

# Child Well-being and Community Policy

## —A Case Study of Arakawa-ward, Tokyo—

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### Abstract

Rising levels of child poverty have been attracting renewed attention in Japan. The purpose of this paper is to look briefly at the overall situation in Japan and then to look in more depth at a specific study carried out by the Arakawa local government. And also this paper aims to illustrate local government addresses how to eliminate child poverty and increase the possibilities for child well-being. This study is a case study of community well-being.

Child poverty in Japan would seem to have the following characteristics: First of all, the child poverty rate is relatively high and is increasing in Japan. Second, it is reported that child poverty in Japan appears to be strikingly concentrated among single-mother families. Third, it is reported that not only the child poverty rate in Japan is high, but also that the poverty rate after income redistribution i.e. tax rebates, grants and welfare allowances etc., is even higher. In terms of child poverty and social exclusion, case-by-case action needs to be taken. The local government, being the closest to its resident, is thus best equipped to take such actions.

Arakawa-ward is situated in the northeastern part of Tokyo. The Research Institute for Local Government of Arakawa City (RILAC), established by Arakawa-ward in October 2009, started conducting investigation and research into child poverty and social exclusion issues. Data on 61 cases was collected. The 61 cases were classified into three categories: economic poverty (5 cases); non-economic poverty i.e. dysfunctional families (19 cases), and hybrid poverty (poverty due to both economic and non-economic reasons) (37 cases). This research and analysis lead to a finding that there were risk factors and deciding factors which caused children to fall poverty and social exclusion. Simply having those risk factors, however, does not immediately result in child poverty and social exclusion. When both risk factors and deciding factors are present in a household will its children fall into poverty and social exclusion.

It is critical to empower parents with employability and to empower children for future employability because child poverty is closely related to parents' employments. Getting children ready for the job market in the future is also an issue of school education. Some child poverty and social exclusion cases are the result of low academic ability and incomplete dietary habit. To address these problems, Arakawa-ward has been actively taking educational measures such as

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(1) school library activities, (2) remedial tutoring - night tutoring, (3) career education, and (4) dietary education.

## **Preface**

The percentage of the population over the age of sixty-five in Japan exceeded 20% in 2005 and is expected to reach about 40% in 2050. In the midst of rapid changes of the social structure, fostering the next generation to be capable of supporting an ageing society has become increasingly important. However, rising, child poverty is a serious threat to the next generation. According to Aya Abe, a renowned academic in Japan, the poverty rate for children had already reached 12.9% by 1989, and 15.2% by 2001 (Abe, 2008). However, no specific measures have been taken to solve the problem. This is due to the persisting belief that every Japanese, all one hundred and twenty million of them, is middle class, a myth created at the end of the era of high economic growth. The lack of action is also due to the strong belief that raising a child is the responsibility of parents. Accordingly, no child policy has been considered other than those countermeasures for falling birthrate (RILAC, 2011b). However, an increase in the child poverty rate is now attracting social attention.

The purpose of this paper is to look briefly at the overall situation in Japan and then to look in more depth at a specific study carried out by the Arakawa local government. And also this paper aims to illustrate local government addresses how to eliminate child poverty and increase the possibilities for child well-being.

Family is important factor for accomplishing child well-being. However, some children are in poverty or are excluded from society because their parents either have little ability to raise children or are mentally unstable. In such situations, case-by-case action needs to be taken. The local government, being the closest to its resident, is thus best equipped to take such actions. Local government acts an important role for child well-being and this paper is a case study of how local government increases the possibilities for community well-being.

## **1. Child Poverty in Japan**

Rising levels of child poverty have been attracting renewed attention in Japan. Child poverty in Japan would seem to have the following characteristics: First of all, the child poverty rate is relatively high and is increasing in Japan. With social concern about child poverty increasing in recent years, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW, hereinafter) released a relative poverty rate report for Japan at the beginning of October, 2009. According to the report, the general poverty rate in 2007 was 15.7%, and the child poverty rate was 14.2%. The general poverty rate in 2010 was 16.0% while the child

poverty rate was 15.7%. The child poverty rate has been increasing to reach its highest level in history (as of May, 2011, released by MHLW). According to a 2012 UNICEF report, child poverty rate in Japan is notably high among economically advanced countries (the 9th highest out of 35 countries) (UNICEF, 2012).

