

100th Anniversary
Roundtable Discussion - 2From the frontlines of active participation of women
— courage to speak up changes the future**Ikumi Kaihatsu**

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Fostering an environment where everyone can challenge
nature, and maximizing flexibility and growth potential
as a company

As part of its efforts to improve employee engagement, the ISEKI Group is promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). At this roundtable, with the theme of “promoting the active participation of women,” female employees and Board members discussed real issues in the workplace. We will explore ways to foster a workplace where employees can challenge themselves in their own way, delving into issues that systems alone cannot resolve, such as “atmosphere,” and the need for a change in mindset among all employees, regardless of gender.

Please share any issues or requests you have
based on your current workplace and previous
experience.

Okabe: I work in the Secretariat, where I am responsible for tasks that support the directors, such as managing schedules—including that of the president—arranging business trips, and receiving visitors. I feel that creating a workplace where all employees can work comfortably regardless of gender requires us to foster an atmosphere where it is easy to consult with others. Even if systems like special leave exist, psychological barriers such as whether it's acceptable to use it and what others will think may, in some cases, prevent them from being fully utilized. In that regard, my current boss is very easy to talk to. Since we are both women, I feel comfortable

discussing issues unique to women and personal matters as well as work-related things. I feel that this daily communication leads to improved ability to cope when irregular situations arise. I also believe that having numerous opportunities to hear the real voices of senior employees who have experienced a significant number of life events will foster a culture in which employees feel that the system is easy to use.

Kaihatsu: I am affiliated with the Dream Agricultural Research Institute and ISEKI Japan's Sales Planning Department, where I am engaged in verification testing for the proposal of organic rice cultivation and the planning and operation of Amoni, the farm business solution portal site. I feel that there are still stereotypes about “women's work” and “men's work” in the workplace that we are not conscious of on a daily basis. Technical service departments,

for instance, which require the use of tools and involve considerable physical labor, have mostly male employees. Areas of expertise and strengths are not by nature related to gender. I think the ideal workplace is one where individual abilities can be put to good use, free from gender distinctions. Younger female employees have recently become increasingly outspoken, and there are more opportunities for them to, if they wish, take on new challenges. I myself also try to speak out and take on challenges when I find something I want to do. I think it is important to express your desires.

Kuroiwa: After having worked at a subsidiary in France for six years, I joined the Financial Department at the head office last year, where I am currently the manager of a team. After returning to Japan, I took part in Directors' Operating Committee meetings and various working groups, and became aware that the number of female managers was overwhelmingly small. In France, half of the managers were women, and it was normal for them to actively express opinions in meetings and have them reflected in decisions. I felt a big gap when I came back to Japan. Given the diversity of talent within the company, it is unfortunate that management positions are predominantly held by men. I believe that this needs to be improved, first and foremost.

Kuradomi: I was transferred last year from the Tractor Engineering Department of the Development & Production Division to the Sales Planning Department of ISEKI Japan Tohoku Company. Our main tasks include smart agricultural machinery demonstrations and training sessions, as well as information dissemination via social media. When I was in the development department, they created an environment where everyone could take on challenges, as men and women were treated equally and given the same work. At my current workplace, it seems that men tend to be assigned to field work and demonstrations, while women are tasked with office work. I think the fact that there isn't really a precedent is a bit worrisome, but if possible, I would like women to be afforded the same opportunities as men. Coming from a background focused on development, I am responsible for giving lectures and demonstrations on smart agricultural machinery. I find it very meaningful to convince female customers that women are also capable of operating agricultural machinery.

As an Outside Director, how do you view the
promotion of the active participation of women
in the ISEKI Group?

