participation. This and other examples of private voluntary organizations in Japan are highlighted in the reports of the US delegation members.
3. **There is almost no opportunity for Japanese citizens to further or continue their education once they have entered the workforce.** In speaking with the many women we encountered on our study tour, it soon became apparent to the delegation that the concept of continuing education for individual growth

is virtually unknown in Japan. Other than company-sponsored training, it seems nearly impossible to further one's education, complete an unfinished degree, or explore a new professional direction, particularly if this involves temporarily dropping out of the workforce. This is due to at least two major forces. First is the fact that, once one leaves his or her job, it is impossible to return to the company at the same or a higher-level position. The same obstacle that keeps women from progressing in their professional lives once they have children and must leave the company to raise their families also prevents their advancement through further education. This limits the opportunities for women to develop new skills after their children have grown—skills that could be employed in the nonprofit sector.

Second is the fact that university entrance is based on a highly competitive entrance examination system. Any person wishing to return to university must take the entrance exam and must compete with high school seniors studying for a few coveted spots. Students obviously have an overwhelming advantage as they devote most of their waking hours studying and preparing for these exams, a luxury which working adults can not afford. Furthermore, there is no institution comparable to the US community college through which one can take courses part-time. Universities do not offer continuing education programs through which nondegree coursework may be pursued. Thus the opportunity to better oneself through further education later in life, a major vehicle for the advancement and empowerment of women in the United States, is largely absent in Japan.

- 4. There is very little networking, coalition building, and sharing of information among volunteer groups working on similar issues in different prefectures or regions of Japan.** In traveling to four different cities throughout Japan, the delegation members became aware that many communities were facing similar problems, and there were numerous groups working to solve these problems and effect change in their communities. There is tremendous potential for replication of successful projects and activities in many regions of Japan. However, we were surprised to learn that citizens groups were often unaware of the many other groups working on similar issues in other prefectures and cities, thus limiting the possibility of sharing ideas and acting cooperatively.

This seemed odd since Americans are so used to hearing about Japan as the ultimate group society and about the Japanese talent for consensus building. However, we eventually learned that "group" has a different meaning and different functions in Japan than "group" in the United States. Groups in Japan tend to be much more closed and exclusive. Whereas Americans feel free to join many groups (and leave just as many), it is much harder for the Japanese to join a group or to separate themselves from one. These factors may hinder the sharing of information among different groups and may deter groups from joining forces and forming powerful coalitions. We were told the Japanese are uncomfortable with the idea of simply picking up the telephone or writing a

letter to get information from an individual or group with whom they may have not had previous contact. Although the custom of distributing business cards is much more widespread in Japan than in the United States, it appears this is a simple formality (often to establish rank and seniority among various parties) rather than part of the networking process, the concept of which seems to be absent.

5. **There is very little, if any, mentoring of young women professionals by their senior colleagues.** The delegation was very fortunate to meet with numerous outstanding women in a wide range of professions. However, in spite of their extraordinary talents, skills, and experience, it appeared to the delegation members that these women were not sharing their knowledge with younger women. The concept of mentoring does not seem to have developed among Japanese professional women, perhaps for the same reasons as outlined in finding #4 above. Most of the delegation members believed that the practice of mentoring would greatly benefit Japanese women in all fields and professions, particularly those involved in the NGO sector, where professional training was thought to be needed most.
6. **There is very limited citizen participation in government decision-making at the both the national and local levels.** With the centuries-old top-down approach to government, it is perhaps not surprising that modern Japan has not developed a significant mechanism to accommodate citizen participation in public policy formation. Many of the women we met believed there was little citizens groups could do to influence government policy. During the study tour, the delegation encountered many women who gave examples of how the government seemed unresponsive to, if not uninterested in, the concerns of the tax-paying public. In Kanazawa, we were told the city would not send representatives to citizens' group meetings to listen to their concerns on the environment, because they claimed this would be perceived as the government officially endorsing the opinion of a specific interest group. In Yokohama, we learned that the Seikatsu Club had been largely unsuccessful in its attempt to persuade local assemblies to ban the use of synthetic detergents, in spite of having collected over 300,000 signatures in support of the ban.

In spite of the government's apathy towards citizen involvement, the Japanese, and in particular Japanese women, have developed very creative strategies to advance their causes, adapting their methods in an environment that would render many US activists helpless. After their proposals fell on the deaf ears of the government, the Seikatsu Club established its own political party called the Kanagawa Network Movement, and by 1991 had succeeded in seating 27 women in local assemblies in Kanagawa Prefecture. This extraordinary political party, whose membership is composed entirely of housewives, requires that women elected through the party return their entire salaries back into the movement so that the funds can be used to further promote their cause. The delegation also learned of one environmental group's strategy that capitalized

on the fact the government is more responsive to *gaiatsu*, or pressure from abroad, than to pressure from its own citizens. The group sent postcards to members of the United States Congress asking them to protest the Japanese government's bringing plutonium from France.

The above findings are a mere summary of what the delegation learned in Japan. It is impossible to outline all the experiences and lessons learned on the study tour in these few short pages. The pages that follow, written by the participants, capture more fully the profound impact of this trip on each of these thoughtful American women, as well as their commitment to build on a unique learning experience.