

Title: Development of Japan-Sudan relationship and Japanese contributions in 60 years after the 'Year of Africa'

Takashi HATTORI, Ambassador of Japan to Sudan

The year of 2020 dawned with the emergence and rapid spread of the new deadly virus, which still haunts us until this very day. The entire globe faces the challenge of how to put an end to this crisis. For the later generations, 2020 will be remembered as the year of global pandemic.

Having said so, we must not forget that this year commemorates the 60th anniversary of the 'Year of Africa'. In 1960, African continent witnessed a variety of nations achieving self-determination and independence. Since then, the presence of African countries in international community is becoming larger and larger, especially for that the continent hosts the steadily growing population and abundant natural resources. With such main driving forces for the economic growth, African countries have been luring foreign investments as one of the largest unexploited market in the world.

Needles to mention, Japan has been maintaining a friendly and mutually benefitting relationship with African states since their births. The bond between Japan and Africa is becoming ever much stronger in recent years, and the trait of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, namely TICAD, illustrates such evolving relations. Though it stemmed from the aim to foster the development of Africa in 1993, the latest TICAD7 in 2019 focused more on the establishment and invigoration of partnerships in the private sector, for example creating the Public- Private Business Dialogue between Japan and Africa. In two of the plenary sessions, active discussions on topics such as economic diversification, industrialization, quality infrastructure, and trades and investments were seen with concrete commitments from many Japanese firms.

However, Japan does not only deem Africa as an attractive business destination. At TICAD7, Prime Minister Abe proposed a New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa, shortened as NAPSA, the target of which is to boost the institutional building and governance enhancement for African states, especially under- or post- conflicts, to restore the country and its people. In line with the underlying spirits of TICAD, which are the partnership and ownership, Japan supports the self-efforts of Africa to consolidate peace and stability, as well as to

cultivate a good capacity to address the foreseeable security risks. The pursuit of SDGs is also one of pillars of the TICAD and general Japan-Africa relation. The expansion of Universal Health Coverage, construction of disaster resilient society, and the provision of education are our utmost priority to ensure the healthily development of the whole African continent.

Turning our eyes to Japan-Sudan relationship, even before the establishment of JICA office in Khartoum in 1989, we have been providing numerous development projects under the themes of 1) consolidation of peace, 2) basic human needs and 3) diversification of industries. For the recent example, the “Capacity development project for irrigation scheme management in River Nile State” greatly improved the agricultural productivity of communities through dispatching experts and offering sequential trainings for more effective water provision to the deserted land. The long-lasting activities of JICA and other forms of cooperation gave Japan a unique and professional role as a developmental partner to Sudan.

In addition, Japanese government has been traditionally one of the representative donors for the humanitarian activities. 6 million USD were funded in March 2020 to international organizations such as the UN agencies for their projects to fill the urgent need of the people who suffers the damage of conflicts and disasters. As a response to the damage caused by the desert locust and COVID-19, Japan also granted emergency aids amounting to 12.3 million USD. These attempts, sided by the long-term developmental cooperation, casts sizable impact to the population on both aspects that they offer immediate assistance to those who are in the grave need of basic living material and that it sustains the lives of people who will bear the impact of the ongoing socioeconomic reformation.

As a new Japanese ambassador to Sudan, I am honored to commence my duty in this memorable year both in terms of the 60th anniversary of the 'Year of Africa' and of the 2nd year of the historic revolution in Sudan. I am more than keen to contribute to the strengthening of our bilateral relationship with the newly democratized Sudan, and also as one of the responsible members of the Friends of Sudan community. Although the transitional government has been tenaciously revamping the structure of the state, I understand that there remains a number of tasks and conundrums to be solved such as subsidy curtail, long-lasting inflation and depreciation of the currency. On top of such conventional issues, the corona

pandemic devastated the population and the economy of Sudan.

With these circumstances in mind, I am planning to put more emphasis on our activities in the fields of the health and medical care, as well as the independency of the Sudanese economy. In addition to the ongoing support in the health sector, such as the support to hospitals or the provision of clean drinking water, it is necessary now to build responsive measures to the COVID-19 spread. Along with this, to revitalize the economy, increasing the productivity in agriculture is a must since 60% of Sudanese soil is arable with more advanced knowledge and technology. General human resource skill up and development, through for instance vocational trainings, is also a key element for establishing sustainable and self-controlled economy in Sudan.

A constant economic and technological advancement also requires an active trade and investment. I have a background in working in the private sector and had been in charge of African business development for more than 40 years. Utilizing this experience and knowledge, I would like to stimulate the interrelation of private companies, especially illuminating Japanese firms how promising Sudan is as a commercial market and how attractive Sudanese companies are as business partners. With more alive inter-sectorial exchanges, it becomes more feasible to design and constitute investment-friendly environment in Sudan.

To deepen and cherish Japan-Sudan relation, which naturally consists one of the important pieces of a broader Japan-Africa relation, 2020 is a salient cornerstone year. Japan will more eagerly commit to Sudan and the entire Africa as their partner, and will continue its support and collaboration from multi-angled perspective.

End.