Kisogawa: It has been a year since I became an Outside Director. When it comes down to the theme of women's empowerment, I feel that there is still considerable room for improvement. The women who take part in committees and other forums are very logical and talented, but I feel that they are too small in number. Although our group has traditionally had a low proportion of female employees, I believe that a major factor in this is the low percentage of female managers (4.0%). Although the average varies by industry, there are more than a few companies where the proportion of women in management positions exceeds 10%. I hope that more women will become managers in the ISEKI Group as well. As I listen to everyone's opinions, I feel that there are situations where it is challenging to find role models. It is difficult to envision a career path if we do not have a senior colleague who we aspire to emulate. In addition to systems and mechanisms, organizations need to provide concrete, living examples. It is also important to change the mindset of male managers. Thinking unconsciously that you don't want to place a burden on a woman results in depriving women of opportunities to challenge themselves. It is my view that providing equal opportunities is essential for promoting the advancement of women.

Kishimoto: I am a lawyer by profession and have no experience working for a large organization, but the first thing I noticed when I started was the small proportion of female employees. I think one issue is that women are rarely involved when company policies are decided. Meetings in which both men and women participate allow for perspective and value exchange, which leads to deeper discussions and decision-making on a broader scale. I have often heard that the risk of misconduct is lower at organizations with a good balance of men and women. In that sense, I believe ensuring diversity among decision-makers is very important. What strikes me most as I listen to our employees is their opinion that though the systems are in place, they are not easy to use. Institutional design alone cannot solve this issue. I strongly feel that daily communication is necessary with superiors and colleagues to create an atmosphere in which we can consult with them immediately in

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the event something happens. Increasing opportunities for face-to-face discussions is important in achieving this.

Please tell us about the efforts being made in the ISEKI Group to promote the advancement of women.

Okabe: The Subcommittee for the Promotion of the Advancement of Women was established in January 2025. On this subcommittee, female employees themselves consider issues and measures necessary for women to play an active role. It was established with the aim of creating a workplace where female employees can advance their careers and where all employees, including women, can work comfortably. The subcommittee comprises 12 members with diverse backgrounds. Activities include discussing topics such as what makes a workplace appealing to women and how to change the mindset of female employees who are directly involved to achieve the action plan targets based on the Act on the Promotion of Women's Active Engagement in Professional Life. These include 20% or more of new hires to be women, active recruitment of women for technical positions, women to be appointed to 7% or more of management positions, and employees taking 12 or more days of paid leave on average. I joined the subcommittee because I saw talented colleagues and junior employees who, due to significant life changes such as marriage and childbirth, were forced to leave work. This left me feeling frustrated, wondering if a more conducive environment would have enabled them to keep working. Based on that experience, I decided to join the subcommittee, hoping to contribute to creating a workplace where people can continue to work with peace of mind, with their work status unaffected by major life events. Since joining the company, I had been mainly engaged in support work. Given this, I was a bit nervous about expressing my opinions in meetings, but I was motivated by the desire to do what I could because I wanted to work at ISEKI for a long time.

Kuroiwa: I took part in the subcommittee because I wanted the voices of female employees to be heard, and ensure that they were properly conveyed to the company. The mindset of the entire company needs to change if we are to improve disparities in areas such as the ratio of new hires and managers. We would like to begin by ascertaining the current situation of female employees

and what they want from the company, and then share this information internally. Currently, our company actively encourages women to take childcare leave and work reduced hours. In dual-income households, however, women are still responsible for a disproportionate share of childcare and household chores. In promoting the advancement of women in the workplace, we believe it is important to upgrade systems such as paternity leave and eliminate long working hours, as well as to foster mutual understanding among employees and enhance the workplace environment. I would like to leverage my experience at ISEKI's French subsidiary in contributing to the efforts of the subcommittee.

The Sanae Kurabu has also been launched.

Kaihatsu: The Sanae Kurabu is an independent group comprising female employees at ISEKI that was established in support of the "Women in Agriculture Project" launched by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. This is the ISEKI Group's first cross-departmental team of women, bringing together members from business, development, products planning, general management, and other departments. The objective of Sanae Kurabu is to support the activities of women in farming. We conduct activities such as seminars on handling agricultural machinery as well as online seminars. Last year, we held an exchange meeting for women in farming at the Tsukubamirai Office in Ibaraki Prefecture, where we introduced the latest in smart agricultural machinery. The group discussion provided a valuable opportunity to hear opinions from people with whom we do not normally interact in our daily work. It allowed us to learn about the enthusiasm of women working in agriculture and the challenges we face, and served as a good opportunity for us, as women, to reflect on our own workstyles.

