

Small-scale Fisheries in Japan

Environmental and Socio-cultural Perspectives

edited by Giovanni Bulian and Yasushi Nakano

The Development of Women Fishery Entrepreneurship Group in the Japanese Marine Products Distribution Sector

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Abstract The paper focuses on the development of women fisheries entrepreneurship groups in the marine products distribution sector in Japan. In particular, we will discuss the women's groups in fishery cooperative associations (FCAs) who live in fishing communities and conduct economic activities using local resources centred on fishery products. The case study of the Sanmi Sea Mothers will also be examined following its historical evolution up to its current operational and economic performance.

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Keywords Women fishery entrepreneurship group. Low value fish. Processing and selling. Utilising local fish. 'Unsellable' fish. Fishing community. Small activity.

1 The Characteristics of Marine Products Distribution in Japan and the Increasing Handling of Low Value Fish

There are many small-scale fisheries and communities landing a broad diversity of fish everywhere in Japan. Usually, the local Fisheries Cooperative Associations (FCAs) are managing and recording the fish landings in these ports. The local fish stores, fish processors, intermediary fish agents, etc., come to buy fish at these local fishing ports. Therefore, they are

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DOI 10.14277/6969-226-0/CFJS-8-2 | Submitted: 2017-09-08 | Accepted: 2018-01-19

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-226-0 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-242-0



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Figure 1. Fish peddler recommending fish in Wajima (© 2003 Kumi Soejima)

Figure 2. Fish peddler making *sashimi* 刺身 (sliced raw fish) in Wajima (© 2003 Kumi Soejima)

called “wholesale markets at producing area”. The size of these markets is usually not very big. Aside from such local consumption, a lot of fish are gathered and transferred to big cities and sold at big wholesale markets. They are called “wholesale markets at consuming areas”, and the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo is one of these wholesale markets. Currently, there are about 35 wholesale markets in consuming areas and about 900 wholesale markets in producing areas all over Japan, which form distribution chains that cover the whole of Japan. These wholesale markets’ distribution networks contribute to a stable and abundant food supply no matter where we live in Japan, and they support Japanese food culture’s reliance on raw fish (Sano 2015, 97-100).

In addition, the existence of local and small fish shops and fish peddling, in which women are often engaged, is important, because these can evaluate the wide variety of fish landed and distribute this fish, enabling our culture to cook and eat this fish. They go to wholesale markets in producing areas operated by FCAs and buy varieties of local fish, which they sell to local consumers in addition to teaching consumers how to cook and eat the fish they have bought.

For example, women have peddled fish in the town of Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture (map 1), for a long time. Until recently, they peddled local fish using two-wheeled carts; however, the use of light trucks is gradually increasing. Their commodities are fish caught by their husbands (who work as fishers), or they buy at wholesale markets in producing areas or from local intermediaries. Because the main fishing methods in Wajima are trawl fisheries and purse seine fisheries, much low value fish are landed and sold at local wholesale markets. Therefore, the women carefully take time to pre-process (e.g., dressing into fillet, making a dried overnight etc.) and sell this fish to customers who each buy only a small quantity.

Peddlers sell through constant communication with their customers. This communication includes not only daily conversation but also an explanation about the fish: for example, the species of fish, how to cook it, fishing methods, the name of the fisher, and so on. They actively communicate all this information. When they sell fish, they not only cut off fish heads and guts and slice in rounds or fillets, but they may also prepare bite-sized thin slices of raw fish for *sashimi* or shuck dozens and dozens of turban shells, shell by shell, depending on the customer’s order. In addition, they may dip the fish in soy sauce or marinate in vinegar on the spot. They may suggest a dish for the day after asking customers about their previous night’s meal. In recent times, fish peddling is conducted at the time and place of the customer’s convenience, because they can keep in contact with customers using mobile phones. Despite the increasing number of GMSs (General Merchandise Stores) and SMs (Super Markets), fish peddlers have also been increasing their customer numbers recently, as they can offer more tailored services to customers. They supply fresh,

safe fish, offering peace of mind and supporting Japanese food culture by communicating cooking methods. Incidentally, they also serve to confirm the safety of aged people living alone on their usual peddling route, amid the growing number of aged people living alone.

