

Eradication of Poverty in a Developed Country

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In some of African and developing countries, starved people like skeleton with swelled belly by malnutrition are often reported, clearly and visibly showing the necessity of salvation. It is so-called absolute poverty which can be easily understood by everyone that their lives are threatened due to lack of basic resources for survival. In Japan, a developed country, however, it is estimated that millions of people are suffering from poverty at the or lower of the livelihood protection level, which is a relative poverty. Relative poverty means to live at a level significantly lower than that of the majority of the community and lack the basic resources. This framework of community has an important meaning that the commodity price, monetary value and necessary items and their amounts for living an ordinary life are very different among the countries. Without knowing this fact, some often tend to superficially understand the issue, forcing excessive patience to the people suffering from relative poverty, saying "you should be grateful for having at least a residence to shelter rain and winds", or "even If you could not eat desirably, you are lucky not to be at starvation." But absolute poverty and relative poverty can not be compared fundamentally. It would not be right that the people suffering from relative poverty in a developed country are underestimated compared to the refugees and orphans in the world, who are in the different dimension.

Relatively poor people in a developed country often eat insufficiently, for example, just once a day, and cannot afford medical cost so as not to undergo treatment, but just buying a general drug like painkillers, and eventually die alone at home. In particular older people occupy the majority of such relatively poor people, and its number is estimated to continuously increase in the future. Nevertheless, very few specific or effective remedies have been taken. Individual's lack of abilities or laziness are not the cause of his/her being impoverished. The real reason lies in the social system too much focused on economy and our consciousness and emotion accustomed to human exclusion.

Impoverished person in a developed country is who has no enough income, saving and reliable person, which means to have lost every safety net. The current social structure should be the cause of so many people with these three factors. If this issue is left intact, then not only those people will stay suffering from poverty, but social huge loss will eventually arise. Also if someone in a family falls in poverty, his/her children would have to suffer together similarly.

Some people insist that the poverty should be attributed to the poor people's own responsibility, so that they do not deserve to be salvaged. And many poor people in developed countries, particularly in Japan, blame themselves for having fallen to such a situation, which would eventually keep the poverty issue within their own, not asking for help. Also they themselves tend to feel ashamed of the situation. Because of these reasons, it is often too late – they die alone of starvation or sickness, for example - before people around them realize the severe reality and try

to help. So unless people close to the poor person becomes aware of his/her conditions, no support or systematic salvation would actually work for him/her.

One of the causes contributing to worsen the situation is the adoption of examination/approval-upon-application rule for almost all of the supporting policies, including the livelihood protection system. This rule means that those suffering poor people cannot use the livelihood protection system unless they themselves show up with their intention to have consultation or application at the jurisdictional office counter. Some experts point out that the real aim of adopting the examination/approval-upon-application rule is to suppress the utilization of the social welfare system. Such stance of the government or local municipal administration as not to inform or help them sufficiently unless they themselves request would be one of the cause of prejudice, discrimination or misunderstanding on the livelihood protection system and its beneficiaries, which leads to the lasting suffering of the impoverished people.

As a system capitalist society would unavoidably yields a certain rate of poor people. While it produces rich people, relatively poor people will definitely appear. There is no society that every single person can continually work with zero unemployment rate. Unworkable people exist to a certain extent in any era and society regardless of individual's ability or efforts. In this sense, poor people should not be deemed as those who have dropped out of the society and not be left behind, but must be salvaged and included as its members. Poverty issue in developed countries is principally caused by dysfunction of social security system or social structure so as to be attended by other people, rather than the problem of the poor people themselves. While certain consideration for poor people not to unappropriately depend on livelihood protection system would be necessary, we think the system should be improved so as to be more easily accessible, usable and understandable for poor people through promotion and dissemination. One suggestion is, as Mr. Takanori Fujita, the author of "Karyu Roujin" (Impoverished Older People) wrote in the book, that local government or municipal office side calls in the poor people and encourage them to apply for livelihood protection system, rather than passively leave them neglected until they themselves show up for consultation and application.