

Japan's Diplomacy towards Africa: Strengthening Each Individual, One by One

Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan,
on the Occasion of His Visit to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

[Provisional translation]

January 14th, 2014

Your Excellency Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

Your Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union,

Dear friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have come to Addis Ababa, home to the African Union, in order to fulfill the pledge I made at TICAD V. In Yokohama, I said, "I want absolutely to set foot on African soil at the earliest time possible." It gives me great pleasure to fulfill this promise I made to you.

As I begin my remarks, I would like to reflect for a moment on the achievements of H.E. Mr. Nelson Mandela, the late former President of the Republic of South Africa and, together with all of you, renew my spirit of respect for him.

People must never lose their sense of hope. People who have lost hope stop making their own efforts to intercede in their fate, and instead turn into a slave to that fate. I believe Mr. Mandela taught us that through his firsthand experiences throughout his life.

We can only say that the world has now lost a star of truly great magnitude.

Now, my dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Through the entire TICAD process, a great many Japanese have acquired a predisposition to conjure up images of Africa in bright colors. A considerable number of Japanese believe that Africa is the hope for Japan. With this firmly in mind, here I will state once more that the Government of Japan will carry out each and every one of the commitments made at TICAD V without fail.

Today I also have something new to share with you. Japan is providing Yen loans to

the Enhanced Private Sector Assistance for Africa, or “EPSA,” which was created together with the African Development Bank to foster the private sector development in Africa.

In 2012, we made a commitment to provide Yen loans of US\$1 billion over five years. We have now revised that to double the amount of the loans we will provide over this same period, to US\$2 billion.

(A Japan that values each individual)

What can Japan do as a contribution only Japan can provide, in order for Africa to realize its brilliant future?

I recall that at TICAD V, one of the African leaders said to me, “Only the Japanese companies teach us the morals of what it means to work and what the joy of labor is.”

His words moved me, because they struck me as summing up quite marvelously what the Japanese companies and the anonymous Japanese people working there are trying to convey.

Japanese companies are places for bringing forth profits. But even before that, it is a place for people to learn and devise new ideas together, and share not only their hardships but also their joys.

Japanese companies value each person’s efforts that arise from his or her inner motivation. They also consider individuals who make efforts without being instructed to do so as their most precious resource. These have been the quintessential spirit of Japanese companies.

We find this same mindset as the reason that Japan grew. I think the reason can be found in the efforts of the countless individual Japanese who worked hard tirelessly, with the desire to make our future brighter than today, and the belief that this “brighter future” is most certainly within our reach.

What I would like all of you to understand is that Japanese companies that come to Africa never fail to bring with them this type of managerial philosophy.

Under this philosophy, companies seek to elicit ingenuity by enhancing the competency of each individual.

Let's say for example that a company wants to sell outboard motors for fishing boats. Normally, a company wouldn't go so far as to teach fishing methods to the fishing community. But if the company introduces to the fishing community a method enabling them to expand their radius of operation, then they will in fact enjoy steady sales of outboard motors, even if this is a roundabout path to that goal.

Japanese companies use such methods when selling their goods. It is a philosophy that aims to have each individual customer seek by him or herself the true empowerment that flows from making a technology or skill "one's own." This is the method that Yamaha Motor Co. has actually employed in Mauritania.

Yamaha went still further to assist in the construction of Mauritania's first shipbuilding yard. Yamaha Motor sent Mauritians to Japan, where they acquired skills in shipbuilding. This February, the very first fishing vessel to be "made in Mauritania" will officially be launched from the shipyard that was established in this way.

When Japanese companies that value each and every individual come to Africa, a win-win relationship in the truest sense can emerge.

If the countries in which these companies begin to operate have a set of values in which work is perceived as drudgery, this will come to change as the local community interacts with the Japanese company.

This is because it is even possible for a workplace that values the ingenuity and efforts of each individual to become an enjoyable place.

As I see it, this gradual cultural shift that has occurred—and is occurring even now—in Southeast Asian countries into which a large number of Japanese companies have advanced brings with it this kind of change.

There is no doubt in my mind that the next ones to experience this, with Japanese companies as the catalyst, will be the countries and the people of Africa.

I would like to address now the representatives of Japanese companies that have accompanied me.

I urge you to weave the tapestry of growth that you have woven over the years in Asia, this time using Africa's most vibrant colors of thread.

