

BY ATHAN TASHOBYA

It has come to 60 years since the Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) started working with the rest of the world to foster economic and social development. Rwanda has been part of the Japanese international cooperation initiative through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) since early the 1970s. Since its inception, on 6th October 1954, ODA has targeted neighboring Asian countries' economic and social transformation through the Colombo Plan- an international cooperation organization to support social development of Asian and Pacific countries which has since turned global.

"In general, neighboring countries with Japan have been supported in addressing social challenges, industrialization and reducing poverty," says Moriya Takahiro, JICA's Country Representative.

According to Moriya, the project might have been inspired by the global issues like environment and AIDS, poverty and hunger and the need to contribute to global stability and peace.

Japan's advantages and experiences like KAIZEN and 5S campaign, were proved to be applicable and workable in other parts of the world.

The Kaizen project has set the unshakable foundation for Singapore's industrial growth and admirable economic transformation; which is why Rwanda has perceived the same approach to attaining her development agenda.

"Many other countries learned from Asian experiences and have tremendously improved their economies and people's welfare. Good practices have been rolled out."

JICA BACKGROUND AND OPERATIONS IN RWANDA

From the early 1970's, the Government of Japan started to provide Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Rwanda through Grant Aids and Training program in Japan.

ODA is a brainchild of Japan International Cooperation Agency, which was established as an executing agency for ODA of Japan in 1974 and has been reformed in 2003 and 2008.

In 1985, the Note Verbal was exchanged on deployment of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and a first batch of JOCVs was assigned to Rwanda in 1987.

However, due to the civil war that occurred in 1994, most of assistance was stopped for a while except Grassroots and Human Security Grant Aids and Training program in Japan / third countries.

In June of 2004, the first Economic Development Annual Policy Dialogue was held between two governments of Rwanda and Japan, represented by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Embassy of



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Japan in Kenya respectively.

As an output of the dialogue, an international agreement for Technical Cooperation was signed between two countries in January of 2005.

Based on this agreement, JICA Rwanda Office was opened in July of 2005 and JOCVs was restarted to deploy in December of 2005. Substantial ODA started coming from Japan to Rwanda, including Grant Aids and Technical Cooperation.

CURRENT JAPAN'S ODA PROGRAMMES IN RWANDA

In January 2010, the Embassy of Japan was opened and Japan's ODA has been accelerated since that time.

Recently, Japan has constantly disbursed more than USD 20 million in total annually.

Japan's ODA is now provided on the issues where Rwanda has expressed a need that can be met by Japan's experience and competency. In close partnership with the Government of Rwanda, currently JICA is focusing its development activities in the four priority areas as a result of Annual Policy Dialogue Meetings between the Government of Japan and the Government of Rwanda:

- A) Economic infrastructure including energy, especially electricity, and transportation focusing on regional connectivity,
- B) Agriculture for commercialized agriculture including irrigation and capacity development of smallholders,
- C) Water and Sanitation. The program has three major components in rural area:

Development of water supply infrastructures,

Technical cooperation for sustainable operation and maintenance of facilities, and

Community empowerment in water



Courtesy to JICA

management and hygiene promotion by JOCVs.

D) Education and Training in Science and Technology. Two major components:

Construction of mechanism to improve the quality of teaching in basic education, and

Technical Education and Vocational Training (TVET) for boosting the Rwandan industry.

In 2014, the total number of participants in the Training Program in Japan / third countries is expected to reach 1,000 and in 2015, the total number of JOCVs assigned to Rwanda will reach 200.

JICA's Moriya says Capacity Development is crucial in attaining the set objectives.

"From the accumulated observations and experience, Japan's ODA in other countries is not just providing from one side but mutual collaboration; co-thinking and co-implementation, enabling individuals and institutions to acquire skills, knowledge, and experiences, localize them and scale up," he says.

Moriya says JICA's interventions have been very pivotal in changing people's lives in communities, with regard to water, hygiene and sanitation, training, and infrastructure among others. Some regional projects that have recently been supported include the multi-million Rusumo Bridge along Rwanda-Tanzania border and ABE Initiative Programme in the areas of ICT Geothermal development sponsorship programme.

"People of both of countries will continue with closer partnerships at various levels especially in the private sector where more Rwandan and Japanese entrepreneurs will benefit from such cooperation," he explains.

As ODA celebrates the 60 years of existence and international cooperation, Moriya, believes that Rwanda and Japan should hope for the better especially improving livelihoods.

"For the years the Japan's ODA to Rwanda has been extended, practical and tangible results have been registered; with co-implementation given due consideration," he reiterates.



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