


TICAD7: Private Sector to Lead the Way



Shigeru Ushio, Director-General of the African Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

THE Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7) will be held in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, from August 28 to 30. We interviewed Shigeru Ushio, Director-General of the African Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about the significance of TICAD and the discussions to be conducted at TICAD 7.

What do you think of the current situation in Africa?

The annual average growth rate in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2017 was 5.1%, exceeding the global average of 3.8%. The population of Sub-Saharan Africa was 1.25 billion in 2017, but it is projected to reach 1.7 billion by 2030 and even to exceed 2.5 billion by 2050. The African market is expected to expand, and an increasing number of companies are predicted to make inroads into the African markets from around the world. In Africa, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which is aimed at creating a single market, went into effect in May this year, and investment and trade are expected to be revitalized even further.

In addition, major cross-border conflicts have broken out in many parts of Africa in the past. Such conflicts have now reduced in number and scale, however. Nonetheless, the economic gaps are widening among different African countries and domestically, and poverty is still a serious problem.

Japan held TICAD I in 1993. What role has TICAD played in African issues since then?

In the early 1990s, immediately after the end of the Cold War, the international community's interest in Africa faded. In this situation, TICAD provided an opportunity to renew the international community's interest. Currently, development forums on Africa are being established in a range of countries and regions. It can be said that TICAD pioneered these forums.

Photo: Tadashi Aizawa

TICAD's major characteristics are its inclusiveness and openness. Japan takes the initiative in holding this conference, and it is organized jointly by the Japanese government, the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the African Union Commission (AUC). International organizations, partner countries, private companies and civil society organizations as well as African countries can participate if they wish.

TICAD has placed emphasis on realizing the basic philosophy of African ownership and the international community's partnership; that is, support for African self-help efforts. This philosophy is pervading Africa and the international community as a result of more than twenty-five years of TICAD.

What will be the main themes of the discussions conducted at TICAD7?


One of the themes to be discussed is the promotion of private investment and human resources development through the collaboration between the public and private sectors. Initially, TICAD focused on development assistance, conflict and refugee issues. Investment and trade have been major topics since TICAD IV in 2008, however. Many Japanese companies participated in TICAD VI, which was held in Kenya in 2016. At TICAD7, companies will commit themselves more deeply to it as leading players of TICAD.

Another important theme to be discussed is the health area, and in particular how to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) so that all human beings have equal access to medical and health services. UHC is not sufficiently available in Africa, and there are outbreaks of infectious diseases, including Ebola virus disease. At TICAD7, the participants will also have a wide range of discussions about disaster damage control, education and women's empowerment.

The third theme to be discussed is the promo-

tion of peace and stability. In recent years, Africa has handled peacemaking and conflict prevention by itself. In 2018, Ethiopia and Eritrea, which had been in conflict for many years, signed a peace agreement. In addition, in Central Africa and South Sudan as well, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organization in East Africa, acted as a mediator, and Africa has been implementing initiatives for achieving peace by itself. Japan supports this peace process through IGAD. At TICAD7, the participants will have discussions based on the concept of supporting Africa's own proactive efforts for peace and stability.

Please tell us about the support that the Japanese government will provide to Africa in the years to come.

By promoting human resources development and quality infrastructure development, we will encourage private companies to make inroads into Africa. With regard to human resources development, the African Business Education Initiative for Youth (ABE Initiative), which Japan has implemented since 2014, is evaluated highly by African countries. In addition, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provides support for vocational training centers in many countries. Nurturing industrial human resources will lead to boosting private investment, which creates jobs. Moreover, African peace and stability are also essential to facilitating the stability of business activities. It is necessary to support the construction of systems, including legal systems, through human resources development. The entry of numerous Japanese companies into Africa and the advancement and expansion of their businesses in Africa are vital to the future of Japan and Africa. The Japanese government will back private companies' advances into Africa. 

Interview by OSAMU SAWAJI