(The philosophy of kaizen)

The *kaizen* approach—it was H.E. Mr. Meles Zenawi Asres, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia who took notice of this management philosophy that originated in Japan, in which each and every individual is valued at the workplace, and he envisaged the potential for its practical application before anyone else.

Kaizen starts with *Seiri*, that is, organizing and *Seiton*, that is, arranging things in an orderly fashion.

“Organizing” means getting rid of wasteful or useless materials from the factory floor and systematizing the flow.

“Arranging” means setting out the tools necessary to tackle the line having a newly-improved flow, in a way that makes these tools easy to access.

Through organizing and arranging the line, it becomes exemplary in appearance and performance. People everywhere recognize the beauty of the line and enjoy a sense of accomplishment, regardless of national boundaries or cultural differences. As the production efficiency of that same line increases, the sense of achievement escalates still further.

In this way, *kaizen* is applicable to any country or culture as a type of managerial know-how.

But that is not all. As people come to be engaged in the *kaizen* process, a culture that values the creativity and ingenuity of each individual begins to permeate the workplace, which shows the profound nature of *kaizen*.

Kaizen is, at any rate, a thoroughly “bottom-up” approach. It is not top-down. It incorporates confidence in each and every individual to support initiative at a grassroots level. *Kaizen* is a philosophy grounded in universal trust in human beings.

The people working also accumulate modest achievements, cultivating in them a steady confidence. *Kaizen* is also an action that fosters self-esteem.

As each individual gains definite confidence and works tirelessly every day, the company will grow. As such companies and workplaces grow in number one by one, society gradually becomes stable, and in time, positive soil for democracy will emerge there.

Furthermore, all of this is something that is also shared in Africa’s rich cultures and way

of thinking that values human beings, both of which have always existed here. It can perhaps be said that *kaizen* is a technique for Africa to rediscover its indigenous state.

If Africa interacts deeply with Japan and Japanese companies, it will surely be easy for it to leverage its original strength. I believe that Africa will be able to acquire definite seeds towards the future.

In addition, what Japan's diplomacy towards Africa aims to place its focus from now is all about Africa's future itself.

We will center the axis of Japan's diplomacy towards Africa on two groups: young people, who will without a doubt shoulder the responsibility for the future Africa, and women, who will give life to Africa's future generations.

In Africa, the reality is that women are responsible for all kinds of aspects of rural life. In that sense the empowerment of women holds twofold importance.

I would like to state that what narrows down the focus to youth and women, each and every one of them, is Japan's diplomacy towards Africa.

(Bringing a bright future to youth)

A Japanese NPO called "Community Road Empowerment," or "CORE," provides an excellent illustration of this.

This is a story of villages whose only roads are bumpy and rough. In order to ship the rice they cultivate, it has been necessary to transport the crop to a place where a truck is able to enter. This is a task for the entire family, and thus the children are unable to go to school.

At these times, the NPO "CORE" teaches villagers how to make a simple pavement. Their method uses sandbags. When the road reaches the village and the truck for shipping the crops is able to enter, the children can be freed from the work of carrying the heavy crops and will be able to go to school.

Therefore building a road means enabling children to go to school.

In time, business people contracting for road-building projects appeared among the African youth who had themselves learned how to build a sandbag pavement. And what's more, some have been from the slums.

The future of Africa hinges upon motivated young people who overcome difficulties through their own power.

In Africa, the youth population continues to increase. If we can reveal a bright future to young people, the future of Africa will without a doubt also become bright.

At TICAD V, we mutually confirmed the great importance of vocational training, and Japan pledged to establish human resource development centers for business and industry.

As the first step towards this goal, it has been determined that the “Ethiopia KAIZEN Institute” will expand the content of its programs and be launched as the first human resource development center for business and industry in Africa.

The African Business Education Initiative for Youth, or “ABE Initiative,” is also moving forward. Under this initiative, young people who will shoulder responsibility for the future of business in Japan and Africa will be chosen from around Africa to study at Japanese universities.

During their studies in Japan, they will also work as interns at Japanese companies. This is an initiative which seeks to have these young people cultivate networks linking Japan and Africa someday.

In Japan, more than 58 prominent universities have already indicated that they would like to accept these students.

