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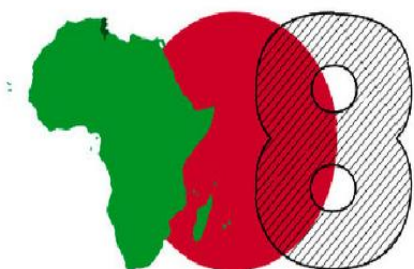
Japan's Economic Diplomacy towards Africa

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The 8th Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD) was held in Tunisia from August 27-28, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida marked the opening of the same.¹ Japan's economic diplomacy in Africa has been pursuing both economic as well as geopolitical objectives. In Japan's strive to provide economic assistance as a responsibility to help achieve peace and stability all across the world, it has given high priority to Africa. PM Kishida also affirmed his commitment to support the Japan-Africa partnership while focusing on investment in human capital, security in the global order, and sustainable growth.² When Africa was suffering from stagnating economic growth in the 1990s, Japan worked effectively to highlight the importance of Africa to the international community.

Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa since 1988 has been the largest in the world, except for Asia. Japan also aims to catch up with other Asian and western actors while moving toward a private investment-based approach. Tokyo has been helping Africa recover from the Covid-19 pandemic by preventing sovereign and private debt defaults. Moreover, Japan's policy towards Africa also promotes several international norms of transparency and sustainability in infrastructure financing. Japan aims at balancing its strategy vis-à-vis China since Tokyo sees China's expansion as progressing at the expense of human rights.

The 8th TICAD has come amidst several international changes, such as the Ukraine crisis, increasing aggression over Taiwan by China, and former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's assassination. The conference emphasised Tokyo's leadership in healthcare initiatives and secured a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. African nations were severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and despite support from powers like Japan and China, they still continue to recover from the socioeconomic devastation caused by the pandemic. Japan aims to reform the African healthcare system by developing frameworks for international organisations.

Human security, too, has become a diplomatic agenda for Japan to support the African nations. TICAD is a multilateral platform for focusing on issues pertaining to promoting Africa's development and it is co-organised by the Government of Japan, the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Bank. The first TICAD was organised by Japan in 1993, and over time, African countries have developed expectations of TICAD as seen by the increased number of heads of state who participate in the event.

The Japanese government and the African Development Bank (AfDB) together announced a US\$ 5 billion financial cooperation under the Enhanced Private Sector Assistance for Africa

(EPSA) initiative from 2023 to 2025. Both Japan and the AfDB have given importance to food security by prioritising agriculture and nutrition. Dr Akihiko Tanaka, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), said, “Under the severe situation caused by multiple crises, enhancing resilience and promoting human security are critical components of Japan’s support for Africa.”³ JICA is a prominent governmental institution in Japan for bilateral development cooperation. Since Japan pursues pacifism in nature and in diplomacy, development cooperation is one of the most vital ways for Japan to support developing countries like those in Africa.

Way forward

Japan aims at strengthening its ties with African countries and is working relentlessly to support them. This is because Tokyo is concerned that some of the African nations might be keen on enhancing security cooperation with China after sanctions were imposed on Russia due to the Ukraine crisis. Bolstering ties with Africa would also help Japan to advance its soft power in the international community. Japan aspires to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC). This is one of the reasons why it is actively engaging with African countries and seeking to gain support for its proposal to reform.

Japan wants to diversify its supply of energy and mineral resources, and Tokyo announced a phasing out of Russian oil imports due to the Ukraine crisis, which would further endanger Russian LNG imports. To diversify the supply of energy resources and reduce financial strain, Japanese companies wish to launch floating offshore LNG production. Thus, it is vital for Japan to deepen its ties with Africa. For instance, Mozambique is a crucial country for investing in Japan’s LNG supply and infrastructure.

Owing to the deepening relations between India and Japan, both countries wish to enhance their engagement in Africa's development and have taken different approaches in the past. However, over time, both countries have been influenced by the geoeconomic imperatives of supporting the region. The establishment of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in 2016 was a new step for India and Japan to collaborate and engage in Africa.⁴ The AAGC was also established due to increased Chinese activity and power in the African region and to counter its rise. However, this initiative of AAGC has not gained much momentum in recent times due to differing interests within the three countries, India, Japan and Africa. The AAGC should focus on being more profit-driven rather than a human development vision. Both India and Japan should focus on investment in areas that promote a liberal and value-based order which further encourages Indian and Japanese companies to collaborate in Africa such as in areas of infrastructure.

Nevertheless, Japan is likely to expand its commitment to Africa in a more pragmatic manner, keeping in mind China's rise and its rivalry with China. Japan must work on promoting balanced development assistance and aid that would be based on quality and further train personnel to take advantage of commercial opportunities. Japan has been able to contribute to Africa's development since Tokyo respects Africa's ownership and wishes to empower its capacity by ensuring human security. Japan's achievements in modernisation and technological advancement can help the African countries in the coming times, which would further enable them to create their own development policies.

NOTES:

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), TICAD 8 August 27-28 in Tunisia, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad8/>. Accessed on August 29, 2022.

² Ibid.

³ "Japan and the African Development Bank announce up to \$5 billion in support for Africa's private sector", *African Development Bank Group*, August 28, 2022, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/japan-and-african-development-bank-announce-5-billion-support-africas-private-sector-54402>. Accessed on August 30, 2022.

⁴ Gurjit Singh, "India, Japan and the Asia Africa Growth Corridor", Gateway House, January 17, 2019, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/japan-aagc/>. Accessed on August 30, 2022.