
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES



LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

SHUHEI NAKATA

President, NAKATA KOGEI Co., Ltd.

WHY THE PRESIDENT OF A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE COMPANY PROMOTES GENDER EQUALITY

Since its establishment in 1946, NAKATA KOGEI Co., Ltd. has been producing wooden coat hangers in Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture, in western Japan. President Shuhei Nakata is the grandson of the company's founder and took office after studying in the United States and working in Tokyo. He is promoting gender equality through innovative actions; adding new perspectives to a very traditional company.

What was the rationale/motivation for signing the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)?

The Mayor of Toyooka City, where our company was founded, has been working to close the gender gap for two years, and my employees and I have participated in many of the seminars that it has organized to promote this. The values these meetings have shared are inspiring, especially from the perspective of a President of a local company.

I learnt about the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) from the city's gender adviser at one of the seminars. The six steps of the WEPs Journey showed concrete next steps, and I learned how different initiatives that seemed initially irrelevant were actually very much related to each other. That is why I decided to sign the WEPs.

Our business partners are in the fashion industry and very conscious of environmental and gender issues. I found the WEPs Principle 5, Enterprise Development, Supply Chain, Marketing Practices, particularly interesting, as it emphasizes the need to promote gender equality in the supply chain. I also agree that we should work together with our stakeholders rather than separately.

I would like to build on our past efforts in promoting gender equality at our workplace by following the WEPs. We will re-evaluate our baseline and apply the WEPs effectively.

Why do you think it is important for companies at the regional level to promote gender equality?

The challenge is how to deal with the reality of population decline. We need to be more alert and responsible for this crisis. I feel that women's abilities are not recognized enough at regional level. We are promoting gender equality at our company in the belief that it benefits both women and men.

I had not originally planned to lead the company, so I went to college in the United States and worked there for a while. I then returned to Japan in 2007 and worked at our showroom in Aoyama, Tokyo, commuting back and forth between Tokyo and Toyooka for 12 years before resettling back in Toyooka with my family in March 2019. The years at Tokyo enabled me to see both the potential and challenges of working in the region. The speed of change in urban areas can seem too far away from us in the provinces, which can be a challenge – people see this as something on the media only, but we should be equally up to speed.

You led by example and took paternity leave. What were the reactions of people around you?

We had our second son three months after our return to Toyooka. I did not take paternity leave when our first son was born but after raising him together with my wife, I felt the strong need to do so for our second child. My wife also asked me to take leave, so I took a month off after my wife and son were discharged from the hospital. Since then, I have been recommending that our male employees take paternity leave. I feel it is essential to break the gender stereotype that women are caregivers and men breadwinners.

When I was planning to take the leave, I was also encouraged by our mayor, after hearing him mention his plan to promote paternity leave for employees at the municipality office.

When I look around our region, companies in general seem reluctant to respond to these changes. However, there are initiatives that spark change, such as the mayor's initiative; and an old school mate, who works in Toyooka, became the first one to take paternity leave at his company after hearing that I had taken mine. I would like to create a cluster of employers in the region that promote gender equality in order to build on, and accelerate, these changes.

What kind of steps can small and medium enterprises take?

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are able to introduce changes more quickly and cheaply than larger companies as their leaders have a more influence over decision-making. Since becoming President of the NAKATA KOGEI in 2017, I want to expand our business globally and would therefore like to promote the WEPs both domestically and globally.

I have heard that consumers in Europe make deliberate decisions not to buy from companies that are not taking measures to address environmental issues. I believe that building a sustainable society is an important strategy for companies wanting to please consumers.

What are the responses to your actions from your employees and other stakeholders?

I think following the WEPs can make employees feel connected to global trends. We also have opportunities to reach out to children in Toyooka. We receive study tours from local elementary schools, and I also visit schools to give lectures. On such occasions, I make sure to mention gender issues and the importance of alleviating gender gaps. I believe these activities go beyond our corporate activities and contribute to the larger regional development.

Please tell us about your future aspirations.

We have a dream of becoming the best wooden hanger manufacturer in the world – and the promotion of gender equality is necessary for us to reach that goal. The city of Toyooka is facing an unavoidable population decline, which pushes us to recruit and retain human resources fairly and look at the individuals involved rather than simply hiring men as we have done before. I believe that, by promoting gender equality and a fair working environment, we will be able to attract better talent.

One of our business partners is a global clothing company and their domestic business is led by a female CEO. To see a global company appoint a female CEO for their business in Japan is truly encouraging.

As such, I believe it is necessary for businesses to work on advancing gender equality through the WEPs. It is not easy to embrace and respect diversity, but I will continue to work as hard as I can.

Women's Empowerment Principles



High-level corporate leadership



Workplace HR



Employee well-being and safety



Education and training for women



Supplier diversity & marketing practices




Community engagement



Measurement and reporting

 weps.org

 weps@unwomen.org

 [@WEPrinciples](https://twitter.com/WEPrinciples)

 [@Empower_Women](https://twitter.com/Empower_Women)

Funded by:



European Union

Produced by:



In support of:

**WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT
PRINCIPLES**

Established by UN Women and the
UN Global Compact Office

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Union, UN Women, International Labour Organization or the United Nations and their Member States.