However, these small local peddlers who play an important role in the lives of local communities by promoting Japanese culinary culture and utilisation of diverse kinds of fish continue to decline. On the other hand, the numbers of GMSs and SMs are increasing. GMSs and SMs have numerous chain stores across all over the country, giving them strong buying power in regard to marine products distribution. GMSs and SMs order marine products selected under four conditions for given distribution and production areas: constantly fixed quantities (large quantities), constantly fixed quality, constantly fixed times, and constantly fixed prices (low prices). GMSs and SMs are particularly insistent in their demands that production areas cut fish prices. Therefore, the size and species of fish are standardised and the only fish in strong demand are those fit for mass distribution and widespread distribution. Even if the fish are delicious, unknown and local or minor fish varieties have lesser value. Even if the fish are of a well-known variety, if their size is too big or too small they are unsellable for GMSs and SMs. If the lot size is too small they are also unsellable. Of course, we can understand that GMSs and SMs, which have numerous chain stores all over Japan, need large quantities of fish. But why are the size and species of fish standardised? The authors had actually heard a buyer say: «On ordering lists that come up on my PC screen, I order only the kinds of fish I know because I'm not sure whether I can sell a fish if I don't know it». Thus the line-up of fish at GMSs and SMs becomes increasingly standardised. Many local or minor fish varieties evaluated and distributed by wholesale markets in producing areas, fish shops and fish peddlers are considered of lower and lower value, as they are unfamiliar. As a result, the handling of low value fish in Japan is currently increasing. Around 500 or 600 fish species landed all over Japan are actually fit to eat. But GMSs and SMs will stock only 50 to 70 of those fish species (Hamada 2011, 105).

Given this situation, the sale of these 'unsellable' fish is increasing at producing areas. Especially small lots of fish and various types of local fish not in demand by GMSs and SMs are continuing to lose commercial value. On the other hand, the concept of 'balanced harvesting' (Garcia et al. 2012) suggests that the consumption of a variety of small fish species is important to conserve the function and structure of marine ecosystems. So that means most fish caught, especially by particular small-scale fisheries, continue to represent lost opportunities for commercialisation. Many kinds of fish are underutilised or discarded. From the viewpoint of ecosystem-based fisheries management, this is irrational.

2 The Movement by Women in Fishing Communities

2.1 Women's Groups in Fishery Cooperative Associations (FCAs) and Women Fishery Entrepreneurship Groups

Given this situation, many women at fisheries in various regions have created women fishery entrepreneurship groups in order to sell local fish with added value. We refer to groups organised by women living in fishing communities that conduct economic activities using local resources centred on fishery products or whose purpose is focused on links to future economic activities as women fishery entrepreneurship groups.

Organisations known as FCA's Women's Groups have come to exist in many fishing communities. There are 680 women's groups within FCAs, consisting of 40,102 members at the present (National Association of FCA's Women's Groups 2015). The smallest-scale coordinating organizations are local FCAs. To achieve holistic fisheries coordination for local fishing grounds, local FCAs have to establish operational regulations that stipulate equipment restrictions, as well as closures of fishing grounds on a seasonal or area basis, etc (Makino 2011). Most FCAs have a women's groups of FCAs carry out certain activities. One such activity is promoting the eating of fish. Women's groups of FCAs teach how to cut up fish and how to cook fish, mainly at local primary schools. A second activity is cleaning beaches. A third is promoting the use of natural soaps. They encourage local people to use natural soaps instead of detergent soaps to help protect the environment. A fourth activity is tree-planting on mountains, based on the idea that mountains are important for protecting marine environments and fish. A fifth activity is engaging in welfare support, which a number of women's groups of FCAs are increasingly carrying out particularly for elderly people given Japan's ageing population. For example, they held an exercise class and they make a lunch for local seniors and so on. In these ways, women's groups of FCAs are constantly tackling the issues of life in fishing communities. However, numbers of both groups and their members are decreasing nowadays. In addition, the members of women's groups of FCAs are ageing, overall, and fewer people between the younger generation and the ageing generation feel an obligation to engage in women's groups of FCAs' activities (Soejima, Yano 2004). Therefore, the activities of women's groups of FCAs are moving toward gradual decline.

