



International Development Cooperation Under Strain and Japan's Mission

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The year 2025 will be remembered in history as a major turning point in international development cooperation. A symbolic event is the dismantlement of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced by the Trump administration, which took office in January, along with a sweeping reduction

in contributions to international organizations such as the United Nations. Since the end of World War II, the United States has consistently led international development, both in terms of financing and ideas, as the world's top donor (except during the 1990s, when Japan was the top donor). As such, the abrupt withdrawal of the United States from international development has had a profound impact on the international community.

Major European donors have also faced pressure to reduce their ODA due to the crisis in Ukraine and the growing demand to increase defense budgets. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projects a further 9 to 17% reduction in ODA in 2025, following a 9% decline in 2024. It is the first time in nearly 30 years that major donors such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France have all moved simultaneously to cut aid budgets, underscoring growing strains on the Western-led framework that has long driven international development cooperation. Meanwhile, as challenges such as geopolitical confrontation, conflict, climate change, pandemics, and the digital divide grow more intertwined, vulnerable groups in developing countries face severe hardship.

How should Japan respond to this global contraction of ODA, and what role should it play? First, the current situation has highlighted the risks of excessive aid dependency. Developing countries need to further strengthen the mobilization of domestic resources through economic transformation and expanded tax revenue, and to pursue autonomous development. Second, it is essential that diverse actors, including developed countries, emerging countries, the private sector, and non-profit organizations, collaborate to broaden the base of development financing beyond ODA. Partnerships with emerging countries in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean as well as with Gulf countries, and collaboration with private companies and foundations, will become increasingly important. Third, development partners

should also review their cooperation approaches and place greater emphasis, from a medium- to long-term perspective, on investing in institution-building and human resource development, as well as on leveraging private finance.

In this context, Japan, a non-Western donor and once a latecomer to development, has fostered a unique approach to cooperation, occupying the position of both a "learner" and a "provider" of development knowledge. These qualities include an emphasis on self-help efforts and autonomous development, the process of translating and adapting foreign institutions and technologies to the context of partner countries, and the commitment to standing by partners in the field to support the capacity development of their organizations and human resources. These deserve to be reassessed now. Japan should confidently disseminate its development cooperation approach to the international community and, rather than following the lead of Western countries, should strive to maintain its ODA budget and secure a sufficient volume of projects. At the same time, in order to maximize the impact of limited funding, Japan is encouraged to actively pursue support for upstream policy and institution-building, the use of ODA loans to the social sector and regional development, and stronger partnerships with the private sector and civil society.

Furthermore, building on its experience of promoting triangular cooperation and South-South cooperation in partnership with emerging countries, Japan should serve, at a time when Western donors are faltering, as a "stabilizer" of international development and a "nexus" of international solidarity.

From these perspectives, the April 2025 amendment to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Act, which expanded financial instruments for private finance mobilization, was extremely timely. With ODA serving as a catalyst and through co-creation with diverse actors, new value can be generated, contributing to the resolution of increasingly complex challenges. It is also noteworthy that at the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9), held in Yokohama in August, JICA, together with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), organized a consultation with emerging donor agencies from Southeast Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, marking the beginning of cross-regional collaboration.

"Autonomous development" and "aid for graduation" are principles that Japan has consistently valued. Now is the time to return to these fundamentals, engage partners from emerging countries and the Global South, and navigate this turning point in international development cooperation.



ODA Topics

Japan's SDGs Progress Report: Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025

In 2025, Japan conducted its Voluntary National Review (VNR)^{*1} on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).^{*2} The VNR is a mechanism under the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” adopted at the UN Summit in 2015, through which UN Member States periodically report on their progress toward achieving the SDGs. Japan previously conducted VNRs in 2017 and 2021, making this its third review.

(1) Key Features of the VNR Report

The current VNR report has four major distinguishing features. First, with future discussions on sustainable development by 2030 and beyond in mind, the report focuses on Japan's challenges and initiatives that can serve as models for the international community, such as addressing the declining birthrate and population aging, promoting SDGs in local areas, and disaster risk reduction. Second, the report uses columns to introduce cross-sectoral initiatives in an easy-to-understand manner in areas such as Expo 2025 Osaka-Kansai Japan, GREEN×EXPO 2027, declining birthrates and population aging, public-private partnerships, youth, regional development, disaster risk reduction, and national resilience. Third, the report endeavored to evaluate Japan's efforts and progress toward achieving the SDGs objectively as much as possible, using statistical and other evidence. Finally, the report benefited from the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, including experts, civil society, and youth, centered on the SDGs Promotion Roundtable.^{*3} In addition to the government's evaluation, a dedicated chapter for an independent evaluation by stakeholders was included, and a “Stakeholder Meeting” bringing together a wide range of participants for discussion was also held in March 2025. Furthermore, a public comment process was conducted, incorporating views from a broad spectrum of society into the report.^{*4}

(2) Overall Evaluation of SDGs Progress

Japan's strength lies in the widespread awareness of the SDGs through society, with diverse stakeholders actively engaging in efforts to achieve these goals from their respective positions, and the country promoting initiatives to achieve the SDGs with an “all-Japan” approach. A goal-by-goal evaluation confirmed progress in areas such as Goal 3 (Health and Well-being), Goal 8 (Economic



The Japanese delegation at the HLPF Ministerial Segment

Growth and Employment), Goal 9 (Infrastructure, Industry and Innovation), and Goal 13 (Climate Change), while also identifying remaining challenges in areas such as Goal 5 (Gender) and Goal 10 (Inequality).

