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## **ENHANCED JAPAN-US COLLABORATION FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT**

*Kenzo Oshima*

Japan and the US today have an excellent opportunity to strengthen their cooperation in development assistance. Until now, the two countries – the top donors in terms of gross disbursement of Official Development Assistance (ODA) - have coordinated their field operations in such areas as fighting HIV/AIDS and Malaria, improving maternal and child health and nutrition, and providing safe water. And of late such collaboration has expanded from Asia and Latin America to Africa. These coordinated efforts have yielded positive results in countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia. Now, in a further move, Japan and the US should discuss how they could

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extend their field cooperation by setting further ambitious but achievable goals. The advent of the Obama administration bodes well for such an endeavour.

During his presidential campaign, Senator Obama said that development assistance “can be our best investment in increasing the common security of the entire world”. He promised to “double US foreign assistance to \$50 billion by 2012, and use it to support failing states and sustainable growth in Africa; to halve global poverty and roll back diseases”. He pledged to “double the size of our Peace Corps over the next few years, and engage young people of other nations in similar programs, so that we work side by side to take on the common challenges that confront all humanity”. We will have to wait and see how the current economic crisis and budget constraints will affect his ability to fulfil these promises. However, it seems clear that the Obama administration fully intends to raise the profile of development to be on a par with defence and diplomacy – the so-called 3Ds.

Meanwhile, although it lost the position it once held in the 1990s as the world’s top donor, Japan remains a major player in the international development arena. Through a recent domestic institutional reform, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has emerged as an agency that can offer comprehensive and integrated development assistance through its merger with the yen loan arm of the Japan International Cooperation Bank (JBIC), with a combined current operational budget larger than that of USAID.

Japanese and American aid policy priorities are not identical. Traditionally, Japan has focused its attention on Asia but in recent years Africa has loomed larger in its programs. The US has concentrated on the Middle East and to a lesser extent on Africa. Based on this premise, it seems the region where New JICA and USAID should now focus is Africa. The reasons for that are clear.

During the current global economic crisis, sub-Saharan Africa, which has the most impoverished and fragile states, is feeling the crunch the hardest, including soaring food prices. The prospect of Africa reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of cutting poverty and hunger by half, stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS and offering universal primary education by 2015, etc., looks

grim even under the best of circumstances. Yet, at the same time, Africa as the “last frontier” holds enormous potential. If Japan and the US were to recommit themselves to improving the situation in Africa and tap into their potential to bring funding, technology, experience and knowledge of both, they would serve not only their own national interests but also those of Africa and the international community as a whole.


At the Fourth International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) meeting in Yokohama last year, Japan pledged to double its aid to Africa over the next five years, and Japan and TICAD partners articulated their assistance strategy to the continent in the form of the *Yokohama Action Plan*. Much of it was subsequently endorsed by the G8 summit in Hokkaido including strong support for poverty reduction through economic growth, building requisite infrastructure such as roads, power, ports, as well as the support for capacity building and governance.

Notable also in the *Action Plan* is an emphasis on greater efforts in agriculture and rural development. Some 80% of Africa’s poor live in rural areas – a sector that has been relatively neglected. Japan and the US, working together with the other key African and international partners, could reverse this trend and help achieve enhanced food security and other MDG goals. In this context, Japan is already working with African and international partners in the ‘Coalition for African Rice Development’ to double rice production in ten years as part of a continent-wide “green revolution”. The US could take an active part in this project.

Less than 10% of Africa’s rural population has access to electricity. However, technology able to bring light and energy, at a reasonable cost and in a sustainable way, to rural off-grid zones is already available – solar panels, mini-hydro generators and bio-fuel technology. Mobile phones are spreading rapidly throughout the continent. An African version of the *Green New Deal* is not a far-off dream but within reach if we make a determined attack on the problem with ingenuity and commitment. For example, Japan and the US could begin a joint initiative targeting 1000 African communities to receive in the next few years sustainable electricity supplies through “green energy”. Japanese and US

volunteers – JOCV and the Peace Corps – could join forces to make a useful contribution in such an endeavour.

Alongside ODA, the private sector has an important role to play. USAID's Global Development Alliance and other similar mechanisms for public private partnerships should be encouraged to play their roles, and in this JICA has much to learn from American and other models and practices.

I believe that the US and Japan should seek possibilities to deepen and broaden the areas in which they cooperate in international development, and, as a first step, consider setting up a *Japan-US Africa Cooperation Forum* as a public-private platform to explore such possibilities. 

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