

# **Job Creation in an Ageing Society**

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## **Ageing Population: a global phenomenon**

We are well aware that the world population is rapidly ageing whilst contrarily, the rate of fertility is decreasing. These phenomena have been very common in the industrially developed countries, but it is also becoming the trend in the developing countries. There are several forecast figures and it is said that the increasing proportion of people aged over 60 in the developing countries will surpass those of the developed countries during the period between 1990 and 2025.

According to the statistics, Japan is one of the countries with the most rapidly increasing proportion of older persons in the world. In March 1999, there were more than 20 million people over 65 representing nearly 16.5 per cent of the Japanese population. It is predicted to reach 25 per cent by the year 2025.

## **Co-ops in the ageing society**

What I want stress here is the fact that the communities that co-ops serve and accordingly their own memberships will certainly include more older persons than ever before. This sort of demographic shift certainly gives the co-ops various new challenging issues for their own future activities. Accordingly, everything in the co-ops should be purposefully scrutinised under such conditions whether they keep up with new trends or not. Not only the physical assets such as stores, warehousing and transport infrastructure, but also their policies, information systems, the service quality which they deliver and even member organisation should be re-examined.

I am sure that there are so many points to be discussed and to be clarified for future research activities, but because of the time-constraint I should like to briefly mention here only store designs which should be friendly to all generations including older persons.

I conducted store checks at the two stores of the Nagoya Citizens' Co-op in March, asking 30 older shoppers whether they found any inconvenient aspects to the design with regard to access and utility. Fortunately, these two stores generated almost no adverse comment. The only thing they unanimously wanted was for the entrance to be without any hindrance such as steps or curves or mats on the floors. The friendly designs to the older persons

(including disabled persons) may serve all generations. The concept of 'Universal Design' is now gradually prevailing in the world, with its principles being as follows;

- Accessible to all
- Flexibility
- Simple and intuitive
- Clear signage/instructions
- Error tolerance
- Low physical effort requirement
- Size and space for approach and use.
- Of course it should be low in cost and pleasing to the eye!

These basic principles could be used as criteria for re-examining co-operative service delivery to older persons. I should like now to cite several Japanese co-operative experiences for the older persons hoping to get a handle on this issue for discussion.

## **Older Persons Organisations initiated by Consumer Co-ops**

### **1 Mutual-help groups**

In Japan besides their consideration for older persons in retail business, consumers co-ops have organised mutual-help groups called "Kurashi-no Tasukeai-no Kai" among their members, consisting of mostly older persons and some of middle-age. They help each other in the miscellaneous housekeeping works of sweeping, washing, cooking, shopping and the like. At the outset, the idea was to help other people and in return to be helped when needed for the same length of hours. Nowadays, they have developed the system of remuneration on the basis of the number of hours served. According to the statistics of the JCCU (March, 1999), the number of individuals registered under those groups in the 67 co-ops is more than 47,500 and it is reported to be increasing very rapidly. In parallel, they started the meal home-delivery service and luncheon serving meetings. Forty-five co-ops have delivered 78,800 meals in a year. Based upon those activities, many consumers' co-ops could enter into the care business under the new care insurance scheme which I will deal with more later.

Similar organisations are found among the workers collective movement initiated by members of the consumers' co-op Seikatsu Club, which is very active in the Tokyo metropolitan area. These are also found in the worker co-ops initiated by the co-op Kanagawa.

It is important to create opportunities for older people to

socialise. Isolated in their own homes they become lonely and age more quickly.

## **2 Co-op Nursing Homes and other facilities**

Co-op Kobe is the first to open a nursing home for members and the public with the legal form of a social welfare corporation in 1993. It has two homes accommodating 150 older people, which at the same time act as day care centres for up fifty per day.

Nara co-op also opened a similar nursing home in 1999 accommodating 50 older people. Seikati club co-op has opened two such facilities in Chiba (for 50) and Kanagawa (50) prefectures. The day-care centres are also managed by the various co-ops as social welfare corporations.

Of course it is not easy to have such facilities in the movement as it needs rather substantial capital investment and appropriate expertise. In any case, the co-op should be rooted deeply in the community and should have a good relationship with local government. In other words, it should win a reputation for trustworthiness through its daily operations. Medical/health co-ops are also taking care of older people in 79 hospitals and 314 clinics all over the country. They have short-stay facilities and many day-centres. The preventive medical activities for older persons are delivered ordinarily through members' han-groups (small members groups).

## **3 Ikigai (Self-Esteem) co-ops by retired persons**

Nagoya citizens' co-op has been encouraged to organise workers co-ops among retired persons in the communities. It started eight years ago by setting up a secretariat for the promotion, dissemination and networking of their activities.

Examples of the types of work include;

- Gardening by 40 people
- Manufacturing barrier-free wooden furniture and ceramics by 30 people
- Apple orchard management by 50 people
- Serving needs of the community, such as morning milk deliveries, flower decoration making, taking dogs for walks, cleaning tombs etc. by 100 people.