On the other hand, women fishery entrepreneurship groups in fishing communities have been developing and flourishing recently. Our research confirmed the existence of at least 364 groups across Japan in 2010 (Tokyo Fisheries Promotion Foundation; Umi Hito Kurashi Forum; Fishery Communities Planning Co, Ltd 2011).

2.2 Motivations and Major Activities of Women Fishery Entrepreneurship Groups

There are four main motivations behind start-up of women fishery entrepreneurship groups. Firstly, they want to make efficient use of local fish, which is handled as low value fish. As mentioned above, the rate of local fish (which was distributed as a saleable commodity in the past but is distributed as low value fish in the present day) is increasing at the moment due to distribution issues caused by the powerful position of GMSs and SMs. Whenever they calculate that shipment to wholesale markets makes no business sense, fishers either eat those fish at home, share fish around the neighbourhood, or dump fish at sea.

Women married to fishers see the fish their husband made great efforts to catch treated so unfairly at the market, and they wonder why they are forced to throw away such delicious fish, considering it wasteful and so on. Such reasoning has caused many women to create their groups.

There is a women fishery entrepreneurship group called Hikoshima Sea Ladies located in the city of Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture (map 1). The main fishery in their area is a small trawl fishery. One characteristic of small trawl fisheries is that their catches are mostly low value fish. Therefore, the wives of this fishers have been selling the fish that husbands catch directly to consumers since early times, because their fish are considered unsellable by auction at wholesale markets. Several wives of fishers in the Hikoshima community created the women fishery entrepreneurship group named Hikoshima Sea Ladies in 2001 because they often could not sell their fish. Their business consists of serving lunches utilising local fish buying 'unsellable' fish from the wives of fishers in Hikoshima and cooking these fish by pan-frying or deep-frying. Figure 3 shows their shop and figure 4 their lunch menus. A lot of tourists visit the shop, and eat and enjoy the 'unsellable' fish.

There is another women fishery entrepreneurship group, Saga-shi Gyoson Josei no Kai, which roughly translates as 'Fisherwomen's Group of Saga City'. This group was established by women involved in laver seaweed aquaculture. Prices of even slightly blemished dried laver seaweed have been falling significantly, even though these have been painstakingly created. This group became active from 2000 because they had the conviction that their dried laver seaweed tasted good even when it had minor blemishes. They have made efforts to commercialise their products, aiming for eventual rollout in Tokyo department stores.

Current their flagship product is laver simmered in soy sauce (laver seaweed simmered into a paste with soy sauce and other ingredients, as illustrated in figure 5). This laver simmered in soy sauce is often eaten on rice in Japan. Many Japanese do not know other ways to eat laver simmered in soy sauce. Therefore, they suggest alternatives to enjoy laver



Figure 3. Hikoshima Sea Ladies shop (© 2015 Kumi Soejima)

Figure 4. Hikoshima Sea Ladies lunch menus (© 2015 Kumi Soejima)



Figure 5. Laver seaweed simmered in soy sauce by Saga-shi Gyoson Josei no Kai (© 2015 Kumi Soejima)



Figure 6. Lunch by Saga-shi Gyoson Josei no Kai (© 2013 Kumi Soejima)

Figure 7. Banded blue-sprat with vinegared *okara* おから by Tosa Himeichi group.

Soybean grounds squeezed from soymilk are known as *okara* (© 2016 Kumi Soejima)

Figure 8. Gomadashi (© 2009 Kumi Soejima)



simmered in soy sauce. For example, figure 6 shows a pasta made using laver simmered in soy sauce and some accompanying dishes using laver simmered in soy sauce.

Secondly, they want to make places to work in their own community, as there are few in fishing communities. Furthermore, in the case of fishery households, for women who engage in pre-harvest and post-harvest work, their entire lives revolve around this work. They can only rarely find places to work in between pre-harvest and post-harvest work. Therefore, in many cases women fishery entrepreneurship groups are established to create places to work that complement fishing-related work and domestic care work in their communities.

The Tosa Himeichi group is active in the town of Sukumo, Kochi Prefecture (map 1). They started their group in 2004 to create places for local fisherwomen to work. In addition, the prices of the fish their husbands catch using the purse seine method get lower every year. Most of this fish is used for fish aquaculture feed and is traded at considerably lower prices, even though it is tasty and fresh. Thus, to add as much value as possible to the fish, the wives started processing and preparing it as food and selling

it from trucks in the city. In figure 7 there is one of their products. They process local traditional cooking. However, peddling fish from trucks has become more difficult for these women, as they are now ageing. Therefore, they stopped peddling from trucks and now they sell their products at local roadside stations.

