

BRAVING THE SEA:

The Amasan (Women Divers) Of
Yahataura Fishing Community,
Iki Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan

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Outline of Presentation

Objectives

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Objectives

To know and understand the situation of women in the coastal village of Yahataura, Iki, Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan.

Specifically, it looks into the:

men and women's access to and control over resources;

activities and the time allocation;

**women's views about their work; and
their longings in life.**

Methodology

Participatory Rapid Appraisal
Gender Resource Map
Social Map
Calendar of Activities
24-hour clock
Participant Observation
Key Informant Interview
Photo Documentation



Study Site



Iki Island



What is an Ama? Who are they?

Literally - “sea person”

Professional men and women divers who use high speed diving technique but without air tanks.

Diving prowess depends largely on the lung capacity, diving speed, resistance to cold, intuition for finding their catch and determination to succeed.

Mobile - moving from west to east along the Japanese coastline. And as the men Ama found other jobs in fishing, women divers were left to do most of the diving. Over the years, the word, Ama, was associated to women divers.

Women divers dive for abalone, turban shells and sea urchin



Number of Ama in Yahataura

54 Female Ama

24 (50s)

17 (60s)

5 (40s)

4 (70s)

3 (30s)

1 (20s)

Projection: decline in number

Types of Ama

The *Funado* Ama



- ✓ Younger Ama
- ✓ use colorful tubs (orange, yellow, pink)
- ✓ dived in groups, usually 5-6 members, and assisted by a boat operator.
- ✓ Dive from an anchored boat to a much deeper fishing ground (7-15 meters)
- ✓ Diving lasts for 30-40 seconds, 30 seconds of rest before the next dive.

Types of Ama

The *cachido* (walking people) Ama

- ✓ Older Ama, the oldest being 74 years old
- ✓ reliant on the services of the boat men who would take them to the breakwater and back to the fishing port
- ✓ dived to a depth of 4-6 meters to collect seashells.
- ✓ Diving lasts for 30 seconds then 30 seconds of rest

Ama's Diving Wear

Rubbery wet suit vs modern stylish long tights of either plain dark colors or printed color topped with colored cotton or poly-ethylene long neck and sleeves shirts, ordinarily being worn during cold months, autumn or winter.



Ama's Diving Wear



A facemask to protect their head

Goggles to enable them to see the underwater

Pair of flippers of varied colors to improve kick strength, ankle flexibility, body position and speed.

Ama's Diving Tools

Hanzo - a metal made color coded bucket float used as a container for their catch at the same time a locator of the Amasan's whereabouts

Awabi Okashi - one being short and small for easier picks while the longer one is for deep crevices and crannies

Awabi ami - a net bag for placement of abalone catch



Ama's Diving Tools

Uni-tori, a handheld instrument with a hooked tip for picking of sea urchin

Pumpo, an elongated plastic pump used to pump the water out of the bucket to prevent it from sinking

Uki, a floater

Omori, an anchor, which is tied to a rope



Ama's Social Center (Amagoiya)

The shaded part of the boat
– place for rest, eating,
changing clothes, recording
and engaging in women's
talk.



Ama's Diving Time

2 Diving trips a day:

**11:00 AM until 1 PM, when plentiful or
2 PM, when scarce**

2:20 or 3 PM until 5:00 PM

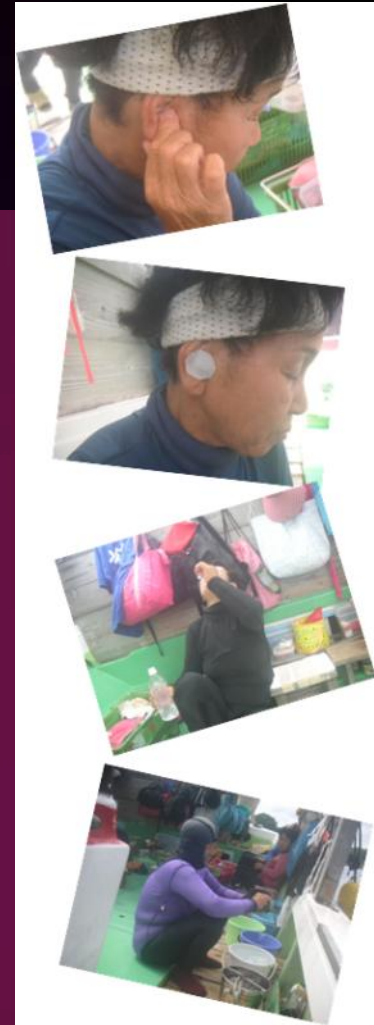
Ama's Diving Practice

Application of a heavy foundation cream to protect the face from the salt and scorching heat of the sun and thus, maintain an unblemish facial skin.



