



# Rwanda development efforts very impressive —JICA Vice President Kato

Last week, the Japan International Cooperation Agency Vice President **HIROSHI KATO** was in the country on a four day official visit. Over the four days, he visited a number of projects the agency is implementing in the country and also had a series of meetings with top government officials. The *New Times* **COLLINS MWAI** caught up with him for insights to JICA cooperation and support framework with Rwanda. Below are excerpts:



Vice President Kato poses with some participants to Masters Programme under ABE Initiative at KLab

## THIS BEING YOUR FIRST VISIT TO RWANDA, WHAT WAS THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE TRIP AND WHAT IMPRESSIONS DID YOU GET?

This is my first visit to Rwanda and I have been looking forward to it for a long time. Since I assumed my current position about 2 years ago, I have been looking forward to the visit.

The purpose of the visit was to acquaint myself with national development, Rwanda being one of our closest partner countries in Africa since we re-established our support and cooperation with the Rwandan government 10 years ago in 2005. The purposes also included seeing the progress in the cooperation between the two countries and also meet top government officials as well as visit projects we support.

I was very much satisfied with the results of my visit which showed that the cooperation has been dynamic and productive.

## JICA SUPPORTS A RANGE OF AREAS AND PROJECTS IN THE COUNTRY, DURING YOUR STAY WHAT WAS YOUR OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECTS AND THEIR IMPACTS?

In our cooperation framework, there are several prioritized areas; rural agriculture development, water, infrastructure and human resource development. I visited several projects that we support in the various areas, talked to experts in the respective areas who are all very encouraged by

the progress and development so far.

In agriculture, I visited a project that aims at improving the productivity on the ground by sensitizing the farmers on market needs and also providing them with necessary skills and know-how to improve their productivity. An important element for agriculture development is irrigation where we have just started a project to support the construction of an irrigation scheme in Ngoma district, which will provide infrastructure and sufficient water for farmers to produce throughout the year unlike the past when they solely relied on rainfalls.

In human resource development, I visited Tumba College of Technology with whom we have been cooperating for almost 10 years. We are very much satisfied as the school has developed itself into one of the centres of excellence in vocational and technical training. We also understand that the government aims at creating a knowledge-based economy for which ICT development is very important. We have provided assistance through an advisor in the Ministry of Youth and ICT and there are several important developments.

We understand that the Rwanda government has a very clear vision about how the country should develop. It has to take advantage of resources available and overcome emerging challenges. The advantages include a well-disciplined population. People might say that this is a landlocked country and you have to carefully choose a strategy to take advantage of the resources available.

One of the developments was the establishment of K-Lab, a technical and business incubation hub of ICT developers which I was also very much impressed.

## WHAT INFORMED THE COOPERATION FRAMEWORK BETWEEN RWANDA AND JICA?

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The move towards knowledge-based economy through human resource development is the right strategy and we have been very happy to put our cooperation in line with the government's strategies, Vision 2020 and the second economic development and poverty reduction strategy (EDPRS2). Our various projects have been in line with the government's development agenda.

## RWANDA IS PART OF A REGIONAL INTEGRATION INITIATIVE WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY WITH A GOAL OF PROSPERITY FOR ALL CITIZENS IN THE REGION. WHAT DOES JICA MAKE OF THE INITIATIVE?

The infrastructure development is one of the priority areas in the portfolio between Rwanda and Japan. Regional integration on the other hand is a shared goal of the East African Community Countries and we are glad to be part of the exercise through infrastructure development. We have supported the construction of the bridge and the One Stop Border Post in Rusumo and are studying the project to improve the road network connecting Kayonza and Rusumo. We see Rwanda as an important hub for the Northern Corridor and the Central Corridor, as the two converge in Kigali. We are not only supporting Rwanda but other countries in the region to develop the port in Mombasa and railway facilities from Dar es Salaam.

We are considerate of the political wishes of not only individual countries but also regional agenda.

**BY JUNE THIS YEAR WHEN THE DEADLINE OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS LAPSED, RWANDA IS ONE OF THE COUNTRIES THAT HAD ACHIEVED PROGRESS IN THE VARIOUS INDICATORS. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WAS JICA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FEAT?**

Rwanda has shown a remarkable progress in achieving most of the MDGs goals. Among the impacts that can easily be felt is that poverty has drastically reduced, primary school enrollment have gone up, gender parity.

