

Japan Seeks to Outbid China in Quest for African Support

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Ramesh Jaura and Kawakami Osamu

Two reports follow on the vast, and vastly expensive, Tokyo International Conference on African Development designed to showcase Japan's aid to Africa. The conference, held in Yokohama with the presence of 51 of 53 African nations, was attended by 40 Presidents of African nations. The first report by Ramesh Jaura concentrates on the proposed Japanese aid package, as Japan proposes to double both trade and investment in Africa within five years. The second report by the Yomiuri Shimbun's Kawakami Osamu highlights the real stakes for Japan: the effort to outbid China whose burgeoning trade, investment and presence in Africa is a cause of Japanese, and the continued pursuit of the chimera of a Japanese UN security council seat. Neither report mentions either oil and energy or military strategic issues. MS



In a keynote address at a three-day conference that kicked off on Tuesday in Japan's port city of Yokohama, Tanzania's President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete welcomed the announcement by Japan's Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo to double Japan's ODA in the next five years, bringing annual aid from the current US\$900 million to \$1.8 billion by 2012.

But, he added: "Africa needs more ODA to develop its infrastructure, develop its human capital, and improve the provision of basic social and economic services."

Japan To Double Aid to Africa by 2012

Ramesh Jaura

African leaders are in Japan seeking an increase in official development assistance (ODA) and a boost to trade and investment.



Pres. Kikwete and Prime Minister Fukuda

Kikwete was addressing the fourth round of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Speaking on behalf of 52 African governments, the Tanzanian President said: "Besides the increase in ODA, which is highly appreciated, TICAD needs to go further."

He said there was a need for increased trade between Africa and Japan, more Japanese investment, and "more involvement and active presence and participation of the Japanese private sector on the continent."

Kikwete and other African heads of state also welcomed a Japanese package that includes up to US\$4 billion of soft loans to Africa over the next five years to help improve infrastructure, and the doubling of grant aid and technical cooperation for the region over the next five years, bringing the five-year average to \$1.4 billion from \$700 million at present.

But they stressed the need to take into account all countries on the African continent, and not focus the measures on South Africa and Egypt, which absorb 85% of Japanese investment in Africa.

"We must attach importance to the local potentialities of the African countries - particularly in the face of the current food crisis," Ohata Akihiro, a senior leader of the New Komei Party that is part of the ruling coalition government in Japan led by the Liberal Democratic Party told IPS. Ohata pleaded for exploring needs for technology and aid, keeping in view concerns about the environment and human rights.

Contradicting reports in some newspapers that along with China and India, Japan was joining the run for Africa's rich resources, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Kodama Kazuo said Japan was keeping up a high-level policy dialogue with African leaders and development

partners that it had launched at the first round of TICAD in 1993 - when "aid fatigue" had set in after the end of the Cold War.

Kodama told IPS that the process continued with TICAD II in 1998 and TICAD III in 2003, and has evolved into a major global framework to facilitate initiatives for African development.

"The [present] conference comes at a time when Africa's average economic growth rate has reached 6%, peace-building and democratization are taking hold, and countries are tackling climate change and environmental concerns," Kodama said.

This view is supported by a World Bank study released ahead of the conference. According to the study, sub-Saharan Africa is reversing its two-decade decline in economic and social development. That is reason enough for the organizers to give a forward-looking title to the conference, "Towards a vibrant Africa: A continent of hope and opportunity".

Fukuda said Tuesday: "If we were to liken the history of African development to a volume of literature, then what we are about to do now is open to a new page, titled the 'century of African growth'. In the future, Africa will become a powerful engine driving the growth of the world."

The conference, TICAD IV, is being attended by leaders from 52 African countries including some 40 heads of state and government, 22 donor nations along with the European Union (EU), 12 Asian countries, and officials from 16 African regional organizations and 55 international organizations.

The conference has three priorities: boosting economic growth; ensuring human security, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and consolidation of peace and democratization; and addressing environmental issues and climate change.

The conference is co-organized by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Bank.

The results of TICAD IV will be fed into the G8 summit in Hokkaido in Japan, scheduled to begin July 7. "We want to bring African priorities to the summit of the world's major industrial nations," Kodama said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Kodama said TICAD IV will conclude with the adoption of the "Yokohama Declaration" outlining guiding principles and approaches to African development among TICAD stakeholders, as well as a "Yokohama Action Plan" and a "Yokohama Follow-up Mechanism" laying out a road map for action-oriented initiatives with measurable targets.

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China Rivalry Behind Japan's Bid for African support at TICAD IV

Kawakami Osamu

The government believes it has built a concrete diplomatic footing with African countries at the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), which closed Friday. However, it is unclear if TICAD IV will lead to African support for Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. Fifty-one of 53 African nations took part in TICAD IV. Of the 51 participating nations, 40 sent their presidents, vice presidents or premiers.

A senior Foreign Ministry official said: "TICAD IV became one of the biggest international conferences ever held by the Japanese

government. I feel that trust between African countries' and Japan has crystallized."

Japan's hosting of the conference has fueled its rivalry with China over Africa. China has been economically penetrating African countries for natural resources, and in 2006, it held the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing. Thirty-five heads of state from African countries took part in the forum.



Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and President Thabo Mbeki in South Africa in 2006

Government officials are pleased by the number of leaders that participated in TICAD IV. "TICAD's participation figures are comparable to FOCAC's," one official said.

At the conference, the Japanese government announced assistance measures for African countries. One measure was a promise to double Japan's official development assistance in the next five years. This included providing a loan of up to 4 billion dollars in yen.

At a Thursday meeting on escalating grain prices, Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo said: "Japan promised to provide assistance measures to Africa. These measures include

supporting food production expansion and improving agricultural productivity. We're prepared to make further contributions."

China's total trade with African countries came to 73.5 billion dollars in 2007. Total trade between Japan and Africa was 26.6 billion dollars in 2007. "This conference has been assisting African countries since 1993. As this year's host, we wanted to be more competitive than China," a government official said.



China-Africa summit 2006

Increasing government loans to Africa aims to support African countries' development of infrastructure such as roads. In turn, it will be easier for domestic companies to expand investments there. However, some experts point out that the 4 billion dollars loan looks bigger than it actually is because previous debt repaid by countries will be deducted from the amount of the new loans. Thus, the net amount the countries will receive is expected to be less than 4 billion dollars.

There were instances when the conference did not go as Japan expected. The government planned to include a statement in the Yokohama Declaration to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent from current levels by

2050. However, the government withdrew this provision after encountering fierce opposition from South Africa, a major polluter.

Fukuda held bilateral talks with 40 leaders of African countries and seven private sector Africa supporters. At the meeting, Fukuda asked for support of U.N. Security Council reform and Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. The government hopes to gather momentum for Security Council reform through support from African countries, which hold about 25 percent of U.N. General Assembly seats.

Fukuda met with 47 people during the summit and saw varying responses. John Kufuor, president of Ghana, was a strong supporter. "We will support Japan becoming a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council," he said. However, some countries were not as positive. Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba said, "I will take the issue back to my country and examine it."

A government official said: "Most participating countries showed understanding or support on the [United Nations] issue. However, only a few countries went beyond their past stances and expressed their support for our bid." "Algeria, Egypt, Libya said they won't approve the Security Council reform if they can't become a permanent member themselves. I'm worried some countries are showing superficial support for Japan while in their hearts they are less than supportive," he added.

Kawakami Osamu is a staff writer for The Yomiuri Shimbun.

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