

Japan in Africa



TOKYO, Japan, August 21, 2016 (TICAD/WPost) -- On August 27 and 28, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) – the key platform to drive Japan’s development initiatives in Africa – will be held in Nairobi, Kenya.

While Africa has made great gains since the turn of the century, the collapse in prices of natural resources, the Ebola crisis and the rise of violent extremism and terrorism have highlighted the fragility of African development. The upcoming conference offers a timely opportunity to address the important challenges Africa faces today.

A pioneering initiative launched by Japan in 1993, TICAD draws up concrete action plans for African development with follow-up through regular progress reports. The TICAD initiative is not limited to Japan and African countries. It is also open to international organizations, donor countries, relevant private-sector partners and representatives from civil society, while retaining ownership of projects by Africa.

When TICAD V was held in 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe predicted Africa would become a growth center of the world by the middle of the century. His forecast is right on track.

But, several new challenges have emerged; namely, the slump in natural resource prices, the Ebola outbreak, and the spread of violent extremism and terrorism.

To address these challenges, TICAD VI will be a forum to discuss how the TICAD mechanism and Japan's strengths can contribute to sustainable African development with a focus on economic diversification, resilient healthcare and social stability.

Economic diversification is a particularly important pillar of TICAD VI. Looking back on its own development path since the end of World War II, Japan—a nation without rich natural resources—has put great emphasis on human resources. For example, accuracy, teamwork and the “kaizen” approach, the process of workers onsite continuously brainstorming ideas to improve productivity, have enabled Japan to create high-quality products.

Japan has long believed that highly-skilled human resources hold the key to economic diversity in Africa. Demand from African countries in this area is growing, and Japan is ready to share its experience and expertise. TICAD drives Japan's ongoing efforts to empower young Africans through human resource development programs.

To cultivate a strong human network between Japan and Africa, at TICAD V, Japan launched the African Business Education Initiative for Youth, or “ABE” Initiative. Extending from 2013 to 2017, this initiative provides 1,000 young Africans with an opportunity to study at Japanese universities and participate in internships at Japanese enterprises. This public-private partnership exemplifies Japan's openness and dedication to equipping the African workforce of the future. The program aims to share Japanese professionalism at work with African interns.

Tokyo-based KOYO Corporation participated in the ABE Initiative for the first time this year, hosting five interns from Nigeria, Mauritania, Tanzania, Mozambique and Burundi. The interns visited the company's mega solar power plant in Tochigi, about 60 miles north of Tokyo, and were tasked with presenting reports about potential opportunities in their home countries for the technology they observed.

Mr. Mansour Diagne of Senegal, Manager of KOYO's International Division, praised the program.

“As an African, I do appreciate the ABE Initiative because it allows more Japanese companies to know about Africa. And it gives participants the opportunity to learn about the Japanese way of doing business. In particular, the attention Japanese firms pay to customer service and their commitment to follow-up and after-sales service. The ABE Initiative interns have built relationships that will allow them to become bridges between Africa and Japan, both at government and private-sector levels.”

At TICAD V, Japan also committed to train 30,000 local people in Africa to help them acquire professional skills. Japan pledged to set up TICAD human resource development centers for business and industry in 10 locations across Africa and dispatch job training experts.

The Centre de Formation Professionnelle et Technique Senegal-Japon (CFPT) is a role model for these hubs. Founded in 1984 by the Japanese and the Senegalese governments, the CFPT is one of the leading vocational and training centers in West Africa. More than 2,500 intermediate and advanced engineers, as well as around 300 trainers from 16 French-speaking African countries have completed training at the CFPT.

At the beginning, training content was heavily influenced by Japanese experts' insights. With time, various innovations were created to cultivate homegrown technical training systems with local instructors. This is in line with the center's original concept that Senegalese trainees would best thrive under their own leadership and principles. The CFPT's focus on empowering Africans to take ownership of training programs is completely in line with Japan's approach to development programs and the TICAD process.

In partnership with government agencies, the Japanese private sector plays a driving role in human resource development in Africa. One example is the Toyota Kenya Academy operated by Toyota Tsusho Group. In addition to technical automotive training and managerial staff development, since 2014, the academy has offered African trainees business management, agri-mechanization, and agri-preneurship courses in partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Kenyan universities and government agencies. By supporting the next generation's development, Japan's private sector is investing in Kenya's long-term economic growth and sustainable development.

By offering 14 courses to entrepreneurs and businesspeople, the academy is building an

educational system that meets a diverse range of needs, continually developing human resources to support Kenya's future. Based on the Japanese "kaizen" approach, participants are encouraged to develop problem-solving skills critical for starting businesses. The academy welcomed 381 students through to 2015 and expects to receive 750 students this year.

At the upcoming TICAD VI, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and African heads of state will convene in Nairobi with leaders from the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, the African Union Commission, the World Bank, relevant private-sector partners, donor countries, and civil society to discuss pressing African development needs and the prognosis for the future. About 6,000 delegates are expected to attend.

As the first conference held inside Africa, TICAD VI is set to further advance Africa to become a growth center of the world by the middle of the 21st century.

To learn more, visit www.japan.go.jp/ticad/