Second, it is reported that child poverty in Japan appears to be strikingly concentrated among single-mother families. According to OECD data in 2005, the child poverty rate among single-parent families in Japan was 57.3%, tying with Turkey as the highest (RILAC, 2011b, OECD, 2006). This number is nearly four times the average of the overall child poverty rate in Japan. In fact, the child poverty rate among single-parent families is generally high in other OECD countries, averaging 32.5%. Compared with these other countries, however, the rate in Japan is particularly high. In comparison, the child poverty rates among single-parent families in Denmark and Sweden are less than 10%. It is extraordinary that nearly 60% of children in single-parent families are living in poverty in Japan. The average annual income of single-mother families in Japan was 2.314 million yen, and among those, 39.5% have an annual income of 2 million yen or less, according to the National Livelihood Survey conducted by the MHLW in 2009. Furthermore, although 84.5% of mothers in single-mother families are employed, only 42.5% have full-time employment, while 43.5% have part-time employment and 5.1% have temporary employment. A significant portion of mothers have non-regular employment. Single-mothers' employment is unstable, and single-mothers often struggle with low income.

Third, it is reported that not only the child poverty rate in Japan is high, but also that the poverty rate after income redistribution i.e. tax rebates, grants and welfare allowances etc., is even higher. Among all OECD countries, Japan is the only country where the poverty rate increases after income redistribution. Before income redistribution, the poverty rates in Northern European countries and in France are higher than that in Japan. Yet the poverty rates in those countries after income redistribution become significantly lower than that in Japan.

The reason why such an extraordinary change in poverty rate before and after income redistribution happens in Japan is that the amount of contribution to tax and social insurance premium is high compared to the amount of social security benefits for families with children. In this sense, the income redistribution mechanism in Japan has failed. Taking income redistribution in 2008 as an example, the average pre-redistribution income of single-mother families was 2.075 million yen and the average post-redistribution income was 2.349 million yen. As a comparison, the average pre-redistribution income of elderly households was 0.901 million yen whereas their post-redistribution income was 3.749 million yen, 1.6 times that of single-mother households. The difference between single-mother households and elderly households largely depends on the pension received by elderly households. Extremely low social benefits for single-mother households with working mothers are one of the significant causes

(RILAC, 2011b). In Japan, child support allowance is limited. Both its target and actual amount are set to a low level. “Child Allowance (Kodomo Teate)” was established in 2010 under the Democratic Party administration.

Another factor is that the Japanese tax system is not as progressive as in many other countries. Accordingly, the tax burden of low-income individuals is relatively heavy compared to other countries and the tax burden of high-income individuals is relatively light. Moreover, even though Japan offers social welfare as a last-resort countermeasure and a welfare safety net against poverty, working single-mother families with children are determined to have an earning ability, and thus are often disqualified from such protection. In other words, social welfare plays only a limited role in fighting child poverty.

## **2. The Research by the Institute for Local Government by Arakawa City (RILAC) to Eliminate Child Poverty and Social Exclusion**

### **(1) History of the Research by RILAC to Eliminate Child Poverty and Social Exclusion**

In terms of child poverty and social exclusion, support from the central government is mainly provided in the form of improvement of the legal system and the economy. However, some children are in poverty or are excluded from society because their parents either have little ability to raise children or are mentally unstable. In such situations, case-by-case action needs to be taken. The local government, being the closest to its resident, is thus best equipped to take such actions.

Arakawa-ward is situated in the northeastern part of Tokyo with an area of 10.20 square kilometers. It has a population of 204,837 with 95,682 households (as of January 1st, 2011). The average household size is 2.16, reflecting the trend of decreasing household sizes in Japan. In terms of the age structure, 22.7% of the population is over 65 years old, reflecting an ageing society. The number of local government employees of Arakawa-ward is 1,545 (as of April 1, 2011). It has many independent shops, and ties in the local community are relatively strong.

In Arakawa-ward, the ward administration has set it as a goal (area of effort) to make its residents happy and it is working towards that goal. Since poverty and social exclusion deprive children of their potentials and hope, it has been recognized that it is necessary to deal with these issues with utmost efforts.

In May 2009, a “Child Poverty Investigation Committee” was established in the ward. The ward then started investigating solutions for child poverty and social exclusion (RILAC, 2011b). The Research Institute for Local Government of Arakawa City (RILAC), established by Arakawa-ward in October 2009, started conducting investigation of indicators concerning happiness and community well-being (2011c).