Roadside stations are licensed and registered with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Road Bureau. The roadside stations system was launched in 1993. Its basic concept is to create a safe, comfortable road traffic environment, and unique, lively spaces that showcase the individuality of a region. Roadside stations have three distinct features:¹

1. Refresh: Rest facilities, including free 24-hour parking and rest-rooms.
2. Community: Regional cooperation where cultural centres, tourist attractions, recreation facilities and other local development facilities promote interaction with the region.
3. Information: Where road, tourist and emergency care information is readily available.

There are currently 1093 roadside stations in Japan (as at May 2016). Because there are so many roadside stations established throughout Japan, many women's entrepreneurship groups have secured places where they can sell their products.

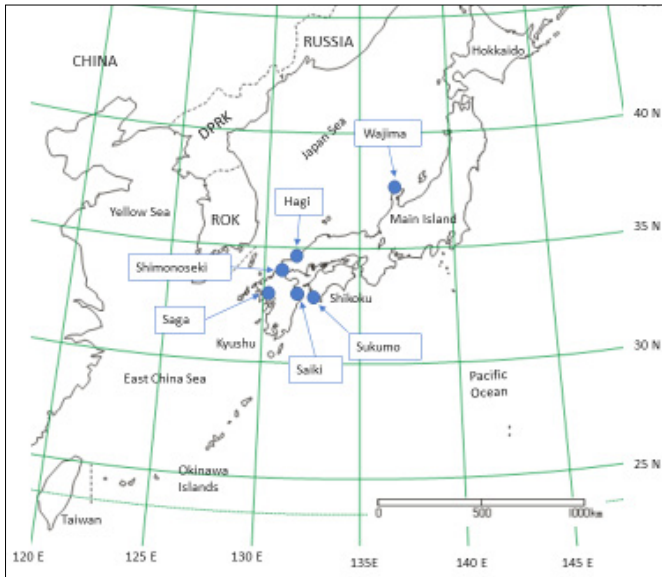
The third aim of these group is to spread and pass on their local traditional food cultures. The women's fishery group Mebaru in the town of Saiki in Oita Prefecture (map 1) produces and sells the local traditional food *gomadashi* (fig. 8). *Gomadashi* is a paste made with grilled fish flakes, sesame, soy sauce and sweet rice wine used for cooking. It can be used to make soup with 1 tablespoon of *gomadashi* to 1 cup of hot water. The fish these women use to make *gomadashi* is *Trachurus japonicus*, which are cheap since they are caught in great number in local purse seines, or *Coryphaena hippurus*, which have low market value in Japan. *Coryphaena hippurus* has low market value because the Japanese seem to have an innate dislike of *Coryphaena hippurus*. However, the price of *Coryphaena hippurus* at wholesale markets in local producing areas is apparently slowly rising after Mebaru started to use local *Coryphaena hippurus*. In addition, the desire to spread the word about *gomadashi* led them to publish and sell an original *gomadashi* recipe book in 2014 (fig. 9). This recipe book contains not only existing serving ideas but also many new ideas. We have heard that this book is very popular and will be reprinted.

1 All Nippon Michi-no-Eki Network website <http://www.michi-no-eki.jp/en-what/?language=1> (2016-10-12). English version available on the website.



Figure 9. Mebaru recipe book (© 2014 Mebaru)

The fourth goal of these women is educating consumers about local fish. People who are not involved with fisheries often do not know about local fisheries, even if they live in a fishing community. According to our research in 2006, people not involved in fisheries do not know about local fisheries and have very few opportunities to eat local fish (Soejima 2003). The district of Saga Prefecture (home of the aforementioned Saga-shi Gyoson Josei no Kai) is famous for producing dried laver seaweed. According to our interview-based study, however, rather unexpectedly people in the area tend not to eat dried laver seaweed and do not know how to farm laver seaweed. Naturally, they do not know about the difficulties and opinions of laver seaweed producers. Some people did not even know that the district is a well-known production area for laver seaweed. Therefore, Saga-shi Gyoson Josei no Kai is making efforts to convey how laver is produced and the thoughts and opinions of laver producers by offering hands-on activity sessions in their factories. Many women fishery groups try to educate people about the kinds of local fishes they have, how to cook and eat the fish, how it tastes and so on. We can say that fisheries women fishery entrepreneurship groups play an important role in joining production with consumption.