Japan will also be conducting the “Sports for Tomorrow” program. Japan, which will host the 2020 Olympics, wishes to assist in having African youth learn the joy of playing sports through direct experience.

There is already a young Japanese in Burkina Faso who is working to spread baseball. There is also a Japanese coach who has fostered table tennis in Morocco with great care.

These are the achievements of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers.

From now on we have great expectations for them to cultivate a greater number of Olympians and Paralympians from all around Africa and sending them off to Tokyo for the Games.

(An Africa in which women shine)

Leaving the topic of youth at that, from now I would like to talk about the most important topic in sustaining growth, both for Africa, and indeed for Japan as well.

That topic is how to utilize the power of women. The Japanese economy is unable to grow without women shining as they work.

“Abenomics” will not succeed without “womenomics.” For Japan, making the best use of women’s potential is not a luxury or anything of the sort; it is a necessity.

I believe that the same thing can be said about the future of Africa.

My understanding is that in Africa, it has been entirely the women—the mothers and wives—who have managed the households, anticipated the future, and managed risk.

I am fully confident that imparting knowledge to women, bringing their latent potential into full bloom, and raising their position in society will be a way forward that leads directly to developing and to enhancing the sophistication of African society and African industry.

There is a young woman who has been putting this into practice. .

In Mozambique, in an impoverished town with poor sanitary conditions, Ms. Sayaka Kuriyama has been teaching the local women various kinds of knowledge necessary for daily living.

Ms. Kuriyama started an NPO by the name of “Achante Mama,” which means “Thank you, everyone,” working entirely by herself.

The women who attend the training sessions she holds on health, pregnancy, and other topics receive one stamp for each session they attend. When they collect twenty stamps, they are able to exchange it for a mosquito net or other items.

Perhaps she saw a similar type of system when she was working at a women’s fashion shop in Tokyo.

The Government of Japan will not fall behind the level that Ms. Kuriyama has set in her work, which she continues to pursue entirely by herself.

We would like to give women the opportunity to get sufficient education and training and acquire agricultural techniques, enabling them to participate in decision-making in their rural communities.

We also wish to assist in increasing the school enrollment rate for girls.

It is also our goal to increase the number of midwives and nurses and expand universal health coverage from pregnancy through to childbirth, child raising, and nutritional support. We also intend to pass on the mindset of “human security,” which Japan has been advancing.

When African women shine, Africa will most certainly be truly radiant.

I would like to underscore that for Japan, the main point within our diplomacy towards Africa is to contribute to making African women shine.

(Cooperation with the AU)

Finally, I would like to discuss cooperation between the AU and Japan.

A panoramic look at a world map reveals that Africa, with Europe to its north, Asia to its east, and North and South America to its west, quite literally stands on the world’s center stage.

Japan wishes to support the efforts of the AU, which provides the driving power for this Africa at center stage.

Exactly one year ago, in response to the crisis in Mali, Japan was one of the very first countries to announce assistance.

In order to respond to conflicts and disasters in Africa, Japan is now preparing to implement assistance of approximately US\$ 320 million.

This includes, for example, US\$3 million in support for the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic.

Japan will also implement humanitarian assistance towards the Central African Republic.

In addition, Japan is also preparing to implement assistance of approximately US\$25 million to respond to the deteriorating situation in South Sudan.

We will also send experts to the AUC to offer Japan’s intellectual assets, including, notably, the concept of *kaizen*.

(Concluding remarks)

Yesterday I held a summit meeting with H.E. Prime Minister Hailemariam, where we decided to connect Addis Ababa and Tokyo through direct flights.

The Olympics will return to Tokyo in 2020. I would like to express my appreciation once more for Tokyo having received so much support from Africa.

I sincerely hope that the direct flights between Tokyo and Addis Ababa will bring many visitors to Tokyo.

Africa has now become the continent that carries the hopes of the world through the latent potential of its resources and its dynamic economic growth.

In order to impart a lasting force for living up to these hopes, I believe that it is important for each individual in Africa to have confidence in his or her own abilities and to build up efforts going forward, in order to forge a future.

Today, I thus spoke about the useful strengths that Japan and Japanese companies enjoy, which can help make this a reality.

I myself would like to visit Africa multiple times as necessary, in order to support vigorously these efforts to bring about a brilliant future for Africa.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.