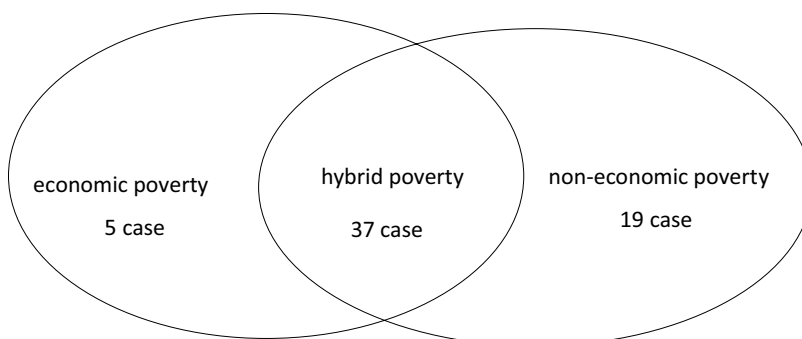
After that, the RILAC decided to incorporate the techniques of “action research”, to find the state

and solutions to the child poverty and social exclusion issues. While conducting the research, direct contact with parents and children was avoided due to the requirements of protection of personal information and flashback (intense past experience brought back to mind suddenly). Information was collected from persons who were in daily contact with the subjects, such as staff in charge at nurseries, kindergartens, elementary and junior high schools, afterschool child care, children and family support centers, maternal and child living support facilities and health centers.

Data on 61 cases was collected. Survey items mainly collect information on individual characteristics (household composition, nationality), causes of household poverty (job insecurity, lack of child-rearing ability), poverty conditions that households and children are facing (financial situations, living conditions), and household needs (financial assistance, employment support). The collection of such data is a major contribution in and of itself since little information, even of the most basic type, had existed up to that point.

The 61 cases were classified into three categories: economic poverty (5 cases); non-economic poverty i.e. dysfunctional families (19 cases), and hybrid poverty (poverty due to both economic and non-economic reasons) (37 cases). Economic poverty refers to households that are struggling financially because of the unemployment of the household head, because of low income since the household head has only a non-regular job, or because of other reasons. Consequently, these households have difficulty raising their children. Non-economic poverty refers to households that are not economically distressed but in which children are in a worrisome situation affected by guardians' social problem (such as mental instability).

Hybrid poverty refers to households in which economical and non-economical poverty occurs in combination. In such households, there are guardians having mental illness, continuous child abuse, or children refusing to go to school.



**Illustration 1** Cases of child poverty

## **(2) Case Studies**

### Case 1

The mother was suffering from schizophrenia but interrupted her treatment as she did not believe she was ill. Although the father had a job, both parents had low comprehension ability and seemed to be intellectually disabled. Their son was in elementary school. The mother-in-law living nearby was helping with daily chores including taking care of the boy. After the mother-in-law had a stroke, the family hired a visiting nurse. However, the mother-in-law was re-admitted to hospital. The son, who was overweight, gained even more weight during that period. His elementary school reported that: “the boy does not come to school. When teachers reached out to the boy’s mother, they could not understand what she was saying. We do not know what kind of action to take.” Visitors found left-over food and unwashed clothes piling up in the house. It also turned out that the father had not come home for several days as he was hiding away from consumer loan collection services. The mother, whose assistant left, complained, “I cannot sleep because I can hear harassing voices. I cannot think properly even if I try to do housekeeping.” Her illness worsened, and it was determined that support was necessary. A search was started to find a hospital that could admit the mother. A conversation was also started with a child consultation center for admitting the son during the mother’s hospitalization. The mother, accompanied by her son and others, saw a doctor after a bed became available in a hospital. The mother was admitted and the son was escorted to the child protection home.

### Case 2

A single-mother of two children suffered from depression and was unable to work. She had been receiving public assistance. A Protection Division member of staff who worked on this case said: “Because the mother is unable to do housekeeping work, she has her children help her, which prevents the children from going to school.” The mother was receiving financial assistance for medical expenses that cover psychiatric visits, and had obtained a Mental Health Welfare Handbook. The mother was a victim of domestic violence inflicted by the father (her husband), and the mother and children ran away from the father. When the mother was depressed, she had to stay in bed for days on end. On such occasions, the older child bought packed food from a neighborhood convenience store and fed the younger child. Used food packages were not taken out, blocking the entrance. Since the children could not wash clothes, they often had to wear the same clothes for days, for which they were ridiculed in school. This was another reason why the children did not go to school. Because the mother’s illness was considered the cause of the child neglect, daily home help service was introduced for a short period. Afterwards, the mother’s medical condition stabilized and eventually improved enough to allow her to hold down a part-time job.

