

Interview with Cham Ugala Uriat, Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Japan

# Africa: a Continent with High Potential to Contribute to Global Growth

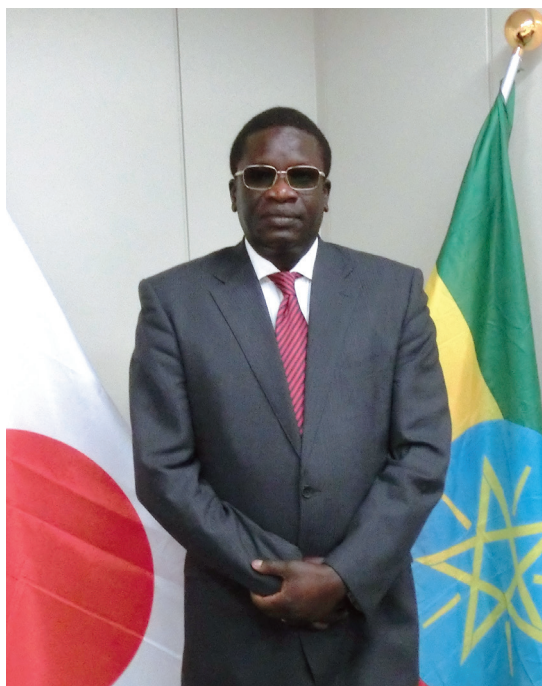
By Japan SPOTLIGHT

The sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) was held in Nairobi, Kenya, on Aug. 27 and 28, 2016. TICAD is led by Japan and co-organized by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank and the African Union Commission (AUC). African heads of state and government organizations, donor countries, private companies and civil society organizations discuss policy issues to improve social and economic conditions in Africa. From TICAD I in 1993 until TICAD V, the summit-level meetings were held every five years in Japan. TICAD VI was the first meeting held in Africa. The African economy has great potential to achieve high growth and thus will be a key player in the future of the global economy.

Japan SPOTLIGHT had an interview with the Ethiopian ambassador to Japan, Cham Ugala Uriat, who had just come back from TICAD VI. He talks about how Africa could achieve economic success by mitigating some impediments to growth in accordance with TICAD VI's conclusions addressed by the Nairobi Declaration.

**JS:** Could you please briefly introduce yourself and your relations with Japan and Asia?

**Uriat:** My name is Cham Ugala Uriat. I arrived here in Tokyo in February 2016, and presented my credentials to his majesty the emperor in April, so have been in Tokyo for seven months so far and really appreciate the Japanese government's hospitality. Of course, the Ethiopian-Japanese relationship started a long time ago. In 1933 we opened a consulate-general in Osaka, and in 1936 the Japanese government opened a delegation office in Addis Ababa; formal embassies were opened in 1958. And our relationship has grown stronger and stronger since the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was very close to the emperor of Japan. The two prime ministers at present, Mr. Shinzo Abe and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, are also very close, and before that the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had a similar relationship with the then-prime minister of Japan. He attended TICAD II to TICAD VI, in addition to an official visit he made to Japan in 2006, and our Prime



*Cham Ugala Uriat, Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Japan*

Minister Hailemariam participated in TICAD V. This shows there are many high officials visiting each other, which is a testimony of a good relationship.

And of course, the Japanese government has been really generous to Ethiopia in many hard times, such as when we have faced drought and refugee influxes from South Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. The support of the Japanese government through UN agencies has been paramount. It also opened a JETRO office this year in Addis Ababa, showing that it wants Japanese companies to go to Ethiopia, which is really wonderful. Regarding other Asian countries, of course the foreign direct investment of China, South Korea and India is much higher than that of Japanese companies in Ethiopia right now. But I notice that many Japanese companies are showing interest in this regard now,

going to Ethiopia on many occasions to make pre-assessments for their business. Hopefully during my stay here this will materialize.

Photo: Public Relation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the F.D.R. of Ethiopia



TICAD VI SUMMIT, Nairobi, Kenya

## Assessment of TICAD VI

**JS: You just came back from the TICAD VI meeting in Nairobi. How do you assess its progress?**

**Uriat:** TICAD VI was the first TICAD meeting held on African soil — all the forums from the first to the fifth were held in Japan. I think this shows the progress of TICAD, and the meeting was very successful in all aspects. Its handling by the government of Kenya was very good in terms of security and preparation, as was the adoption of the final document, especially with the articles on Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. I think that many African countries are really taking TICAD on as their own, and that the Japanese government is very serious now about bringing Africa on board and working together.