Map 1. Locations mentioned in the text
(© 2018 Mitsutaku Makino)

2.3 Economic Impact

In this way, women fishery entrepreneurship groups are developing widespread across Japan. In a fisheries white paper, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan expressed its expectations that fishery women play a role in regional development. Supports from national and local governments for fishery women entrepreneurship groups are increasing. Our research confirmed the existence of at least 364 groups across the nation in 2010. They process and sell local fish because they want to promote effective utilisation of this fish. But its annual sales are generally small. Many groups' annual sales are about 3 million yen (US\$ 28,000). As economic business goes, this is rather small. Some have suggested that such small-scale activities are just a hobby for these women. However, these women are using local fish, underutilised fish and discarded fish as their materials. If we multiply the average turnover of US\$ 28,000 by the 364 groups, we can see that they produce a value of roughly 1 billion yen (US\$ 9,385,000). How should we evaluate this situation and the activities of fishery women? We evaluate their activities as having crucially important significance.

Next, we will show a case study of practical entrepreneurship by fishery women. We watch the Sanmi Sea Mothers, because they are one high-grossing women fishery group and they try to pay attention to local human services so much.

3 A Case Study: the Sanmi Sea Mothers

3.1 Community Overview

The Sanmi Sea Mothers are active in the Sanmi community in the town of Hagi, Yamaguchi Prefecture (map 1), the western part of Japan. The Sanmi community is located around 10 km from central Hagi. The Sanmi community has 583 households with a total population of 1,224 people (in 2016).² While Japan's overall proportion of population aged 65 or over (aging population rate was 26.7% in 2015) (White Paper on Aging Society 2016), the aging population rate in the Sanmi community is over 46% (Shioya Kimiko 2013). The main types of fishing in the Sanmi community are set net, offshore gill net, small trawl net and so on. Fish caught by these fishing methods tend to be of diverse species and caught in small lots. In the past, these small lots and diverse types of fish used to be properly evaluated at the wholesale market in this producing area established by the Sanmi FCA and then wholesaled and distributed by local peddlers. However, the wholesale market of the Sanmi FCA was abolished in 2002, so now fishers in Sanmi have to ship their catch to a large, new wholesale market in central Hagi.

The abolition of such tiny wholesale market in a producing area and this consolidation of multiple wholesale markets in a producing area were done according to Japan's national policy. Here we will explain the national policy of abolition and consolidation of wholesale markets in producing areas. As mentioned previously, there are many wholesale markets in producing areas across Japan. Nearly all wholesale markets in producing areas are opened and run by FCAs, which carry out wholesale trading.

Private wholesalers and traders dominated marine products distribution until around 1932. Because many fishers borrowed a lot of money from them, they were forced to sell their fish at 30% or 40% lower than the market price to these private wholesalers and traders. Fishers were under the control of private wholesalers and traders. Fish prices kept dropping lower and lower, and fishers lapsed into dire economic conditions following the economic crashes of 1927 and 1930-31. Therefore, the national government strongly supported clearing away this mercantile capital and allowing FCAs to handle fish caught by local fishers. As a result, many wholesale markets in producing areas were opened by FCAs, and many cooperatives sell fish at auction. Much of the income of FCAs comes from sales of fish at their wholesale markets (Hirasawa 1979).

However, many wholesale markets run by FCAs are small in scale and

2 Data from Hagi municipal government website; URL <http://www.city.hagi.lg.jp/shiki/12/706.html> (2016-10-16).

their financial conditions have deteriorated in the present day. For this reason, the financial conditions of FCAs are difficult too. Thus, in 1999, Japan's national government announced a new policy of merging multiple FCAs' wholesale markets into fewer single large-scale wholesale markets. The national government pressed forward with this amalgamation of FCAs, making a major push for reform. As a result, the reorganisation and improvement of fishery cooperatives progressed rapidly and a lot of FCAs have been amalgamated since around 2000.