### **(3) Publication of the Interim Report and Measures Taken**

Based on the above analysis, study findings were presented in an interim report prepared for March 2010 publication. According to the interim report, the Ward had a population of 204,604, including 15,738 non-Japanese residents. Many households with children under age 18 had an annual income of 5 million yen or less. In particular, about 60% of single-mother households had an annual income of 2 million yen or less. The percentage of welfare recipients was on the rise. The percentage of individuals qualified for receiving schooling support that partially covers school expenses such as lunch, school supplies, field trips, and so on at the elementary and junior high schools had been rising since 1992. Further, based on the analysis of 42 cases, the interim report pointed out the future direction of action by proposing a field-oriented organizational structure, improvement of counseling services, employment assistance, and assistance to single-mother households and non-Japanese residents. In addition, the Ward, proactively, took measures against problems identified during the course of the study.

First, all schools were staffed with social workers. In the past, only consultants specializing in psychology had been stationed at schools to deal with various educational concerns that children and guardians had. However, there had been cases that could not be solved by psychological approaches only. In order to deal with such cases, consultants with expertise in both education and welfare were used. By doing so, it became possible to provide advice from the perspective of social welfare at school.

Second, to enable a smooth transition for newly-arrived foreign students to school and social life, supports such as basic Japanese language lessons were strengthened. Improvements of such supports help prevent economic poverty among foreigners who often could not find work due to limited Japanese language skills.

Third, the consultation function of “Child family support centers”, which advise children and families on various problems, was strengthened. These centers had been providing appropriate protection to children asking for help and had been helping them to become self-reliant. These children were often in precarious situations, such as being abused, and therefore were in need of support and/or protection. These centers, when needed, are also able to perform psychological and developmental evaluations for children with developmental concerns. With these functions, it became possible to understand the actual situation of children in more detail, permitting more appropriate supports.

## **3. Publication of the Final Report**

### **(1) Considerations for the Final Report**

In 2010, the investigation and research system was redesigned to be more effective. In all working groups, the number of investigators with more frequent direct contact with children was increased.

Investigation and research was carried out under the new system. Specifically, more detailed analysis was performed on the 42 cases. Additional cases were added to the original 42 cases to cover a wider range of situations. Further, prior international research literature was reviewed. This research and analysis lead to a finding that there were risk factors and deciding factors which caused children to fall poverty and social exclusion. Households with children who fall into poverty and social exclusion face one or more risk factors. Those factors include financial risks such as job loss of guardians, and non-financial risks such as mental illness. Simply having those risk factors, however, does not immediately result in child poverty and social exclusion. For these to happen, households need to have one or more additional deciding factors. For example, if guardians lose their jobs, the risk of economic poverty increases. However, if they are employable, they are more likely to find new jobs. The risk of falling into poverty increases if the parents cannot find new jobs. As a result, only when both risk factors and deciding factors are present in a household will its children fall into poverty and social exclusion.

Risk factors include (i) household income instability, (ii) family burdens, (iii) sickness and diseases, (iv) family relationship, (v) isolation, (vi) chain of poverty, and (vii) others.

Deciding factors include (i) employment status and employability of guardians, (ii) child-rearing status and ability of the guardians, and (iii) the availability of household support.

## **(2) Risk Factors and Deciding Factors**

### **(i) Household Income Instability**

This is economic threat from unstable employment and discontinuation or decrease of financial assistance from relatives. Of the 42 cases, 39 cases (92.9%) faced this type of risks. In 38 cases, the guardians face unstable employment. It is understood that the employment status of the guardians is a major risk factor of child poverty and social exclusion.

