

# GENDER EQUALITY STUDIES: THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON JAPAN'S OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA) POLICY

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## ABSTRACT

Japan is a country that has concern to gender equality, so that, Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy has gender equality values. This paper used domestic political and foreign aid concept and also the power of idea on state policy concept. And then, based on research analysis, so I can conclude that domestic politics, just like, gender equality idea can influence Japan's ODA policy, so that it can influence Japan's perspective about distribution of foreign aid to woman development. Gender equality idea can internalize into Japan's foreign aid policy, so that, it can be applied into recipients' countries. But, when Japan distribute ODA foreign aid based on equality gender values to recipient countries, Japan gets some challenges. The challenges are opinion public factor to Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe. Beside that, also factor of conservative cultural norm and patriarchy system in recipients' countries which is developing country or poor country.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, Japan, ODA, policy, politic domestic

## 1) INTRODUCTION

Gender is an institutionalized structure in the reality of the social world (Hadi 2008, 235). Tickner (1999, 229) says that gender refers to a social institutionalization of sexual differences, so that gender is a concept used by those who understand not only sexual equality, but also socially constructed sexual differences. The main argument of gender is that masculinity (rationality, ambition, strength) has higher value and status than femininity (emotionality, capacity, and weakness) (Jackson & Sorenson 2005, 332). Furthermore, a gender hierarchy emerged in the form of a power system in which men were treated more privileged than women.

The Japanese government enacted a gender equality law in society (Basic Law for A Gender Equal Society) in 1999 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan / MOFA Japan, 2005). Japan seeks to establish cooperation abroad in order to form a society based on gender equality. Japan's concern for gender issues has actually been proven in the ODA (Official Development Assistance) policy by internalizing the concept of Women in Development (WID) in 1995. Giving assistance is not focused on education to all people, economic development, and health facilities. However, assistance also focuses on the field of women's social participation through multilateral organizations and bilateral assistance (MOFA Japan, 2005). This means that Japan has an open

view that there is a desire to equalize the rights of women and men. This perspective is perspective of Liberal Feminism.

Jackson and Sorenson (2005, 335) stated that the perspective of Liberal Feminism is that men and women have the same rights and both of them is equal. In fact, the position of Japanese women in the industrial world is marginalized. Contemporary Liberal Feminists want to make women more famous in world politics, eliminating the differences between men and women. According to Tickner (2014, 261), Liberal Feminists argue that removing legal barriers and other barriers is way to achieve women's equality. Because in the fact, legal and other barriers that have hindered achieving equal rights and opportunities like men and then it can impact woman cannot has equal right and opportunities like men.

Meanwhile, Marxist Feminists argue that women are victims of exploitation from industrial capitalism. The Marxist Feminist perspective sees the patriarchal system as being able to marginalize women. The capitalist system, in this case represented by the owners of capital, also acts to marginalize women as workers in companies owned by the owners of capital. Engels explains that capitalism establishes divisions between productive workers in company and "invisible" work in the private sector, for example, at home (Jackson & Sorenson 2005, 336). In short, men are given the opportunity to work productively, paid by the factory while on the other hand, women work at home and are not paid. When women get paid, women are underpaid. They have a lower class position in the industrial world. This phenomenon confirms that position of women is marginalized.

This paper is questioning that how domestic politics can make Japanese MOFA form a policy to adopt a gender equality perspective into ODA policy? The discussion will be described as follows; first is to explain the concept of domestic politics capable of influencing foreign aid policies, second is the meaning of the idea of gender equality for the Japanese government, third is the role of domestic politics in shaping policies for the adoption of gender equality values into Japan's ODA policies, fourth is the challenges of implementing foreign aid policies ODA based on gender equality, the fifth is the conclusion.

### **Domestic Politics, Ideas, and Foreign Aid Policies**

Lancaster (2007, 18) explains that domestic political forces have a role in shaping foreign aid, for example, ideas, political institutions, interests, and aid organizations. *First*, ideas. Some form of ideas which have donor countries that can influence foreign aid policy. Some academics argue that form of ideas, for example, world view which is has values based on culture, religion, ideology. When it is related to foreign aid, it can be taken as an example, there is a principle of trust behind the provision of foreign aid by the governments of rich countries to poor countries.

*Second*, political institutions. Political institutions play a role in determining who sets the issues, who has access to decision makers, and who can veto decisions. The veto rule can influence giving assistance indirectly. The legislature can also influencing foreign aid policy. Organizational actors also have access to decision makers actors. They can have many impact on decision making process. Finally, political parties actors have powers to determining the amount and recipient aid.

*Third*, interests. Interest groups are hidden and dynamic forces. With regard to assistance, there are three categories of interests namely; commercial interests behind aid (for example, expanding export markets, expanding access to needed imported raw materials), NGO and public interest groups supporting aid for development and related purposes, and groups which interest to foreign, ethnic, or certain religious orientations that support the provision of direct assistance to groups and countries.