Originally, there were several FCAs owned by 14 fishery communities in the town of Hagi, Yamaguchi Prefecture. These cooperatives amalgamated into a single Hagi FCA in 2001 and then into one large FCA for the entirety of Yamaguchi Prefecture in 2005.

At the moment, the Sanmi branch FCA is a subsidiary organisation of the Hagi controlling branch, which in turn is a subsidiary organisation of the Yamaguchi Prefecture FCA. There were previously 8 wholesale markets in producing areas run by fishery cooperatives (including the wholesale market run by the Sanmi FCA) in the town of Hagi before these were consolidated into a single market in 2002. The Hagi controlling branch of the Yamaguchi Prefecture FCA now manages this wholesale market in a producing area. But the market value of the different types of fish landed at Sanmi has dropped at this new large-scale wholesale market (Shioya 2013, 2). Therefore, Sanmi Sea Mothers started to process and sell these local fish to solve this issue.

3.2 Development of Sanmi Sea Mothers

The members of the women's group of the Sanmi branch of the FCA number around 105 as at 2014. The history of this group can be divided into three periods.³

3.2.1 First Period: Growing Awareness of Residents' Issues (1996-2005)

In this first period, women became more aware of residents' issues and commenced activities to address those issues. Because the proportion of elderly persons was increasing in the Sanmi community, in 1996 the women's group of the Sanmi branch of Yamaguchi FCA started a monthly lunch party for elderly people living in Sanmi community, and they have continued this activity to the present day. Through this monthly lunch party, members of the women's group discovered that elderly people in the Sanmi community

³ This chapter is based on Soejima 2014.

experienced difficulties cooking and grocery shopping every day. As stated previously, the fish landed at Sanmi were considered unsellable at the new wholesale market. The women's group believed that if they processed and sold this fish, this would help the fishers' income. And if they prepared and sold lunch boxes using this fish and delivered these to elderly people's houses, they could contribute to community welfare. They immediately moved into action.

3.2.2 Second Period: Commencing Business Activities (2006-2007)

Firstly, all 194 members of the women's group of the Sanmi branch FCA went on an inspection tour of more advanced areas and held a study session about food hygiene at the public health centre. However, the leader of the women's group (and current president of Sanmi Sea Mothers) found that no more than 40 members joined the study session, despite many members joined the inspection tour. In other words, a lot of members participated in fun activities like an inspection tour, but only a few members participated in less enjoyable activities such as a study session. There were major differences in awareness about these activities among the members of the women's group. In addition, there was also the issue that the responsibility for activities varied greatly depending on the leader at that time because the leadership of the women's group changed every two years. The leader thought it better to form an entirely new group comprising only members who agreed with the goals of its activities and who were eager to learn. The leader of the women's group proposed an investment-style approach where one unit of investment would be equivalent to 10 thousand yen (approximately US\$ 96.34 at October 2016 exchange rates), whereby 42 members contributed capital and organised a new group in 2007. This group included not only women but also the male chairman and the branch office manager of the Sanmi branch (positions held at that time) and a set net fishing boat captain as the capital investors. The involvement of these male executives of the fisheries cooperative was expected to increase the level of trust for these women's activities among the community and with other organisations. Among the 42 capital investors, 15 were hand-on partners who commenced processing and preparing meals using local fish and vegetables, delivering lunch boxes to local elderly people.

3.2.3 Third Period: Turnaround (2008-2010)

While Sanmi Sea Mothers were still active, the Sanmi roadside station was built in the area. When this roadside station opened a makeshift food outlet in 2008, the roadside station called on Sanmi Sea Mothers to sell their

prepared meals here. Sanmi Sea Mothers introduced an hourly pay system at that time, after which the amount of processing required also increased. Then they reached a major milestone. The roadside station suddenly proposed that Sanmi Sea Mothers should manage a restaurant in the three months before the roadside station officially opened. The leader of Sanmi Sea Mothers had substantial concerns over the management of a restaurant, but after numerous visits to the public health authority, the members were prepared to open their restaurant. They opened their restaurant in April 2010. The sales turnover of the restaurant exceeded 10 million yen (approximately US\$ 96,334 at October 2016 exchange rates) between April and May in 2010, at which time their tax accountant pointed out that there was a taxation issue in this situation. At the same time, he recommended converting Sanmi Sea Mothers to a joint stock corporation. They had no time to perform a comparative review of other corporate systems and thus they converted their group to a joint stock corporation in August 2010. Five members of Sanmi Sea Mothers each took a 1-unit stake at 50,000 yen (approximately US\$ 481.30 at October 2016 exchange rates), which formed a capital fund of 250,000 yen (approximately US\$ 2,406.50).