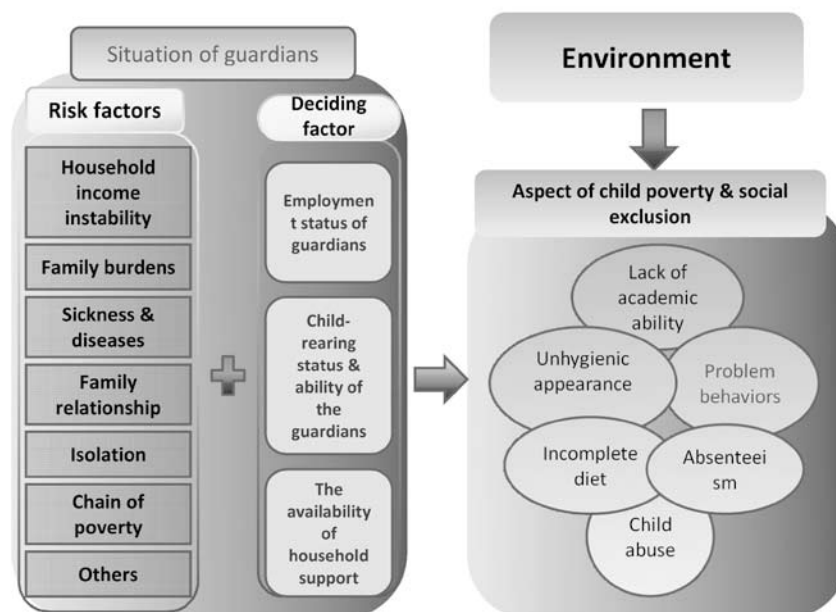
### **(ii) Family Burdens**

Overwhelming family burdens is another risk factor. For example, some guardians had to provide nursing care to relatives, which was very demanding. As a result, those guardians are not able to work and are too busy to communicate with their children. 8 cases (19.6%) fell into this type of risk.

### **(iii) Sickness and Diseases**

This is a risk due to injuries or sickness, mental illness, mental instability, spendaholic or alcoholic, over dependency on the partner and so on. 14 cases had this type of risk (33.3%).





**Illustration 2** Risk factors and deciding factors

(iv) Family Relationship

Being a single parent presents a risk to the family relationship of a household. Family relationship also becomes a risk factor in the presence of domestic violence or strained relationship with other family members. This type of risk was found in 35 (83.3%) cases. In most cases, the family relationship risks were in the form of divorce, separation, and bereavement.

(v) Isolation

Households are isolated from communities and thus cannot receive financial and/or living assistance from public and/or private sectors. Sometimes even though households are eligible for public assistance, they do not receive it due to lack of information. In addition, in some cases parents who are separated from their spouses but have not divorced are not qualified to receive public services targeting single-parents. In some cases, parents are isolated, receiving no support from relatives and losing all connections with the local community.

(vi) Chain of poverty

Economic poverty of the parents is carried over to their children or abuse received from the parent is carried over to future generations.

(vii) Others

Insufficient Japanese language skill of the guardians is another risk factor. There are cases in which foreigners with no Japanese speaking skills come to Japan and cannot find employment due to insufficient communication skills in Japanese. Seven cases had this type of risk.

In addition to the above risk factors, there are deciding factors. These include (i) employment status and employability of guardians, (ii) child-rearing status and ability of the guardians, and (iii) the availability of household support. When these deciding factors are combined with the risk factors child poverty and social exclusion occur. Specific conditions of child poverty and social exclusion are as follows: (i) the lack of academic ability, (ii) unhygienic appearance (holes in clothes, wearing unclean clothes, clothes with lost buttons or torn clothes. One child appeared not to have taken a bath for several days), (iii) incomplete diet (obesity caused by eating fast food only, sometimes eating snacks only as dinner, eating snacks because no breakfast is prepared in the morning or school lunch providing the only good nutrition.), (iv) child abuse, (v) absenteeism, (vi) problem behaviors (excessively mischievous, shouting at teachers, sabotage of school equipment, violence towards other children, truancy and smoking).

