

## Special Lecture on Multicultural Societies (Cross-cultural Talk 2015)

### *Diversity and Difference in Culture and Gender Issues*

Date & time: November 6-7, 2015

Venue: Aichi Health Plaza, Obu, Aichi

The Cross-cultural Talk 2015 was held as a two-day workshop organized by the faculty members and students of the Well-being Program and assisted by lecturers from the NPO Mura no Mirai. The two main topics were cultural diversity and gender issues. The Program started in the afternoon of the first day with opening remarks by Prof. Hiroko Tsukamura, the Program Coordinator, to once again encourage and support the students. The special seminar by Mr. Toyokazu Nakata of 'Mura no Mirai' followed. The students were presented with activities of the NPO in detail, with a special emphasis on the challenges the NPO was facing in their attempts to solve problems of the poor communities in developing countries. These included both financial and social factors, that sometimes took a long time and a lot of effort to resolve. The audience learned that dealing with different cultures, even with the best intentions, bears difficulties and requires special attention, flexible mind and adaptability. To easily visualize how culture affects gender and imposed gender roles, the participants were asked to make a Daily routine diagram for a couple they know, whether it was their own family or the family of their parents/grandparents/relatives. The results were surprisingly different between urban and rural areas as well as between different nations, which created a good background for group discussions. In the final afternoon session, Mr. Nakata provided some guidelines on how to effectively obtain an objective image of another culture by modifying our communication style. Careful formulation of the questions to learn facts, not impressions or opinions, proved critical. The evening session was hosted by senior Program students, who introduced different cultures by presenting various national costumes, anthems, and vocabulary in the form of games, enjoyed by all the participants.

The second day started with review of the presentations and discussions done on the previous day, and continued with a talk by Ms. Kyoko Maekawa of 'Mura no Mirai' on their activities related to community development in rural areas of South Asia. Ms. Maekawa illustrated difficulties in working with community of people having different cultural backgrounds, education levels as well as goals and expectations. It was an inspiring lecture for young students to know how a real cross-cultural encounter may look like, with all its challenges in reaching other people, knowing their reality and getting their acceptance and cooperation. After hearing Ms. Maekawa's talk, the students had a chance to exercise what they have learned from the lecturers by joining group discussions to address gender issues stemming from local culture and customs in a selected local community. In particular, two issues were set as topics and students were expected to suggest possible solutions and ways of implementation, considering conflicts and obstacles they may face. Each group made a presentation on their findings followed by Q&A time. Some topics indeed sparked long discussions. The workshop finished with an overall review session and closing remarks.

In total, 79 participants attended the workshop, including 32 Program students, 6 graduate students of Nagoya University, 11 YLP fellows and 29 faculty members. Photos are given below. We are especially grateful to all the non-Program participants who kindly joined us and contributed their ideas and opinions to successful realization of this workshop.