We are honoured to be part of Rwanda's efforts to achieve the progress in the various goals. Towards goals such as poverty reduction, the development of the agricultural sector has played a role considering that a majority of the workforce is employed in the sector.

Private sector development and ICT sector development have helped create a considerable number of job opportunities for Rwanda, further had a role in alleviating poverty.

Looking into the future, we are currently in the process of finalising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in New York. All our support is aligned to make progress towards the millennium development goals (MDGs) agenda.

**GOING FORWARD, WHAT LESSONS CAN THE WORLD DRAW FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF MDGS FOR DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)?**

Having the MDGs was a very good thing for the international community. We all shared a common goal and had numerical targets to evaluate by. It is important that we have the



Vice President Kato at his visit at Tumba Colege of Technology supported by JICA since 2007

numerical targets in the next phase. However, in my view, they were not very satisfactory in that it did not give sufficient attention to the growth aspect to the development of economies. It highlighted poverty reduction without highlighting how poverty can be reduced.

Going forward, I hope to see stronger emphasis placed on economic growth, private sector development, infrastructure development among other areas., so that we will share not only the importance of poverty reduction but also how to achieve them.

**STILL ON DEVELOPMENT AND ASSISTANCE, WHAT WILL BE PRIORITY CONCERNS AS JAPAN AND JICA CONTINUE TO BUILD PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORKS WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES?**

As we move into the post-2015 era, we need to be sure that poverty reduction needs a particular type of growth. Charity activities, giving money will not solve the issue of poverty, we need sustainable economic growth. Economic growth alone will not necessarily bring poverty reduction because the wealth sustained through such growth can be retained by a handful of people and not distributed widely. What is required is not only growth but inclusive growth where the fruits of growth are shared by a wide segment of the population.

Inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability are very critical elements for growth in any country. This is the kind of growth that the Japanese government pushes for and that is the framework we work under.

We Japanese aid practitioners look out for elements such as private sector development. Africa is now ready for private sector development more than ever; there are stable governments

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and well trained personnel as well as an emerging middle class population.

Japan is also looking more into Africa because of the prospects and potential that the continent has. JICA has extensive experience gained in the 1980s and 1990s supporting fellow Asian partners in which we combined three modalities of cooperation, Aid, Investment and Trade which sums up the Asian development model which has proved to be successful. Going by our model, for the private sector to thrive, among the necessities are, regional integration because individual countries are too small to develop by themselves and human resource development especially TVET type "hands-on" practical education.

All donors talk about the need to develop human resources for development, but providing formal education alone will not spur development in a country, you need to have people with practical skills and Know-how and are willing to find solutions to problems. This kind of proactive human resource approach sets Japan from other donor countries.

**ONE OF THE BIGGEST SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES OF THE JAPANESE**

**GOVERNMENT IS TOKYO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT, HOW DID IT COME TO BE?**

We are now in the process of organizing the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) which will be held next year in Nairobi, Kenya. The concept of the conference started in 1993 in Tokyo when many western states were losing interest in African development after the end of the Cold War. The atmosphere of African development was not very positive considering that the Berlin Wall had collapsed and most African countries were not happy with the involvement of support under the name of structural adjustment. It is then that Japan came up with an idea of organizing a forum to bring together all important leaders in Africa and other important stakeholders in African development. Ever since, the conference was held every five years with the last one being held in 2013.

Next year's conference in Nairobi will be the first time it will be held in African soil and we are very much looking forward to it with a spirit of ownership and partnership.

**IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT THE AFRICAN BUSINESS EDUCATION INITIATIVE (ABE INITIATIVE) WAS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES BORN FROM THE FORUM, WHAT WAS THE IDEA BEHIND IT?**

The Japanese government has always had an interest to promote African development, added to that is the increased private sector interest in Africa. Combining these two, the government's will and the private sector's interest, was the reasoning behind the Africa Business Education Initiative. The idea is to train young business leaders by inviting them to Japan for a post graduate course for two years. We expect them to play a bridging role between the Japanese private sector and the African private sector. This was proposed by our prime minister, Shinzo Abe, about two years ago. So far we have had two batches of entrants and very much encouraged by the results. So far we have successfully recruited about 500 youths to the programme who are also familiarizing themselves with Japanese firms interested in Africa. About 16 Rwandans have been recruited into the initiative with most of them expected to study ICT and energy development specifically geothermal energy.

**ANY CLOSING REMARKS?**

Rwanda is a country with a strong and competent leadership, they are people with a huge potential. I was very much impressed with the country.