3.3 Current Situation

3.3.1 Composition of Membership

In 2014, Sanmi Sea Mothers had a restaurant section (18 members), a roadside station fish sales section (2 members) and a prepared food processing section (9 members). The restaurant section is mainly composed of the board members, who play a central role in the company, as well as members who like cooking and serving customers and other local women who are not members of the women's group of the FCA. The women who are members of the women's group of the Sanmi branch FCA, but who do not like serving customers, work in the prepared food processing section. This section rents and uses the kitchen of the Sanmi branch of Yamaguchi Prefecture FCA, which is located separately from the roadside station. The roadside station fish sales section has one male member, who was one of the capital investors and was previously head of the Sanmi branch. He is involved with Sanmi Sea Mothers as a salesperson in this section. The average age of the members is rather high, around 66 years old, but they have one young member aged 33. In addition, members include not only fishery household members but also farm household members and local general household members. In other words, many members who have no involvement with fishery are involved with Sanmi Sea Mothers. There are also some members who are elderly people living alone. Sanmi Sea Mothers give them a valuable opportunity to maintain an income. The

president considers each member's area of speciality and compatibility and decides the member's job assignment. She tries to ensure a pleasant working environment for each member.

3.3.2 The Operational Performances

At their restaurant, Sanmi Sea Mothers offer the *Nihonkai teishoku* 日本海定食 (Japan Sea combination meal) (price 1000 yen, or approx. US\$ 9.63 at October 2016 exchange rates). Mainly featuring local fresh fish *sashimi* added a 'Fried *Trachurus japonicus* combination meal' (price 800 yen, or approx. US\$ 7.70), as well as other meals. They also prepare processed foods like pressed sushi, one of local traditional food, using local *Trachurus japonicus* and pickled *Upeneus japonicus*, which have long been commonly cooked and eaten at homes in the Sanmi community (fig. 11). Average prices are 250 yen (US\$ 2.41) per pack. They process and sell lunch boxes from 500 yen to 5,000 yen in response to customer orders. The production volume of lunch boxes is higher than other prepared food in the prepared food processing section. They deliver lunch boxes every day to business premises and so on in the town of Hagi. They deliver to the houses of elderly people on Wednesdays and Fridays. However, the new day-care facility in the neighbourhood has started to deliver the lunch boxes to the houses of elderly people, which has reduced the number of users of Sanmi Sea Mothers services. We can say that competition for lunch box deliveries in the elderly market has emerged in this community. Given this situation, Sanmi Sea Mothers are working to deliver a strong PR message that they are committed to local food and do not use artificial seasonings in their lunch boxes.

The total sales turnover for Sanmi Sea Mothers was about 36 million yen (US\$ 356,000) for the period August 2012 through July 2013. Sales at the restaurant comprise 58%, fresh fish and marine products comprise 27%, prepared foods and lunch boxes comprise 14%, and other sales comprise 1% of this total. About 30,000 people visit the restaurant each year, including a lot of tourists as well as local visitors. Raw material expenses (the cost of marine products makes up around half of this) occupy around 50% of total sales. Fish is mainly bought through local intermediaries at wholesale markets run by FCAs, while vegetables are mostly purchased at early-morning markets run by Japan Agricultural Cooperatives. The remaining half of the costs are comprised of employment costs, rental payments for the kitchen of the Sanmi branch, and fees for the roadside station and the Yamaguchi fishery cooperative. Monthly salary for each member is between 25,000 yen (US\$ 241) and 50,000 yen (US\$ 481). Their margins are very small. However, the president prefers to allocate profits toward employment costs and purchasing local fish, not toward the company's margin. The group operates a five-members shift everyday in the restaurant section.



