

AJISS-Commentary

The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies

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Institute for International
Policy Studies



The Japan Forum on
International Relations

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The Japan Institute of
International Affairs
(Secretariat)

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Peace and Security

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No.18. 11 December 2007

GLOBAL HEALTH AND JAPAN'S INITIATIVES

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At the Denver G8 Summit in June 1997, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto stressed before his counterparts the need for coordinated international action against the spread of parasitic diseases. Japan developed this idea into more concrete plans and announced the “Global Parasite Control Strategy for the 21st Century” at the following year’s Birmingham Summit.


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Termed the Hashimoto Initiative (HI), this was a landmark move by Japan in that the country started exercising leadership in the global fight against infectious diseases. The initiative was also significant in that it presented a long-term vision for parasitic disease control. In contrast to the piecemeal approaches being taken at the time, the HI advocated “sustainable” measures with a focus on human resource development and education by calling for the establishment of centers in Asia and Africa dedicated to this end. The Japanese plans enjoyed a high level of support and assistance from international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) – rare for the country's aid programs, most of which are conducted on a bilateral basis. It should also be remembered that the initiative influenced WHO's coining of the term “neglected tropical diseases” (NTD), which has generated a worldwide movement by international organizations, national governments, private organizations and pharmaceutical companies to tackle health problems in developing countries.

Japan has since then announced a series of initiatives to address the problems of infectious diseases and Africa. Under the Okinawa Infectious Disease Initiative (IDI) announced at the 2000 G8 Summit hosted by Japan, Japan pledged to contribute US\$3 billion over a five-year period to the world's efforts to combat infectious and parasitic diseases. It actually provided a total of US\$5.8 billion in assistance, an amount that far exceeds the original target. The IDI also led to the birth in 2002 of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the largest international fund to combat three of the world's most devastating diseases. In 2003, Japan articulated its basic policy toward Africa in the name of Japan's Initiative for Cooperation for Africa, based on the concept of human security. Furthermore, to help achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals - namely Goal 4 (reducing child mortality), Goal 5 (improving maternal health), and Goal 6 (combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases) - Prime Minister Jun-ichiro Koizumi announced in 2005 the Health and Development Initiative (HDI) as a

successor to the IDI. Japan pledged to spend US\$ 5.8 billion under this initiative, building on the success of the IDI.

As for the Global Fund, Japan made an initial donation of US\$327 million in 2002 and then an additional donation of US\$500 million in 2005, making the country an important contributor alongside Western countries. Japan has also served as a board member and helped establish the organization and operation of the fund. No doubt that the success of a series of Japanese initiatives that have won support of international aid organizations and governments enabled Japan to play such an active role.

The world today faces new infectious diseases other than malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS. The recent expansion of avian influenza was one such example. Since Southeast Asia was the region most severely affected by this flu, the expansion prompted Japan to coordinate cross-border efforts to stockpile medicine in collaboration with UN agencies and countries in the region, another example of a successful initiative taken by Japan in the global fight against infectious diseases. 

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