### **(3) Analyzing Cases where Escape from Child Poverty and Social Exclusion is Expected**

In the final report, all the cases were divided into two categories. Category 1 (42 cases) consists of serious cases in which escaping the status of child poverty and social exclusion is highly challenging. Category 2 (57 cases) includes cases in which escaping child poverty and social exclusion may be possible. Category 2 cases were selected from households that receive the “single-mother household self-reliance support grant.” This is a grant that helps mothers in single-parent households improve their employability. Category 2 cases were selected from households receiving “mother and children welfare loans” that are designed to support children to go to schools and complete their study. Dividing the cases into the above two categories was meaningful in order to develop ideas on how to reduce the risk of child poverty and social exclusion in fatherless families. In many Category 2 cases, children were living with both parents and siblings. These households often had very young children. As a result, guardians were too busy taking care of those children to study and improve their employment prospects. Consequently, there were fewer guardians in these households using these support programs, compared with households receiving child support allowance. (RILAC, 2011a).

### **(4) Recommendations**

After providing a systematic review of the phenomenon of child poverty and social exclusion, as

described above, more in-depth discussion was provided in preparation for the final report, “Community Solution to child poverty and social exclusion – Arakawa system child poverty and social exclusion study project final report” (August 2011a). The final report recommends the building of the “Arakawa system” as the course of action for the future. The Arakawa system consists of the following components:

(i) Domains, Goals, and Indicators of the Ward Administration; Each ward division should sets goals and performance indicators. All parties working with children, including local government, ward residents, NPOs, and corporations should, as a whole, recognize, share, and tackle child poverty and social exclusion. Following a cycle of “plan-do-check-action,” policy should be improved. .

(ii) Organization/Human Resource; Strengthen cooperation between supporting departments.

(iii) Social Capital (strengths of local network); the government and regional communities work as a whole to eliminate child poverty and social exclusion. Strengthen cooperation between ward residents and existing regional organizations. Create a mechanism to connect various organizations.

(iv) Diversified Policies and Measures; Provide assistance that is appropriate to specific situations. In cases where the guardians lack sufficient child-rearing ability, dispatch a home-visit type helper. Equip children with life skills. In cases where the guardians have unstable employment, provide opportunities so that they can gradually get accustomed to employment. Currently, there is a demand for measures that blur the boundary between education and welfare. Arakawa’s efforts, hopefully, will catch the attention, as an advanced example of local government, of other local organizations throughout Japan. Dr. Futagami, Director of RILAC, points out that, in the long run, it is critical to empower parents with employability and to empower children for future employability because child poverty is closely related to parents’ employments (2011b). Getting children ready for the job market in the future is also an issue of school education. The next section, therefore, analyzes how the Arakawa-ward works to eliminate child poverty and social exclusion through school education, and looks at what kind of measures are being taken to prepare children for employment in the future.

#### **4. Educational Measures against Child Poverty**

In order to get children ready for the labor market, it is necessary for them to acquire basic academic and life skills. To this end, Arakawa-ward is taking measures with an emphasis on education. In a study on administrative services, Arakawa-ward ranked fourth in overall national ranking and first in

national ranking for education (Arakawa-ward Local Government, 2013). Further, education expenditure accounted for 12.3% of the total proposed budget (2012) of 87.5 billion yen, a high percentage compared with national standards. Some child poverty and social exclusion cases are the result of low academic ability and incomplete dietary habit. To address these problems, Arakawa-ward has been actively taking educational measures. The following section will look at four such activities: (1) school library activities, (2) remedial tutoring - night tutoring (*Terakoya*), (3) career education, and (4) dietary education.

### **(1) School Library Activities**

For children to acquire basic academic skills, Arakawa-ward has been working intensively to improve school libraries and to allow children to acquire basic academic skills at school. Measures to promote school libraries in Arakawa-ward took effect in the year when Mayor Nishikawa took office and allocated a budget for school library books. In FY 2006, 170 million yen was specifically appropriated for purchasing books, and the school library book standard (the standard for the number of library books appropriate for the number of students) was met in all 33 elementary and junior high schools in the ward.

In FY 2007, a school library advisor (school librarian) was assigned for every two schools (working two days a week in each school). At the same time, Arakawa-ward was designated to participate in the “School Library Support Center Promotion Program,” sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (until year 2008). In FY 2009, Arakawa-ward started its own “school library support program”. School librarians were stationed in all schools (five days a week, 6 hours a day), and a school library support division was set up in the education center. The school library support division has one chief school library advisor and serves to support and enrich school library activities. The library support division supports school librarians by providing 23 workshops a year. In addition, it also provides on-site school library workshops and instructional support to schools as requested. All advisors are certified librarians or certified teacher librarians. They devise ways to familiarize students with books such as book talks to introduce books and storytelling. In one example, in Japanese classes taught at the libraries, school library advisors serves the role of storytellers. In another example, a group of students took turns in reading a book aloud. When asked, one girl proudly answered, “I sometimes read 3 books a day”.