Kuradomi: I joined Sanae Kurabu because, as the first female employee to have been seconded to a development department, I wanted to support others who, like me, were taking on new challenges. I also wanted to increase the number of women interested in development and design. The design work I was responsible for allowed me to feel that I was at the forefront of manufacturing, and I felt joyful as I watched my drawings take shape. At our company, designers assemble agricultural machinery and perform inspections themselves, which facilitates rapid



improvement. This speed was, for me, one of the most rewarding aspects of working there. Currently, in addition to planning and conducting networking events, Sanae Kurabu holds seminars on agricultural machinery for women in farming. We also play a role in collecting feedback from the field to help incorporate ease of use from a female perspective into agricultural machinery. I would like to utilize my experience in development to enhance feedback collection toward better product development.

What kind of company do you think the ISEKI Group should aim to be? Please share your views on this, as well as your own efforts.

Okabe: I think we should aim to be a company where life events are accepted naturally—not viewed as disadvantages—so that employees will want to continue working. I often hear people say that there aren't any role models around them. For me, though, my role model is the image of the person I want to become. Even if we feel anxious or uncertain, we can gradually become that ideal version of ourselves if we take positive steps forward without fear of change. I hope someday to become a role model for others.

Kuroiwa: We want to work toward cultivating a workplace where all employees—regardless of gender—can perform to the best of their abilities, rather than simply reaching numerical targets such as the proportion of women in management positions. I joined the company through a career recruitment program. Everyone around me was very kind, which enabled me to fit in quickly. The warmth of the people is, to me, the best thing about the ISEKI Group. While prioritizing that corporate culture, I would like to create a better environment.

Kaihatsu: I want us to be a company where individual abilities are respected and everyone can work in a way that suits them. I believe that, by fostering a culture where each individual can leverage their strengths and accept new challenges, the company will see significant growth. With regard to my own efforts, I plan to find things I can do, work on them, and share my insights without hesitation. I hope that taking action will spark a positive chain reaction internally.

Kuradomi: I would like us to become a company where there are no gender-related restrictions on job duties or types. Personally, I want to achieve as much as possible to show people that women can also do these things. Hopefully those who follow in my footsteps

will be able to work in an environment where they take on various challenges as a matter of course. I need to strengthen my own abilities to achieve this, and I intend to continue challenging myself in various ways.

What are your expectations regarding the ISEKI Group's efforts to promote the advancement of women in the workplace?

Kisogawa: Ultimately, I believe it is important to create an environment where capable people can thrive, without success being impacted by gender. Three perspectives are necessary to achieve this. The first is a change in the mindset of female employees themselves. We shouldn't let the lack of precedent or perceived impossibility cause us to hesitate. Create opportunities for yourself and take on new challenges. The second is a change in the mindset of male managers. It is essential for people to be cognizant of unconscious bias and have the courage to consciously give women opportunities. The third is to create a companywide mechanism that allows the reflection of diverse opinions in management and on the front lines. Continuing these three initiatives will very likely serve to enhance our competitive power as a company and drive us toward achieving sustainable growth. Today, we listened to the stories of our fellow women employees and were able to once again feel the passion they have for their work. As an Outside Director, I am determined to support your efforts and do whatever I can to put the necessary reforms into practice.

Kishimoto: When we talk about promoting the advancement of women in the workplace, it is often perceived as the implementation of measures for women. In reality, however, companies where women can work comfortably end up enhancing the work environment for men as well. I believe that creating an environment in which, while dealing with major life events, everyone can continue to work with peace of mind ultimately leads to a stronger organization. As such, I would like to once again emphasize that promoting the advancement of women is an initiative geared toward improving the overall quality of the organization. I would like to lend whatever support I can to help bring this to fruition. And it is my sincere hope that all employees will believe in their own potential and move forward one step at a time.

