

Welcome Address

Tomohiro Bessho

Director General

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Research Council Secretariat,
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF)



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Distinguished speakers and chairmen, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Tomohiro Bessho, Director General of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Research Council Secretariat. On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have come to participate in this JIRCAS International Symposium.

Ensuring food security is a priority for the entire world. The world population is expected to increase to 9.8 billion in the year 2050 from the current figure of 7.6 billion. With this population increase, food demand is also expected to become 1.6 times as large as the current level. This causes concerns over the possibility of tight supply and demand situation in the future. According to an announcement of the United Nations this September, the number of people suffering from hunger began to increase again in 2016 due to conflicts and climate change, and reached approximately 800 million. IPCC also reported that the temperature rise could negatively affect the production of staple crops. In order to tackle these challenges and achieve food security in the future, gender is one of the important elements that we should consider. In many developing countries, empowering women is shown to have a positive impact on children's nutrition and education. Also in some regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, women are the major producers of staple crops.

It is important to understand the different roles of men and women and the different challenges they face in society. This is why this symposium is very timely. By promoting an active role for female researchers, we could incorporate women's views and ideas on our research better and deepen our understanding of the opportunities and challenges in achieving food security and improving nutrition. Promoting an active role for women is also a priority for the Government of Japan. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe clearly stated his intention to bring about a society where women shine both within Japan and also in countries suffering from conflict and poverty.

I am pleased to note that the Government of Japan is now hosting the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo, which has been held annually since 2014 under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, and that this symposium is regarded as one of its official side events.

In order to promote gender equality in Japan, the law to promote women's participation and advancement in the workplace was put in force in April last year. Under this rule, the government has been working to make information on active participation of women in private companies easily accessible, and carry out work reforms and promote changes in men's way of life.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also developed a plan to promote active female participation and work-life balance in 2014. Based on this plan, we have been accelerating recruitment and promotion of female staff and improving their work conditions. We have also been promoting active use of women's ability in agriculture. For example, by a project to link the wisdom of female farmers to technologies, knowledge and ideas of private companies and institutions.

I sincerely hope that today's symposium will help you to better understand the latest research on food and nutrition and the role of female researchers in this field. It is my great pleasure if today's discussion will promote women's active participation in research and society and shed new light on our work to achieve food security and better nutrition. Thank you for your kind attention. Thank you.