Daiichi Nippori Elementary School founded by Arakawa-ward in Tokyo is a small school with 122 students in total. However, the number of books checked out during the first school term was about 4,400, averaging 36 books per student. Eight book introduction booths are provided in the school; and dishes in a popular book were made available for the school lunch menu. Such efforts to raise children’s interest in reading proved effective. Principal Etsuko Hamagami expressed the effect saying “I’m sure

students are now able to understand the feelings of characters in books more deeply". The school library is also a place for children to stay whenever they have time. In addition, the school also places carts with library books in the hallways near the classrooms. By doing this, the school attempts to deliver books close to the children. These activities received recognitions. The Arakawa-ward Daisan Junior High School received the School Library Award in 2010. Nationally, library activities in Arakawa-ward are receiving wide attention.

In addition, as one of the reading promotion activities, Arakawa-ward holds the "The Investigative Learning Contest Using Arakawa-ward Libraries". In this contest, each pupil chooses a theme for him/herself and completes a paper during a summer vacation using resources from Arakawa-ward Libraries. The Arakawa Children's Reading Festival also offers (i) the Kunio Yanagida Picture Book Grand Prize and holds (ii) a short essay contest, in both of which many children participate.

## **(2) Remedial Classes *Terakoya***

Arakawa-ward implements a "power-up" program. The program greatly expands the authority of principals over budgetary implementation. It also supports creative and ingenious educational activities designed by individual schools to reach school education goals outlined in the "Arakawa-ward School Education Visions" formulated in 2007. Daisan Junior High School uses the budget of the "power-up" program to open a "*Terakoya*," or supplementary lessons, from 7 to 8:30 pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays every week. The "*Terakoya*" offers English and math study sessions (Arakawa-ward Board of Education, 2012). It is currently implemented at two junior high schools, Daisan Junior High School and Suwadai Junior High School. In *Terakoya*, college students are the instructors; students study with printed materials, and parents and volunteers check the answers. Students enjoy learning even though they are tired after club activities. This kind of effort is critical in enhancing basic academic skills and filling educational gaps.

## **(3) Career Education**

Career Education aims to get students to think about what kind of life they want to spend in the future and how they can realize their dreams. Shioiri Elementary School, Shioiri Higashi Elementary School and Daisan Junior High School have been working on a career education curriculum that consolidates the elementary and the junior high levels.

Elementary School First Grade: I love everyone - Family

Elementary School Second Grade: Shop explorations

Elementary School Third Grade: People working in town

Elementary School Fourth Grade: A half Coming-of-Age ceremony

Elementary School Fifth Grade: What is working life like

Elementary School Sixth Grade: Working experience exchange (second grade junior high school students share their working experience with sixth grade elementary school students), local community experience

Junior High School First Grade: Workplace visits, in-school job placement service

Junior High School Second Grade: Working experience, in-school job placement service

Junior High School Third Grade: Working experience exchange (share working experience with second graders), in-school job placement service

The author visited and observed an open class for research purposes at Daisan Junior High School. As a part of career education, sixth grade elementary school students visited a junior high school where second grade junior high school students answered questions from the elementary school students about life in junior high school. For those elementary school students, this was an opportunity to get answers to their questions and to allay their anxieties about life in junior high school. This also seemed to be a valuable opportunity for junior high school students to look back on their own junior high school lives.

#### **(4) Dietary Education in Arakawa-ward**

Unhealthy eating habits and life rhythm disorder have become problems leading to child poverty and social exclusion. As such, dietary education has been a focus of Arakawa-ward. Higurashi Elementary School was designated as a school to promote “Sleep early, Wake up early, and Have Breakfast” in 2008. It promoted activities that help regulate the rhythm of life. It was realized that pupils could not concentrate when they were studying due to the disruption of proper life rhythms. Having a good breakfast activates the brains and enhances pupils’ learning ability. In order to have a good breakfast, it is necessary to form the habit of going to bed early at night, sleeping well and getting up early in the morning. To promote such a habit, the opening time of the school gates was moved earlier to 7:50 am.