Ama's Diving Practice

- ✓ Preparation of the gum which they would insert in their ears to safeguard them from the sea water and pressure.
- ✓ Intake of some vitamins and medicines for cold.
- ✓ Washing of goggles with a Ramin leaf and sea water before putting them on.



Ama's Diving Practice

- ✓ Putting on of modern flippers
- ✓ Taking on the bucket with their gears inside it and swimming out to their chosen spot in the sea.

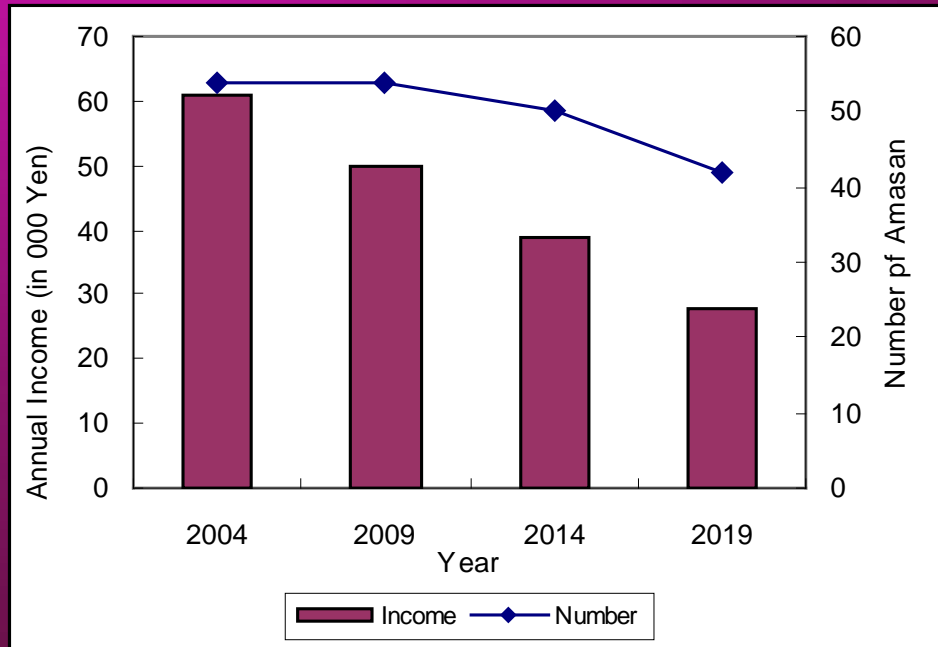


Ama's Whistle Sound (*Isoboue*)

- ✓ Ama's whistle sound resembled that of a "deep sigh or gasp" which is either short or long.
- ✓ a short "ha" or a long "haay" - very disturbing as it tries to communicate a laborious pain.
- ✓ Done when gasping for some air and re-adjusting their breathing.

When at sea, one could not miss the Ama because of their whistle, beside their floating colorful tubs.

Ama's Income



Trend in annual income and number of Amasan, Tobu FCA, 2004-2019.

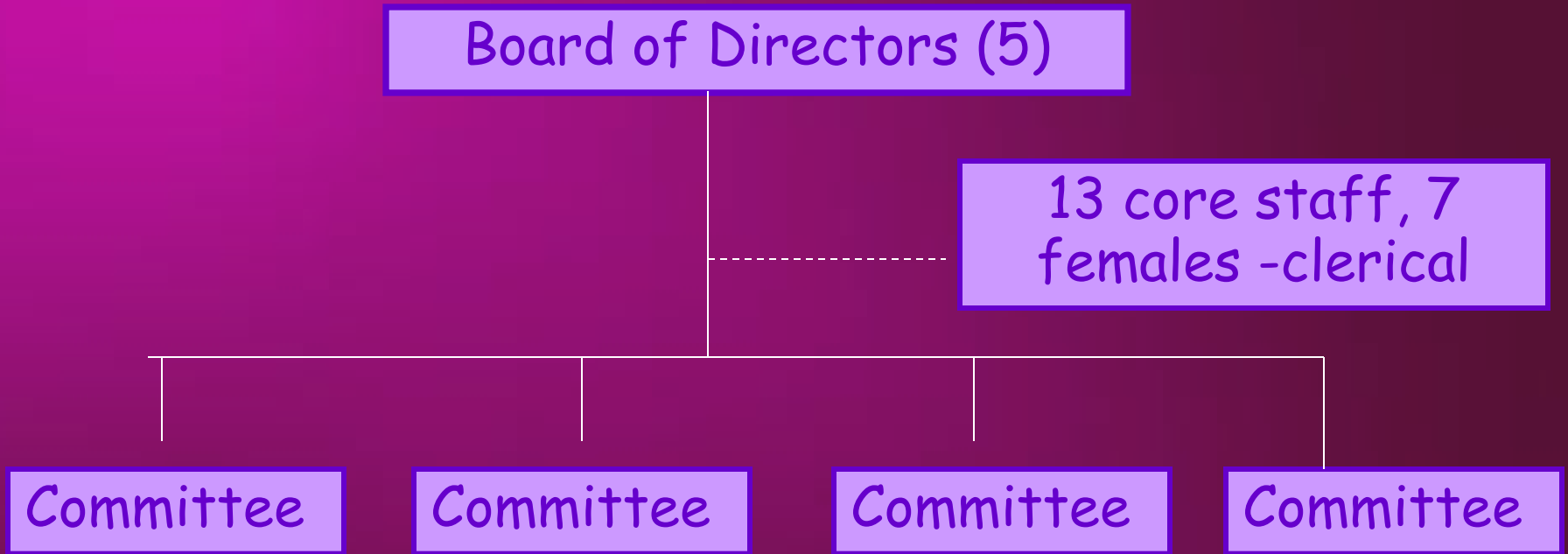
In 2007, the average per capita annual income of Amasan reached 61,086,603 yen. By age, the highest average annual income, 1,522,232 yen, was earned by those in the age bracket 50-59 years.