Figure 10. Sanmi Sea Mothers' members preparing the lunch at their restaurant (© 2014 Kumi Soejima)

Figure 11. Prepared foods of Sanmi Sea Mothers (© 2014 Kumi Soejima)

3.3.3 Current Issues and Prospects

Among the issues the group faces today, the first is overworking of the central members. The president and vice-president, in particular, have a lot of work they perform at home, and this work can be very physically demanding. But they have strong feelings of responsibility toward the company's vision - namely, utilising local fish, contributing to local fishing and local elderly people, creating a liveable community, and so on. This helps them sustain such levels of overwork. Secondly, there is a major discrepancy in sense of responsibility for work between these central members and other members. The president has considered how other members share the company's vision and feel a sense of responsibility for its work. But Sanmi Sea Mothers received an award from the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in the National Youth and Women Fisheries Exchange Contest in 2012 and the group was interviewed many times for TV, newspapers etc., both inside and outside the Prefecture. In other words, they are receiving increasing recognition from outside their own community. This recognition serves as an opportunity for other members to realise that their group's operations are significant. The company president feels that other members' sense of responsibility and awareness of their job are growing. That is to say, Sanmi Sea Mothers play a role in giving opportunities to women who not directly involved with local fishing to share in the community's issues.

3.4 Specific Features of Sanmi Sea Mothers

Sanmi Sea Mothers have 3 significant features. Firstly, they utilise local fish resources and local labour resources. They play a prominent role in the fishing community's economy by connecting local production, local processing, local distribution and local consumption. The weakening of fishing communities due to ageing and depopulation etc. is well underway. In order to restructure fishing communities, there is a major need to restructure the local economic circulation that supports society in these communities (Okada 2004). Sanmi Sea Mothers are trying to respond to these issues. Secondly, in many cases, only fishery women participate in women fishery entrepreneurship groups, but Sanmi Sea Mothers play an important role in generating local employment through their entrepreneurship by employing women not involved in the fishing industry. Furthermore, in addressing the issues of life in fishing communities, people tend to think only of the fishing community itself. But Sanmi Sea Mothers give opportunities to share the issues of life in fishing communities with other locals in the community. The authors consider it very important that people who live their daily lives in fishing communities, even if completely uninvolved in the fishing industry, can be made aware of issues that involve them and

can participate in group activities to develop the community. Thirdly, they involve local men both as capital investors and as practical partners. Many women fishery activities remain within the framework of division of labour by gender in which men do not participate. But when men participate in the women fishery entrepreneurship group as hands-on practitioners, as in this case study, it opens the possibility of shifting from 'women fishery entrepreneurship' to true 'community entrepreneurship' in which women and men living in the local community tackle issues together. Fourthly, in many cases, the central people involved in fisheries women entrepreneurship are aged 60 years old or more. The issues with passing on this work have been pointed out. To this point, Sanmi Sea Mothers reply: "Young people have no way to find work in our community. So they have to leave the community to find work. But many of them will come back to Sanmi after retirement and so we want to prepare somewhere they can find work at that time. This is our purpose". People usually tend to believe that fisheries women entrepreneurship organisations must include younger people, so this way of thinking offers a fresh perspective.

4 Potential and Challenges for Women Fishery Entrepreneurship in the Future

A great deal of women fishery entrepreneurship is minor when viewed in light of sales and earnings as well as income of its members. They tend not to extend beyond volunteer activities. Small groups like women fishery entrepreneurship groups are liable to become targets for abolition given the current situation of market fundamentalism, which places more value on economic growth and massive size and which has become the global standard.

However, women fishery entrepreneurship is aimed at sustainable regeneration of local fishing and sustainable life in fishing communities centred on the keywords of fishing and fishing communities. In addition, this has some meaning not only for local people but also for the general consuming public. Japanese fishing and fishing communities are not simply going into a decline – consumers are also becoming less and less aware of their existence. Women fishery entrepreneurship is trying to make efficient use of local resources which are losing opportunities for commercial realisation and to reevaluate the food culture of fishing communities, despite the situation outlined above. Through these activities, they seek to communicate the value of fishing and fishing communities to local people, of course, as well as the general consuming public. The success of these activities cannot be determined simply by economic barometers. These activities are essential for the revitalization of societies and communities of the future. These small activities have the potential to play a role in significantly changing our values, in spite off the current emphasis on market principles.

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