The same elementary school has been emphasizing dietary education activities for many years. At dining tables, children learn how to use chopsticks, learn discipline and learn to socialize. At the same time, culinary culture is passed down from parents to children and the family bonds are strengthened at the dining tables. These days, however, all family members are busy, and it is getting less frequent for all the family members to sit at the table together. For example, according to a collaborative study in 1999

between Kagawa Nutrition University and Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), in which children were asked to draw a picture of their dining table, “eating alone” has become a problem today. When children were asked to characterize their dining tables, it was noted that children were having meals alone. There were many cases where snacks were consumed as meals or meals had unbalanced nutrition. This study was a long term study that was first conducted in 1982. Compared with 17 years earlier, there was a clear trend that the problems of eating alone and the lack of nutritional balance were becoming more serious among children.

There were many single-mother households in Arakawa-ward. Among households with at least one child under the age of 18, more than half were single-mother households with an income of 5 million yen or less. Many mothers in single-mother households failed to pay enough attention to their children’s diet. In those households, there were reports that some “children do not have breakfast before coming to school, do not bring any lunch, and only have cup noodles for dinner.” and that “dinner includes snacks only”, and that “lunch provided at school is the only real meal”. Some reported that “a child receives only petty cash to buy dinner” and that “a child has become obese because of having fast food only.” It is necessary, therefore, for children to be knowledgeable about food, to be able to cook for themselves, and to enhance their own food-related capabilities. These are basic life skills.

For this reason, Higurashi Elementary School set up a research topic “Nurture Ability for Positive Living Through the Emphasis on Dietary Education”, and incorporated dietary education as a subject for each grade. The school also offers dietary education activities using time allocated for integrated studies.

Additionally, outside the classrooms, dietary education is provided through school meals. Aiming to show appreciation for each child and to let children have a happy meal time, the school organizes activities such as birthday lunches (to celebrate birthdays of children born in each month) and get-together school lunches (students of different grades eat together). The emphasis on diet was not placed only at a school, but also in a collaborative effort between the school and the families.

Activities such as “love recipe” contests, father-and-child cooking schools, and cooking schools for mothers are organized. For example, all pupils join the “love recipe” contest as a summer vacation assignment. Parents and children discuss and decide on a recipe, and then prepare the dish. Its ingredients and recipe are written down clearly, a picture of the completed dish is attached, and parents and children write down their comments.

The final work is displayed at school for the contest when the new school term starts. The winning “love” recipe is used for school lunches. In addition, the love recipes are compiled into a volume and distributed to each family.

Arakawa-ward holds a ward-wide lunch box recipe contest, providing children an opportunity to

think about desirable dietary habits, find enjoyment in cooking and make a lunch box while considering nutrition balance and ingredient varieties. The lunch box recipe contest has several effects. First, children's interest in food and eating increases. Second, children acquire some culinary skills, which are basic living skills allowing them to survive. Third, the relationship between parents and children is strengthened through collaborations between parents and children at home. Finally, the lunch box recipe contest becomes an opportunity to pass down family culture and history to the next generation.

## **Conclusions:**

Child poverty and social exclusion are urgent issues which need to be addressed in Japan.

The purpose of this paper is to look into how local government challenge to eliminate child poverty and increase the possibilities for community well-being.

The Research Institute for Local Government of Arakawa City (RILAC), established by Arakawa-ward in October 2009, started conducting investigation and research into child poverty and social exclusion issues. This research and analysis lead to a finding that there were risk factors and deciding factors which caused children to fall poverty and social exclusion. Simply having those risk factors, however, does not immediately result in child poverty and social exclusion. When both risk factors and deciding factors are present in a household will its children fall into poverty and social exclusion.

It is critical to empower parents with employability and to empower children for future employability because child poverty is closely related to parents' employments. Getting children ready for the job market in the future is also an issue of school education.

Some child poverty and social exclusion cases are the result of low academic ability and incomplete dietary habit. To address these problems, Arakawa-ward has been actively taking educational measures such as (1) school library activities, (2) remedial tutoring - night tutoring, (3) career education, and (4) dietary education.

Taking care of the next generation should be one of our prime concerns from both the moral and practical viewpoint. The Arakawa study is a valuable resource which both the national government and local authorities would do well to take note of. It is necessary for the government, NPOs, companies, and organizations to cooperate in order to reduce, and hopefully in the long term to eliminate, child poverty and social exclusion

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