Ama's Access to and Control Over Resources
































- Ownership of farm lots and the responsibility of managing them generally fall on men.
- The fishery rights are given to the which distributed to its members who are dominated by men. In general, the right to harvest fish species with the use of fixed gears, beach seines, and the likes or the culture of fish or pearl is delegated to men
- Some women whose husbands owned parcel of lot, engaged in farming to support their husband.
- The fishery right for seaweeds and sedentary fishery (abalone, turban shells or *sasae*, and sea urchin) is largely assigned to women.

Ama's Access to Administrative Decision Making Position



Tobu FCA, Yahataura

Ama's (vs husband) Calendar of Activities

| Activities | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Household chores |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mobile Fish |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sedentary Fish | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  | | |

Community Activities

AMA Cooperative Gen Assembly

AMA meeting

AMA and Boatmen meeting

Yahataura AMA and other AMA in Iki

Fish stocking (sea urchin, abalone, scorpions)

Cleaning of seashore

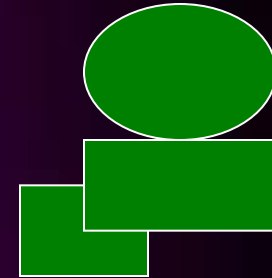
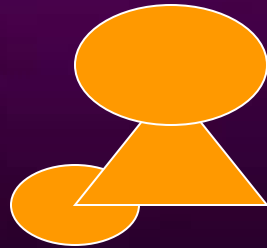
Special religious ceremony

Community Activities

Food preparation

Help in stocking of fish,
cleaning and reforesting
the sea

Offering of food to the
gods



Cleaning of the venue

Take the lead in stocking of
fish in and cleaning and
reforesting the sea

How Ama viewed their works

- ✓ A welcome relief as it becomes a source of additional income.
- ✓ Economically empowering providing them an avenue for making decisions.
- ✓ Opportunity to be in union with nature
- ✓ A dangerous job
- ✓ Venue for socialization
- ✓ An exercise

Problems and Aspirations

Deteriorating health

Good health

Polluted water

Increase Catch

Declining catch

More trained Ama

**Children finish
schooling**

Conclusion

Ama plays a crucial role in Japanese fisheries.

While the Japanese constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, and Japanese law affords women the same economic and social rights as men, the reality of Japanese women having a low social status still pervades the society.

The dominance of male in the managerial positions in the organizational structure of the cooperative reflects marginalization of women.

Gender division of labor characterized by rigid delineation of the productive and reproductive spheres also reflective of strong sense of patriarchy

Women Ama were more than homemakers. They, too, were breadwinners just like their husbands

As elsewhere, Women Ama performed multiple task, a task which when they wake up in the morning they will do it all again.

What can be done?

Issues of cultural and social superiority have to be addressed to redress gender inequality.

Need for the community to embrace a respect for women Ama and promote policies that increase the personal wealth, power and political influence of women Ama.

A survey of women Ama in Japan

A quantitative study on Japanese men and women in fisheries giving particular to their activities, time allocation and income

More empirical studies on women in the fisheries for greater exposure and hopefully, stir attention and discussion from the public.

More opportunities for women participation in the decision-making of the cooperatives, relegation of women to position of leadership, and men's participation in domestic chores.

Need for educational reforms to alter traditional notions (public information campaigns or school textbooks)

THANK YOU!