*Fourth*, organization. When analyzing aid organizations within the government as donors, the analysis is based on two things, namely bureaucratic political discourse and direct experience (Lancaster experience). *First*, government agencies are important political actors who have rights such as advocating or lobbying for their mission and interests. *Second*, goals related to the objectives of some public agencies such as the cabinet and sub-cabinet. Cabinets and sub-cabinets compete with each other to give great impact to the management of policies and programs. Both parties seek to make these policies and programs related to their mission and goals. Some governments give the responsibility of assistance to the sub-cabinet such as the German state to form a ministry of development. Aid organizations influence government aid goals through competing voices for aid support in government policy-making circles.

## 2) METHOD

In this paper, the author takes the idea as the object of the main discussion in this journal, namely as a domestic political force. The idea as an actor to form Japan's ODA assistance policy so that it can become the basis and guideline for state actors in carrying out their social actions. Forms of ideas are policy recommendations, norms, belief principles, causation of beliefs, ideologies, common belief systems, and world views (Tannenwald 2005, 14). According to Tannenwald (2005), that there are 4 types of ideas; *first*, ideology and belief system, which is a doctrines or beliefs that reflect the social needs and aspirations of a community, culture, or country. *Second*, normative belief (principle), namely belief in right or wrong. *Third*, causal trust, namely beliefs about cause and effect or means of ends, relationships. Causal belief is understanding about the world, including, society. It provides guidelines for individuals actors to get their goals. *Fourth*, policy recommendations, namely ideas derived from causal beliefs, principles or ideologies. Ideas can be used in policy making in order to determine how to make policy on how to solve the problem.

However, ideas often marginalized in International Relations studies which are dominated by material, military, wealth, or power ideas. In fact, this idea is a shared belief system, normative belief and can be a policy recommendation (Tannenwald 2005, 15). Policy recommendations are ideas that come from beliefs, principles, or ideologies. Policy makers can determine problem solving policies through idea instrument. The idea can influence policy, meaning that a principle and belief become a road map for actors to achieve their goals (Goldstein & Keohane 1993, 3). The idea is an important element. Idea has many functions such as main focus and solution to problems. There are many ways in which ideas can influence policy, namely by making them principles, roadmaps, or guidelines, influencing strategically where there is no particular balance, and internalizing within institutions. The idea holder is the policy maker, so ideas are always discussed in policy discussions because ideas are a discourse that has its own foundation. In the process of discussing policy, the choice of ideas is specifically a reflection of the interests of actors. So it is not surprising if idea of gender equality can impact to Japan's ODA foreign aid policy. And then, behind this phenomenon are actors' interests who want an impact of foreign aid policy, for example, creating gender justice in recipient countries.

## 3) FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Domestic Politics, Gender Equality Ideas and Japan's ODA

Factors of ideas, rules, norms, and discourses are causes of conditioning (inhibiting and enabling) a social action (Kurki 2008,12). Lancaster (2007, 18) argues that domestic political forces which is can shaping foreign aid policies is ideas. Some forms of ideas which has donor countries can influence aid policy. Domestic politics like idea of gender equality shapes Japan's foreign aid policy by adopting the values of a gender equality perspective into Japan's ODA policy. Japan support all of activity which has aim to achieving gender equality. Such as, international women's conference at 1975, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of resistance to discrimination against women at 1979, Beijing Declaration and the Asian Platform at 1995, and United Nations Millennium

Declaration at 2000 (MOFA Japan, 2005). Legal basics of gender equality-based society in Japan were enacted in 1999 (MOFA Japan, 2005). Even in 2001, the Gender Equality Council and the Gender Equality Bureau were established as a national instrument used to promote gender equality in Japan (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2021). Japan also provides opportunities for women to be a leader in the political world. In 2003, Prime Minister Junichiro Kouizumi said in a speech that the proportion of women in leadership was expected to be increased to 30% for the purpose of achieving equal between women and men (Fusano, 2003). These phenomena illustrate that there is a strong current among the political elite in Japan to spread the idea of gender equality in Japan.

This notion of gender equality exerted a strong influence on Japan's ODA foreign aid policy. The idea of gender equality is a form of Japanese domestic political power brought by the political elites of the Japanese government so that it is finally internalized into Japan's ODA policy. Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Kouizumi (2003) said that the government continues to push for reforms to establish a society based on gender equality and these reforms are understood by women and men of all generations. In the context of ODA assistance, Japan has a special allocation for gender issues in order to create a society based on gender equality. Japan allocates about 10% of ODA assistance for gender-based assistance in developing countries (Fusano, 2003). The idea of gender equality brought by the political elites of the Japanese government was raised through Japan's ODA assistance policy because of Japan's concern for women's development and wanting to involve women in the development process. Japan wants to make women in developing countries no longer be citizens of a marginalized class or another language, women and men have an equal position. Japan hopes that there will no longer be the phenomenon of men being the dominant holder in development.