## Growth Potential of Ethiopia & Africa

**JS: Ethiopia has achieved the highest economic growth in Africa today. What do you think has been the key to your success?**

**Uriat:** The key, which we really want to promote to other African countries, is the commitment of the leadership of the party and the government. Our leadership makes sure that development resources, especially for infrastructure and education, are implemented and closely monitored. Because of that we have been successful in making sure that the road infrastructure reaches the poor in rural areas, so they can find ways to bring their goods and produce to the market. We are also investing highly in human resources, opening

Photo: Public Relation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the F.D.R. of Ethiopia



TICAD VI Ministerial follow-up meeting, Banjul, Gambia

many primary schools and secondary and tertiary education institutions, because we know that human resources are also key. We learn that from countries like Japan: even though it has few natural resources, it has produced a miracle because it invested in human resources. This is why we are really working together with Japan to emulate the way they have come to this point. And of course, the magnitude of corruption can be said to be minimal in Ethiopia when compared with other African countries.

Agricultural policies, which say that small-scale farmers should produce intensively in small-scale farming, have also helped them to produce more. That is also important: the population of Ethiopia is almost 100 million, and 80% of it lives in rural areas. If you change the lives of the rural population, that will support larger-scale economic activities, and that is exactly what we are doing by improving the agricultural productivity of small-scale farmers in rural areas. So I think these are the reasons why Ethiopia is progressing. Of course we are also diversifying the economy: manufacturing is one sector we are working on, and showing good results in that regard. And that is one of the areas where we want Japanese companies to come to help us, especially in textiles and pharmaceuticals.

**JS: Do you find the same good growth potential in Africa overall?**

**Uriat:** When you look at the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world, six of them are in Africa. So it is not only Ethiopia, there are other African countries showing high economic growth. Rwanda is following similar policies to Ethiopia, and you can see what dramatic change is happening there. And there are countries like Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire which are also highly growing. So with good policies and strategies in place, there is no reason why African countries cannot change. My hope is that in the next 10 years we will see a different story about Africa.



## The Nairobi Declaration

**JS: The Nairobi Declaration, issued at TICAD VI, touched upon the importance of structural economic reform to stimulate economic growth. Are you saying that human resources development is key to achieving such structural reform?**

**Uriat:** Exactly. If you invest a lot in human resources, many things improve immediately. Education for example is very important. We have an education policy called Seventy-Thirty, which means that of students completing high school and entering university education, 70% of them should join the natural sciences — engineering, medicine, ICT and so on — and 30% of them should join social sciences. Because we know that if you develop your capacity in natural sciences, especially engineering and ICT, you will be more likely to succeed in changing and transforming your economy. This too is an area where our universities and Japanese universities can work together, and we already have some professors coming from Japan to Ethiopian universities, and one Japanese university working with our own to develop a Master's and PhD program in *kaizen* philosophy.

Children who are born within an educated family have a higher probability that they will go to school. Well-trained human capacity is the source of the capacity you can build to change the economic structure. It is those humans who can participate in infrastructure construction, and go to factories and investment areas with greater skills. Human resources are the key, on which African governments have to have very clear policies and strategies on how to lead the country.

**JS: Without peace we cannot achieve stable economic development. Would we need to promote peace-building to address violence, political radicalism, and refugee issues? Do you think developing countries should adopt some strategic principles to achieve social stabilization?**

**Uriat:** When we say peace-building, that suggests a problem has already occurred. Instead we want to prevent the peace being destroyed in the first place. So what causes this in Africa is the question we have to raise, because there are many factors. One of them is development. If you bring development to certain areas and exclude others, those not included will raise that question tomorrow. Therefore you have to make balanced economic policies that benefit all citizens, and make job opportunities available to everyone, especially the youth. In Ethiopia stability has become permanent because development policy, especially in infrastructure and road construction, reaches to every corner of the country. When you go to Ethiopia now, from north to south, east to west, the roads are there. Policies are inclusive and aim to get rid of marginalization so people feel that they have their own share of the pie. Economic development which is inclusive is necessary for stability; we can see that in countries like Japan, because that inclusiveness is there. So if we do all this, we can minimize problems, but if we do not, problems will be created and peace will be threatened. We have to prevent these problems first, rather than rebuilding peace after it has already been lost.

