

BREAKING PATTERNS OF POVERTY, INSTABILITY  
**Africa aid forum searches for solutions**

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In an attempt to find solutions to Africa's persistent poverty and low economic growth, regional leaders and experts recently met in Tokyo to discuss ways to remedy the continent of its problematic governments.

Eighteen speakers and panelists gathered at United Nations University in Tokyo in late March for the symposium titled "The 'State (Political Entity)' and Governance in Africa." The event was cosponsored by the Japan Institute of International Affairs and the Foreign Ministry, and supported by The Japan Times.

The symposium took place as donor nation jitters are mounting, partly as a result of ineffective use of aid amid continued civil conflicts, monopolizing governments and starvation in sub-Saharan nations. The problem is particularly relevant to Japan, the world's top provider of aid to developing countries.

Japan provided \$968.98 million in official development assistance in 2000 for sub-Saharan Africa, according to the most recent Foreign Ministry figures. However, the economic slump at home and a tight fiscal situation have prompted Tokyo to trim its ODA budget for the current fiscal year by 10 percent.

**Government seen lacking**

Symposium participants agreed that a root cause of Africa's underdevelopment and other social ills is the lack of sound governmental structures free of corruption that are able to protect their people, adhere to a separation of powers and promote effective multiparty politics, they said.

"The first step that should be taken is to introduce a system of checks and balances that ensures transparency and accountability, allowing the people to participate in their

own development," said Hisashi Owada, President of JIIA and chairman of the symposium.

Unless the patronage system - a system unique to Africa in which a chief or patron informally rules the country - is replaced by a formal political structure to carry out efficient policies, the continent may be left behind amid the rapid globalization driven by the information technology revolution, Owada warned.

The leader-follower relationships, nourished by long tradition, make it difficult to redistribute wealth and make public services accessible equally throughout society, experts said.

"Whether Africa can manage to join the global mainstream economically and politically will decide the destiny of the continent for the 21st century," said Owada, a former Japanese ambassador to the United Nations.

### **Hope for the future**

One sign of Africa's determination to combat these problems is seen in the New Partnership for Africa's Development - a pledge issued in 2001 by African leaders to take concrete steps to eradicate poverty, promote democracy, and post sustainable growth and development.

NEPAD also calls for a new leadership that refuses to be dependent on financial aid from developed countries.

"Africans did not want to leave anyone in doubt about the desire to enhance their unity and to advance the collective interest and well-being of Africans in a globalizing world," explained Sam Ibok, director of political affairs at the Organization of African Unity, which helps implement NEPAD plans.

"The principal objective of NEPAD is to bridge the gap between developed countries and Africa as quickly as possible amid globalization," said Abdou Aziz Sow, an adviser on NEPAD-related affairs for the Senegalese government.

Sow said that a long-term aim includes an average annual gross domestic product growth rate of 7 percent within 15 years.

## **History a hindrance**

Africa's long failure to mark sharp economic growth also comes from historic and social factors, experts reckon.

Owada pointed out that the gross national product, which in both Asia and Africa stood at around \$300 per capita in the 1960s, when most African states achieved independence, has surged sharply in Asia but has remained stagnant in Africa.

Historically, Africa has been the victim of power struggles. Vast areas were under European colonial rule and later involved in the power politics of the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The continent has meanwhile largely maintained traditional social systems, including that of chief-follower in rural areas.

## **Will to move forward**

The symposium came hard on the heels of a communique issued on March 26 by African summit delegates gathered in Abuja, Nigeria, that focused on more concrete plans to prevent conflicts in their countries.

Senior Vice Foreign Minister Seiken Sugiura said global attention is essential to see whether regional leaders actually take the steps they promise.

"The international community as a whole is paying great attention to how NEPAD transforms its stance to focus governance into specific actions without leaving it a mere political slogan," he said in his opening speech.

"The symposium is part of Japan's efforts to support Africa's tackling of its problem of governance based on a new trend of ownership in African countries, the process of TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) and G8 (Group of Eight)," he said.

Japan plans to host TICAD III in the latter half of 2003 to further reinforce its Africa

policies. TICAD was previously held in 1993 and 1998. Meanwhile, G-8 summiteers at Genoa, Italy, last July agreed to support African efforts to resolve the continent's problems and end wars, instability and poverty.

In the wrap-up session, Micah Cheserem, chairman of Kenya Unilever Ltd. and former governor of the Central Bank of Kenya, outlined the problems of African governments, including corruption, weak infrastructure and poor public services, as well as high crime rates.

But he stressed that the region's massive market potential should attract Japanese interest, adding that the continent's initiatives will be transformed into concrete steps in the next few years.

#### **Peace a prerequisite**

Speaking on economic governance, Yaw Ansu, country director for Zambia and Zimbabwe at the World Bank, stressed that maintaining peace and security is a prerequisite for development.

Noting that the bank focuses on transparency in government budgets as well as efficient accounting and auditing systems, he added that African countries need to reform their civil service by reducing size and increasing salaries.

At the same time, they need to promote privatization to remove opportunities for corruption arising from large business contracts in the public sector, Ansu added.

#### **Trade extremely weak**

Caleb Fundanga, senior adviser to the president of the African Development Bank, talked about problems surrounding trade, which is central to growth, in Africa. He cited statistics in a World Bank report published at the end of the millennium that said Africa accounts for barely 1 percent of global GDP, about 2 percent of world trade and virtually no share of global manufactured goods.

The situation makes resource-rich African nations highly dependent on traditional commodity exports, which are problematic because commodity producers can increase

their export volumes only by lowering prices, he said.

Other problems cited included limited trade among African nations, poor economic policies, high import and export tariffs, poor infrastructure, low levels of technology and high transaction costs.

To improve the situation, the African Development Bank has been working on policy reforms in African countries in cooperation with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other partners. It has also invested in trade infrastructure, including roads, ports and airports, Fundanga said.

Jinichi Matsumoto, a senior staff writer at the Asahi Shimbun, said Japan's economic assistance to Africa does not appear to be fully functioning and that there should be a set criteria for donors to decide appropriate aid.

### **Instability endemic**

The symposium's subsession on governance and political stability focused on unstable political structures, the main cause of the continent's failure to develop during the decades since African nations won independence.

Luc Sindjoun, a professor at the department of law and political science at the University of Yaounde in Cameroon, pointed out that political problems in central Africa including totalitarian regimes highlight problems of the continent as a whole.

All central, African countries except Gabon, Cameroon and Sao Tome and Principe have experienced a coup d'etat and prolonged instability, Sindjoun said, asserting that whether a country suffers from instability hinges on how political leaders manipulate their governments.

Eisei Kurimoto, an associate professor at Osaka University, said that many people in Africa feel marginalized by their respective governments.

A well-designed electoral system should be introduced so that every sector of society is represented at both the national and regional levels, he said.