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TICAD'S UNIQUENESS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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- Unlike other African partnership fora, TICAD is a multilateral framework not only for enhancing bilateral relations, but also for discussing development issues of Africa.
- TICAD is appealing because: 1) TICAD has provided a suitable ground for connecting good examples of Asian development to Africa; 2) TICAD has advocated the principles of "ownership and partnership"; and 3) TICAD is based on the conviction that business will be an important driving force for sustainable development in Africa.
- At TICAD 7, business promotion became top of the agenda. Japan and the co-organizers held a "Public-Private Business Dialogue" to provide an opportunity for business people to discuss business challenges directly with African leaders. Also, Japan launched the "New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa (NAPSA)", where Africa itself explores root causes of conflict and measures to address them.

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1. TICAD is a multilateral conference for development

The 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 7) was held in Yokohama at the end of last August. TICAD is a summit-level international conference to which the Japanese prime minister invites national leaders from all African countries. Japan, the United Nations, the UN Development Program, the World Bank and the African Union Commission are the co-organizers of TICAD, and non-African countries, international organizations and civil society groups also participate. Various countries are holding partnership fora with Africa in recent years. However, they tend to be bilateral assistance meetings. What sets TICAD aside from them is that TICAD is a multilateral framework to not only enhance bilateral relations with each country, but also discuss Africa's development issues, in terms of economic, society and peace and stability.

A quarter of a century has passed since TICAD was first held in 1993. TICAD grew with each round, and this TICAD 7 conference was the largest ever. More than ten thousand people attended, including heads of state/ government from 42 countries, and approximately 240 side events were held. Why does TICAD have such a centripetal force? Why does Africa welcome Japan to lead the development conference? Let me answer these questions.

2. What is appealing about TICAD?

First, TICAD has provided a suitable ground for connecting good examples of Asian development to Africa. Although the "United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa" (UN-NADAF) was adopted in 1991, Western countries had no additional capacity to tackle African development issues and faced a problem of "aid fatigue" due to the disappointing results of aid being ineffective in Africa, and their hands were stretched with aid to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union at the time. Japan, nevertheless, thought that African development should not be forgotten and held the first TICAD in 1993. Moreover, Asian countries that had been underdeveloped in the past were making great strides ahead of African eyes. The pathway for development and economic/political reform in Asian countries attracted interests from Africa. Consequently, African countries welcomed TICAD as a way of learning from Asian approaches and experiences.

Secondly, TICAD has from its outset advocated the principle of "ownership and partnership", meaning that self-help efforts are the premise for providing aid. Japan stressed that the need for the recipient countries to formulate its own economic and

social development plans. This was not a mainstream concept in economic cooperation with Africa at that time. When offering aid programs, European and American countries tended to “guide” the economic policies and even “instruct” how to administer their governments of African recipient countries. “Structural adjustment programs” by the IMF and the World Bank are typical examples of this. The aid provided by Western countries toward African countries seem to embrace concepts of “charity” and “mission” likely derived from Christianity. The importance of “charity” and “mission” cannot be denied, but sometimes the underlying assumption could be: “Africa is poor, so we will give. Africa is ignorant, so we will teach.” However, Japan thinks that economic and political reforms will not bear fruit if not done by its own initiative. It could be said that the recipients would not get anything if they just wait to be given and taught. Surprisingly, Africa welcomed this argument because the idea is based on a premise that “you can do it yourself.” The attitude of trusting in the potential of Africa resonated with Africans’ self-esteem.

Third, TICAD has believed that business would be an important driving force for sustainable development in Africa. This idea was not widely shared among the experts of development assistance; business was generally regarded as the pursuit of profit maximization, leading to exploitation and increased injustice; therefore, public aid was necessary. However, Japan witnessed examples of how poverty was alleviated and how politics and society matured along with economic growth led by commercial sector in various parts of Asia. So, Japan expected economic growth through trade and investment as a promoter of African development.


Donor countries and institutions are now placing importance on ownership and public-private partnership. It can be said that TICAD had good foresight.

3. Achievements and prospects of TICAD7

The outcome of TICAD 7 are extensions of the above-mentioned points. First, business promotion became top of the agenda. However, understandably, Japanese companies remain hesitant to expand into Africa. It is because in Africa, basic infrastructures for transportation and electricity are still underdeveloped, administrative procedures are unclear, intellectual property protection and legal systems are also weak, and it is difficult to secure human resources for management. Therefore, Japan and the co-organizers held a “Public-Private Business Dialogue” as an opportunity for Japanese business people to discuss these challenges directly with the leaders of African

countries. Going forward, TICAD will develop into a framework that specifically addresses the strengthening of business relationships.

Next, in order to prevent conflicts in Africa, Japan launched the “New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa (NAPSA)”. In what sense is it “new”? Traditional approaches would try to detect undemocratic regimes and cases of human rights violations, and to punish “perpetrators”. However, a region or country will remain vulnerable to conflict without the will and ability to practice democracy and human rights on the ground. Through the NAPSA, Japan will come up with an approach through which Africa itself explores the root causes of conflict and resolutions to it from their own experiences. The first step in conflict prevention is to strengthen national institutions and establish national unity. Under the NAPSA, African-led peacebuilding activities, institution building, and efforts to strengthen the capabilities of governments through human resource development will be promoted.

TICAD will never be satisfied with rhetoric and will always seek specific action plans and the implementation. Every year, follow-up is done at the ministerial level to monitor and ensure progress. Going forward, I would like readers to pay attention to how the visions set out at TICAD 7 will progress. 

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