

AFRECO Review

Association of African Economy and Development (AFRECO), Tokyo, Japan / www.afreco.jp

TICAD 30th Anniversary: Dialogue with Mr Tetsuro Yano, President, AFRACO

Tetsuya Fukunaga, Counsellor, AFRACO

October 2023

--- This month marks 30 years since TICAD I (the First Tokyo International Conference on African Development) was held in Tokyo for two days from 5 October 1993. As President of AFRACO and being called “Mr Africa” by the Heads of State, Ministers and Ambassadors from African countries, what are your comments on this 30th anniversary?

For the past thirty years, I have been committed to helping develop the African continent and solve its problems as one of my lifeworks.

After serving three terms as a member of the Prefectural Assembly of Tochigi, about 100 km north-northeast of Tokyo, I was elected to the House of Councillors in 1992. In working in Japan's central politics, I decided to join the Foreign Affairs Committee, specialising in diplomacy and security, and I made my first trip to Africa in 1994, visiting South Africa and Angola. Until then, I had not thought of Africa as a close neighbour in terms of distance and presence and had seen it as a different world. However, it was this visit that led me to discover the different world, Africa, and to develop an affinity for the continent. It was also a trip that renewed my sense of mission as a politician.

In South Africa, I had the opportunity to meet H.E. Mr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, President, H.E. Mr Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki, Vice President, and H.E. Mr Frederik Willem de Klerk, Vice President. The abolition of apartheid was the result of the efforts of many people, but meeting them made me realise that what changed the

country was the knee-jerk talks between H.E. Mr Mandela and H.E. Mr de Klerk. In Angola, I witnessed the efforts of H.E. Mr José Eduardo dos Santos, President, at the end of the long civil war. Despite the ups and downs of the economy, political decisions brought reform to a turbulent Africa, which is very different from Japan, where people enjoyed a peaceful life some fifty years after the Second World War.

At that time, Japan was in the midst of an economic downturn after the bubble burst, and we felt that we were being forced to live hard lives in our own way. My first visit to Africa allowed me to get a glimpse of the ownership of politicians and to rethink from the ground up what a politician should be. I also began to ask myself what I could do for Africa and what kind of partnerships I could develop. That way of being is no different today.

TICAD, which began the year before my first visit to Africa, is not a one-off international conference, but a rare global initiative to review the decisions taken at the previous conference and link them to the next TICAD. That is why it is called the TICAD process. At the same time, TICAD is now organised jointly with the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the African Union Commission (AUC), while being led by the Japanese government. I have seen, especially during my time as Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, how TICAD has been built on the tremendous efforts of all the co-organisers, who understand each other's position and work towards agreement. I believe it is due to

the efforts of all these people that TICAD continues to be an important pillar of Japanese diplomacy.

On another point, it was a truly wise decision for H.E. Mr Yoshiro Mori, former Prime Minister, to establish the Japan-African Union (AU) Parliamentary Friendship League, and I worked with the League as its Vice President since July 2003. Following the results of the 3rd Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2006, I have asked Japanese ambassadors in Africa to encourage as many African leaders as possible to attend TICAD IV in 2008, in order to mobilise African consensus. As a result, 41 heads of state and government were welcomed to TICAD IV in Yokohama, making it the largest international conference in the history of Japanese diplomacy. The League also led Japanese politicians to participate in the TICAD process and build friendly partnerships with African countries and cities across the country.

In this context, I am very proud and honoured to have been nicknamed “Mr Africa”. This is also why I am committed to working on Africa in a way that is not dissimilar to the efforts of various people.

--- As you mentioned, TICAD has created a pioneering and unique platform in the international community, including the recognition of ownership and the partnership or involvement of many stakeholders. As TICAD celebrates its 30th anniversary, how do you see its achievements?

Thirty years ago, TICAD I, the world's first platform for cooperation in Africa, was held in Japan, the world's largest donor country at that time, to consider seriously what could be done for Africa. I believe that the real achievements that can be called a legacy are (i) recognition of ownership and partnership, (ii) cooperation with various relevant organisations, and (iii) long-term and sustainable efforts based on follow-up (the importance of the TICAD process).

I also consider the following aspects to be noteworthy achievements of the TICAD process: (i) Introducing numerical targets in the three areas of social development, economic

development and the foundations of development in the Tokyo Action Plan at TICAD II in 1998, which contributed to the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in September 2000; (ii) addressing emerging international development challenges such as peace and security, human security, quality infrastructure or climate change; (iii) promoting triangular cooperation together with countries that have achieved or are achieving development; or (iv) emphasising cooperation with the private sector.

--- With the spread of the COVID-19 infection, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, or the emergence of climate change and energy issues, the priorities of African countries in solving the problems they face are changing. In addition, in June 2023, the Cabinet approved the “Development Cooperation Charter - Japan's contributions to the sustainable development of a free and open world”. How do you see the current situation between Japan and African countries?

Today, with rising interest rates, capital outflows to the developed world, mounting debt and fiscal pressures, Africa faces multiple challenges such as high food, fertiliser and energy prices, climate change, disasters, infectious diseases, and crises in medicine, health and education.

On the other hand, TICAD has already seen a shift in emphasis from reliance on official development assistance (ODA) to greater cooperation with the private sector. I have also seen a gradual decline in Japanese ODA and the withdrawal of Japanese (large) companies from Africa. At the same time, there is a growing realisation that Africa remains a huge market for the future. As evidence of this trend, Japanese start-ups are becoming more active in Africa.

--- What are AFRECO's future initiatives to support the economic, industrial and social development of African countries?

As I have told you, I am working for the economic, industrial and social development of Africa through the initiatives of AFRECO. Today, Africa is struggling with many challenges. In

order to resolve them, I believe it is important to assess the situation one by one and to respond carefully, taking into account macro indicators.

Firstly, on the basis of the above recognition, AFRECO actively supports several projects undertaken by its member companies and institutions. For example, the mapping initiative, which does not involve going into countries where civil war is still raging, could be used for future development once security is restored. In addition, support for the refining and marketing of organic oil has led not only to higher incomes and improved quality, but also to increased employment for women and improved literacy rates. Another company that imports and markets coffee from Africa is working to ensure stable volumes and quality, while diversifying its product range by, for example, turning coffee into confectionery by coating it with chocolate. In addition to these projects, AFRECO has supported the establishment of local joint ventures to produce simple disease testing kits for a pan-African market, and a car scrapyards with a view to a future business in car parts recycling.

Secondly, there are the projects that AFRECO manages. For example, to strengthen existing medical faculties at universities, it provides medical equipment, trains medical engineers and develops medical enterprises. The training of engineers, in particular, has been extended to other African countries. It is also working on a regional development plan to build a Japan Village in part of the country, including the transfer of machinery, equipment and technology from member companies. It is also exploring the horizontal expansion of this initiative to other countries. In these initiatives, it cooperates with its member companies and institutions.

All AFRECO initiatives are carried out in partnership with African Heads of State, Ministers, Presidents of Development Finance Institutions and Ambassadors of African countries in Tokyo. It also works with the support of many relevant Japanese ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japanese embassies abroad, the Ministry of Finance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Japan Bank for International

Cooperation (JBIC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for all their support.

--- Thank you very much for taking your precious time to talk to me.

End of the documents

(*) The preparation of this paper was supported by Kyoko Hasegawa, Secretary-General, AFRECO.