**JS: Sustainable economic development is also mentioned in the Nairobi Declaration. Would human security and a good environment also be necessary to achieve it?**

**Uriat:** Climate change is a problem we feel across the board. Sometimes when we talk about it we raise the names of those industrialized countries which are emitting more carbon dioxide, but that being the case does not mean that developing countries do not also have a share in maintaining and protecting their environment. If the country does not develop, people will go and cut down the trees for firewood, cooking, and warming themselves. So when the trees are cut down, and the rain comes, erosion will take the fertile topsoil. Agricultural land and its productivity will decrease, and this will take us where? To famines. Environmental protection is very important for sustainability of the economy.

On human security, one pillar of the Nairobi Declaration is fighting diseases in Africa. We have to make sure that our population is healthy, and we do this by putting resources in the health sector, again developing human resources: educating more health extension workers, especially training women, who go to rural areas and build



good knowledge on how to wash your hands and keep your area clean. When your area is clean, for example, and there are no ponds or water on the ground, you will not be caught by malaria, because the mosquitoes come and lay their eggs in pond areas so when you dry these areas the chance they will come will be minimal. A healthy person in an educated family will have educated children, and will know how to protect themselves against diseases which can be prevented easily. Of course, you cannot leave that alone to the people; the government has to allocate a lot of resources to the health sector. That is exactly what we have done in Ethiopia: by educating people and sending a lot of health extension workers to rural areas to teach people, we have reduced dramatically the level of malaria in Ethiopia.

### **JS: How do you assess income inequality in Africa?**

**Uriat:** In many cases I am not in a position to say it is increasing or decreasing; this needs to be studied. But inequality, not only in Africa but even in the more advanced economies, is something you narrow through policies. In Africa you find sometimes it is only a small elite group who has access to the resources, while poor rural areas and even poor urban dwellers are not getting what they are supposed to as citizens. Because of that some disturbances are occurring most of the time, and as there are no safety nets like in the advanced countries for when this happens, you can see clearly the burden of inequality on lower-income people who are suffering a lot. But in Ethiopia, because development has been mass-based development, and our policies started by addressing the questions we have discussed, we have really made an effort to narrow inequalities across rural and urban areas.

### **JS: Food security is also very important. What do you think about this topic, and about improvements to its conditions in Africa?**

**Uriat:** With the experience we have in Ethiopia, we have learnt well what food security means. If you may recall, our name was associated with difficulties in food and starvation in the 1970s and 1980s. But that perception does not match the reality on the ground in Ethiopia right now, because the government policy has food security at its center. We have done a lot of work in agriculture: we are the only country on African soil that allocates 10% of the government budget yearly for agriculture. We have done a lot in training for agricultural development, such as the extension workers who work with the farmers and provide selected seeds for them. So last year, when there was a drought brought by El Niño, we had the capacity to address it by ourselves. That shows that the capacity we have been building for the last few years has reached the point where we can confront food challenges on our own resources. This is what

African people should do, because food is very important, and is also one of the pillars in the TICAD Nairobi Declaration.

## **Expectations of Developed Nations on Economic Aid & Partnership**

**JS: How do you think developed nations like Japan, and especially the Japanese private sector, could contribute to African development, in particular regarding what you said about infrastructure and human resources development?**

**Uriat:** Let us look both ways at this: the private sector from the developed countries, and the private sector in Africa. The private sector in African countries is short-handed and has no capacity to make investment in infrastructure like highways, schools and the health sector; the African governments have to make a lot of efforts in providing them. When there is a road built by the government, the private sector will follow there. But the private sector of the developed nations has to invest in Africa, because I believe that giving assistance to African countries as we have been doing so far will make no difference at all. Rather a fair trade between the companies of developed nations and Africa, and the investment of those companies on African soil, will be the way to change the nature of the economies themselves. First, because when these Western companies come to Africa, they come with know-how, and can train African people who can learn from them. Second, because when these companies come to Africa they can support African people through employing them. Third, when these companies invest on African soil, they will help the African economies to obtain foreign currencies by exporting their goods outside. So it is much more helpful for these companies to go and invest in Africa, and for good trade deals to be made between the African nations and Western countries.

This is exactly what we are saying to our friends in Japan. If they come and invest in Ethiopia, they will benefit in many ways. They will have a very low cost of labor, and our people are trainable and young. And the geographical location of Ethiopia is very central: very close to Europe, just across the Suez Canal from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and also very close to the Middle East and the rest of Africa. So it will be easy for them to export their goods. And there is also a huge population, close to 100 million in Ethiopia now, with a large domestic market because the size of the middle class is increasing every year. So this is the time, and I hope that Japanese companies will come and invest in Africa. **JS**

*Written with the cooperation of Chaobang Ai, a Tokyo-based editor and blogger.*