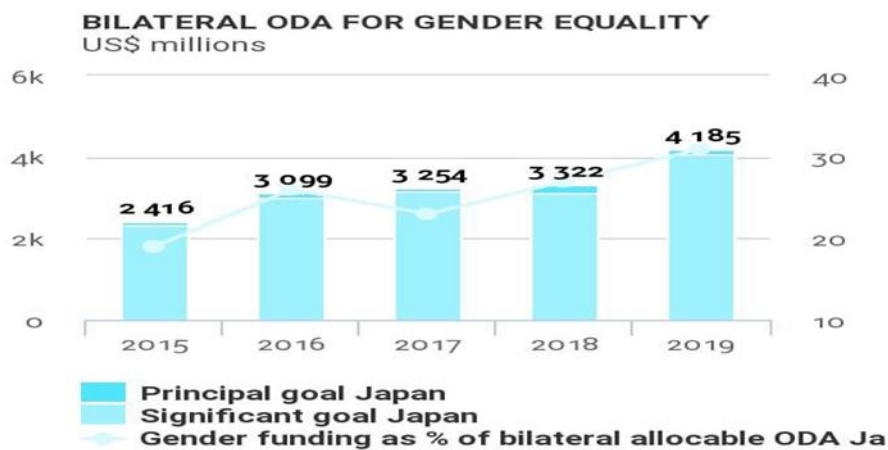
The following is evidence of the influence of domestic political power in the form of the idea of gender equality that is able to influence Japan's ODA foreign aid policy through efforts to adopt the values of gender equality into Japan's ODA foreign aid policy; *First*, Japan struggle to establish international cooperation on community development based on gender equality. There are efforts to strengthen cooperation with the international community and NGOs such as sharing information on gender issues and statistics in the country. Japan made a Japanese ODA policy in the form of WID (Initiative on Woman in Development) in 1995. The assistance was focused on education all of people, health facilities, economic development, and social participation of women. These cooperative policies have been colored with the values of the idea of gender equality. In the real fact, in international cooperation and ODA policies in the form of WID, Japan emphasizes that women more active in development and efforts to improve women's capacities. Japan made a strategy to involve women in the development process through international cooperation, organizations, and assistance. When Japan involves women's participation in development, Japanese women automatically have a role in development that previously women were marginalized. These policies are clear evidence of the results of the efforts of Japanese political officials in internalizing the idea of gender equality.

*Second*, Japan revised Official Development Assistance (ODA) Charter in August 2003. This charter is a guideline for Japan's ODA foreign aid policy. In the revision of the ODA Charter 2003, Japan established the principle of ensuring justice as a policy basis and adopted a gender equality perspective (MOFA Japan, 2005). In August 2003, Japan revised the ODA Charter by establishing the guarantee of justice as one of the basic policies and emphasizing the importance of incorporating a gender equality perspective (MOFA Japan, 2005). The following is the content of the 2003 ODA Charter, *"In particular, the perspective of gender equality is important. Japan will make further efforts to improve the status of women, giving full consideration to the active participation of women in development, and to ensure that women reap benefits from development"*. (ODA Charter 2003, 2). After adopting a gender equality perspective in the 2003 ODA Charter, in February 2005, Japan attempted to adjust its

medium-term ODA program policies with the ODA Charter. Furthermore, Development Cooperation Charter at 2015, which is basic guideline for Japan's ODA policy, and Japan still maintains the idea of gender equality in this charter. This is concrete evidence of Japan in voicing the perspective of gender equality to the international community through foreign aid programs so that it can finally have an impact on the direction of Japan's ODA foreign aid policy programs so that they always pay attention to women's development so that women can be independent and empowered.

*Third*, international cooperation approach. The GAD (Gender and Development) approach in international cooperation has become more important since the 1980s (MOFA Japan, 2005). This approach has a focus on making efforts to increase women in developing countries. The GAD approach to analyze the factors causing of gender inequality. This approach also seeks to change opinions about work that have been stereotyped specifically for women. The reason is, this stereotype will cause women to be marginalized in the world of work. Therefore, this approach seeks to empower women who are economically and socially disadvantaged so that in the end they can act on an equal basis with men. The GAD approach which contains the idea of gender equality is internalized into Japan's ODA foreign aid policy, thus making Japan's ODA foreign aid prioritized for women's development in aid recipient countries to achieve gender equality. The following is evidence of Japan providing Japanese ODA foreign assistance to achieve gender equality from 2015-2019.

