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SUSTAINABLE RURAL FUTURE

**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL
COOPERATIVES IN JAPAN**

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This study aims to examine the participation of rural women in the management of agricultural cooperatives in Japan, specifically the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JAs).

JAs provide farmers with joint sales and purchasing services, as well as financial and mutual aid services. The JA group, comprising 506 JAs with a total membership of approximately 10 million people, has developed not only into a union of multipurpose cooperatives for farmers, but also into a grassroots-level state agency and a lobby group.

For many years, farmers' wives have been primarily responsible for housework and childcare. This has influenced women's status within JAs. Women have neither become full members nor directors of JAs, but have instead joined women's organizations within JAs as members' wives, engaging in non-profit community contributions. However, efforts have been made to increase the

number of female directors. JAs adopting a separate quota for women, which allocates a fixed number of director positions to women and involves the women's organizations in selecting female candidates, have increased since 2000.

The results of the semi-structured interviews with female directors of JAs in Okayama Prefecture indicate as follows; (1) The number of female directors has not increased beyond a few, (2) They do not feel their voices have been sufficiently reflected in the cooperative's management, (3) The current mainstream female quota independent of existing electoral quotas risks institutionalizing gender inequality, (4) Due to the impact of neoliberal policies and the aging of female members, some JAs introduced another female quota. However, since they have not sufficiently engaged female farmers, particularly younger generations, this quota has not been effective.

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Palavras-chave: agricultural cooperatives; japan agricultural cooperatives (ja); gender equality; rural women; female farmers.