For the older people, needless to say it is necessary to give

opportunities to find their ikigai (feeling of self esteem) by themselves through their activities. Several co-ops started to facilitate such types of organisation and they report plenty of opportunities to discover and create new jobs as needs exist both in the communities and among the retired persons. It demonstrates success depends upon the harmonious combination of ikigai and work.

### **New Co-ops are Emerging: Koureikyou (Senior citizens Co-op)**

Starting from 1995, some very new types of Co-op have emerged successively throughout Japan. The co-ops consist of mostly older persons aiming to:

- create spaces for older persons to get together
- exchange information and learn each other
- create jobs and contribute to the communities
- purchase and distribute daily necessities
- enrich culture and pleasures
- keep themselves healthier without becoming bed-ridden and needing care.
- foster friendly communities to older persons, advocate the interests of older people and propose ideas to the governments.

The Japanese Workers Co-operative Union took initiative in forming such co-ops; sometimes providing staff, seed money and even technical support. At present there are 27 co-ops in 27 prefectures with nearly 22,000 members and 18 co-ops of which are incorporated as consumers' co-ops. As they have a policy of one co-op at least for each prefecture, 47 co-ops could to be established in the very near future.

In Japan we do not have any suitable legislation to cover such activities, so the Koureikyou as well as Workers Co-operative Union are campaigning and pushing the government to establish the workers' co-operative law to meet the needs of the contemporary situation. Their activities are very diversified in the various fields such as learning courses, hobby groups, tourism, and importantly job creation.

With regard to job creation, there are several categories as follows;

- Janitor and maintenance
- Agriculture and food processing

- Meal delivery
- Shopping
- Health care
- Home care service
- Miscellaneous.

Of these, home care service is to play an important role for the sustainable development of the Koureikyoku as it is an older persons organisation to care for each other irrespective of whether they are healthy or not.

Anyway many members expect to have jobs and it is obviously important to establish financial stability through the creation of new jobs.

### **Co-ops and the New care Insurance System**

From this April, the national government started a new insurance scheme to be operated by the local government for care provision, privatising the former role to qualified business organisations. Depending on the type of provision and working hours, the payment will be to the engaged organisations from this insurance. Many co-ops mentioned above have enough trained care-workers to enter into such businesses. They duly became licensed. Agricultural co-ops trained nearly 40,000 care-workers and Koureikyoku 18,000. 28 consumer co-ops have started care activities with licensed workers. Koureikyoku see home-care delivery as its core business activity and intends to develop wider care provision. Care business should not be for profit but for human dignity and for the independence of the older person.

In Japan it is reported that there are 2.8 million older people needing care with only 170,000 care-workers. There is huge demand for these services. At the same time it is necessary to resolve the teething problems with these new systems.

### **A little bit about Agricultural Co-ops**

Agricultural co-ops have promoted care works intensively since the amendment of the agricultural co-op law in 1992 opening doors to non-member residents. Here, I do not address their big achievements, but rather I introduce an excellent example of job creation by older farmers. In Nagano prefecture, 16 member farmers of JA Nagano (agricultural co-op) started direct transactions of vegetables with a consumers' co-op in Osaka by request in 1988. Older farmers that had retired from major farming work, found they

were still capable of vegetable-cultivation. So many older farmers came to join for vege-cultivation and 264 have organised a committee for vege-cultivation for local sale. They send vegetables in a box regularly to each home of the consumer co-op member. In so doing they have enhanced their earnings and their feelings of Ikigai, through direct communication with consumer customers. Similar examples exist in many other prefectures.

## **Concluding Remarks**

I have introduced experiences of co-operatives in a ageing society in the Japanese context. However I have merely described their appearances and have not explored the existing problems. I feel that Japanese co-ops have been too slow in adjusting to the coming new society. We have to remind ourselves again of the older populations faster growth. We have to create more adequate form of co-operative system for the coming new era.

Job creation is a rather difficult thing, especially under poor economic conditions with 3.4 million unemployed people (5 per cent of total workforce). The jobs I cited are still minor and sometimes in niche businesses under the spirit of volunteerism. But they do show that if the co-ops are rooted deeply in the communities, they have opportunity to prosper and grow. It is true that healthy older persons intend to continue working but with ikigai. So far as the government statistics of 1996 indicate, over 60 per cent of men without jobs aged 60-64 wish to work and 40 per cent of people without jobs aged 65-69 wish to work. In the case of women the percentages are 30 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. How about in your country?

In the industrially developed countries, people tend to retire earlier, often with financial incentives. Moreover they are forced to leave their working places by the restructuring of companies. For these people it is an urgent task to create jobs for themselves in the form of co-operatives.

In the developing countries, I would presume older persons tend to keep working as long as they can. Anyway, this is a starting point. It is better to exchange information and think together to create a better system by reusing and recycling the wisdom and skills of the older generation.

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