**Figure 1. Bilateral ODA for Gender Equality**



Source: Donor Tracker (2021)

So, the question is why is the idea of gender equality able to influence Japan's ODA foreign aid policy? The idea of gender equality has a role in influencing Japanese government policies because there is a role for Japanese political actors who are aware of the importance of fighting for the values of gender equality in Japan, which has a traditionalist and conservative culture. These traditionalist and conservative cultures actually discredit women from appearing in the public sphere, such as appearing in national development efforts that have been dominated by men. When women are marginalized, this can damage Japan's image in the international community. It can impact to the decline in Japan's ranking as well as value in the assessment of the Human Development Index.

**Challenges of Implementing ODA Assistance Policy Based on Japan’s Gender Equality**

There are several challenges faced by the Japanese government in implementing Japan's ODA foreign aid policy based on gender equality. These challenges stemming from multiple directions

could hinder the implementation of Japan's ODA assistance policies. The following are the challenges faced by the Japanese government in implementing Japan's ODA policy, *first*, the issue of public trust in the commitment of the Japanese government in the Shinzo Abe era in implementing the idea of gender equality. Not all circles believe in the commitment of the Japanese government in providing opportunities for women to advance in various fields. Feminists in Japan are skeptical of the womenomics policy initiated by the conservative and nationalist Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe (Kano 2018,1). The womenomics policy which is policy increasing the productivity of the female worker, a new law for promote the leadership of women. Besides, this policy about also the government's concern about Japan's position in the international relations. The skepticism of feminists in Japan can be understood because the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, is known as the Prime Minister who tends to have a conservative ideology. In the era of his first term of office (2006-2007), Abe Shinzo reactive towards feminist's activist and grassroots groups who were concerned about the issue of gender equality and sex education. Abe Shinzo's thinking is indeed conservative, thus giving birth to a reactive attitude towards feminism. Even Abe Shinzo's attitude involves the right-wing media, religious groups and conservative politicians like himself. After Abe returned to power as Prime Minister in 2012, he instead gave a more feminist speech. He has been selective about women's activities in order to boost GDP, birth rates and also he elevate Japan's position at the international level. This change in Abe Shinzo's attitude has caused Japanese feminists to be skeptical of Abe's feminist policies. This skepticism from feminist circles in Japan has the potential to affect the level of trust of country actors receiving Japanese ODA foreign aid. The level of trust of state actors receiving aid in the Japanese government has the potential to decrease so that it will have an impact on the quality of women's development cooperation through Japanese ODA foreign aid. In other words, domestic affairs can give impact to international level.

*Second*, the challenges faced in providing Japanese ODA foreign aid for women's development are the conservative and patriarchal culture in recipient countries which are categorized as developing countries. The speed of development of women's development is influenced by conservative and patriarchal norms that have become a culture in developing countries. This conservative and patriarchal norm teaches the position of women under men and always places women at the subordinate level. These conservative and patriarchal norms are factor of causes of the phenomenon of male hegemony in India and China and the phenomenon of the low number of female workers in India, North Africa, and the Middle East (Jayachandran 2015, 63). As a result, women's development in all fields such as social and economic is hampered. Whereas ideally, women should be given the widest possible access to opportunities like men so that economic and social welfare can be realized among women.

When related with distribution of Japan's ODA foreign aid, this conservative and patriarchal culture can hinder the ideals of the goal of providing Japanese ODA foreign aid which has been clearly stated in the 2003 ODA Charter and 2015 *Development Cooperation Charter*. Japan's overseas ODA is based on gender equality, it requires the support of many parties as well as a supportive environment. Japan provides external ODA assistance to recipient countries but on the other hand, the recipient countries must actively participate in making policies and facilities that can support women's involvement in country development so that it has an impact on women's welfare.

#### 4) CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that domestic politics such as the idea of gender equality can influence Japan's ODA policy through the internalization of gender equality values into Japan's ODA policy programs. Japan has made Japan's ODA policies in the form of the WID (Woman in Development) program, incorporated the values of gender equality into Japan's ODA foreign aid charters such as the 2003 ODA Charter and the 2015 Development Cooperation

Charter, and used the GAD (*Gender and Development*) approach which contains the values of gender equality into Japan's ODA foreign aid policy.

However, in the implement of ODA policy based on gender equality, there are several challenges, such as the problem of public trust in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's commitment to implementing gender equality values so that the level of trust of country actors receiving Japanese ODA foreign aid has the potential decrease. In addition, Japan faces challenges in countries receiving Japanese ODA foreign aid, namely in developing countries which have been known as adherents of a conservative and patriarchal culture. The conservative and patriarchal culture in developing countries can prevent Japan from realizing the main goal of providing Japanese ODA foreign aid, namely creating gender equality.

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