(3) Presentation at the United Nations

In July 2025, then State Minister for Foreign Affairs Miyaji attended the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) Ministerial Segment, held in New York, the United States, on behalf of the Government of Japan, and presented Japan's VNR. Then State Minister Miyaji stated that even amid a challenging international environment surrounding the SDGs, Japan would remain steadfast in advancing its efforts toward achieving them, and that these efforts are strongly supported by diverse stakeholders. Then a video was played introducing Japan's initiatives, including “WheelLog!,” a barrier-free map developed by Ms. ODA Yuriko (Founder and CEO of the NGO “WheelLog”) that enables wheelchair users to navigate unfamiliar places with confidence by allowing them to share accessibility information with one another. Following the video, Ms. Oda stated, “This journey has taught me that, even though we have disabilities, we can contribute to people and society.” Next, Mr. CHIBA Soichiro (Chair of Y7/Y20 Youth Japan, Founder of Thousandleaf), a private sector member of the SDGs Promotion Roundtable, delivered a presentation on the vision for a sustainable society from the perspective of youth. Finally, Professor KANIE Norichika (Keio University Graduate School) reflected on the VNR process and emphasized the importance of continuing and strengthening the multi-stakeholder collaboration that had been fostered, and of jointly addressing the future discussions on sustainable development beyond 2030.



Then State Minister for Foreign Affairs Miyaji presenting Japan's VNR at the HLPF Ministerial Segment

^{*1} The Ministry of Foreign Affairs website on VNR report: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/sdgs/vnr/vnr2025en.html>

^{*2} See the glossary on page 37.

^{*3} A forum established under the SDGs Promotion Headquarters at the Prime Minister's Office, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from government, NGOs, NPOs, experts, the private sector, international organizations, and various other entities to exchange views and cooperatively promote Japan's efforts toward achieving the SDGs.

^{*4} Summary of public comments on the Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/sdgs/pdf/20250610_vnr_publiccomment.pdf (in Japanese only)



ODA Topics

The Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9): Co-create Innovative Solutions with Africa

The Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9)^{*1} was held in Yokohama from August 20 to 22, 2025.

TICAD is a summit-level international conference on African development that has been held since 1993. The Government of Japan has been leading this conference, co-hosted by the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the African Union Commission (AUC). This ninth conference was attended by 49 African countries, including 33 heads of state and government, as well as co-organizers, international organizations, private companies, and members of civil society. Under the theme of “Co-create innovative solutions with Africa,” leveraging Japan’s technology and knowledge, active discussions were held across three pillars: economy, society, and peace and stability. A distinctive feature of this TICAD was the focus on cross-cutting priorities, namely “private sector-led sustainable growth,” “youth and women,” and “regional integration and connectivity within and beyond the region.” The outcomes of the three days of discussions were compiled into the “TICAD 9 Yokohama Declaration”^{**2} and adopted on the final day.

At the conference, then Prime Minister Ishiba announced that Japan will accelerate its efforts in the following seven areas: (1) promoting investment in Africa; (2) promoting the mobilization of private capital; (3) strengthening industrial cooperation, including the use of AI and digital transformation (DX) and strengthening the resilience of mineral resource supply chains; (4) enhancing connectivity within and beyond Africa; (5) strengthening health policies; (6) human resource development and exchanges focusing on youth and women; and (7) progressing efforts toward peace and security in Africa.

Among the concrete outcomes, the “Economic Region Initiative of Indian Ocean-Africa”^{*3} drew particular attention as an effort to harness the dynamism of the Indian Ocean-Africa economic region, which is characterized by its young population and abundant energy resources and holds the capacity to future global growth, and to channel this potential into revitalizing Japan’s own economy. By supporting Japanese companies expanding into Africa through hubs in India and the Middle East, the initiative aims to ensure that the resulting benefits flow back to the Japanese economy, while collaborating with countries in the Indian Ocean region to strengthen inter-regional connectivity, build a free and fair economic zone, and contribute to Africa’s regional integration and industrial development. As a concrete project to strengthen regional connectivity, the launch of a region-wide co-creation for common agenda initiative entitled “Strengthening the Global Supply Chain through Nacala Corridor Development”^{*4} was announced. It will advance the development and strengthening of regional transportation infrastructure and industrial development promotion along the Nacala Corridor, connecting the landlocked countries of Zambia and Malawi to the Indian Ocean via Nacala port in Mozambique.

In addition, against the backdrop of growing interest among Japanese companies in Africa, business-related discussions and exchanges were actively conducted at TICAD 9. During the Public-Private Business Dialogue held on August 21, candid discussions were held on the themes of “economic diversification,” “intra-regional integration and connectivity within and beyond the region,” and “strengthening finance” in Africa. A total of 324 business-related cooperation documents, which is more than three times the number of the previous TICAD (TICAD 8), were signed between Japanese and African public and private sector actors,^{*5} and the establishment of the Study Group on



Then Prime Minister Ishiba adopting the outcome document at the closing ceremony (Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)



Then Prime Minister Ishiba shaking hands with President Lourenço of Angola, who served as co-chair, at the closing ceremony (Photo: Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

Strengthening Japan-Africa Economic Partnership was also announced. Furthermore, with the aim of expanding business with Africa, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) organized the “TICAD Business Expo & Conference.” Approximately 10,000 participants, including business representatives from both Japan and Africa, attended the event, which proved to be a highly successful platform for business exchange.

Throughout the TICAD process, which has continued for more than 30 years, Japan has continuously evolved the themes of focus and the nature of TICAD itself in line with Africa’s development needs and international trends. At the same time, Japan has consistently advocated TICAD’s unique approach, which places emphasis on the importance of African “ownership” and international “partnership,” as a common principle underlying all TICAD conferences. Looking ahead to the next TICAD, to be held in Africa, Japan will continue to tackle various challenges in order to co-create solutions together with Africa.

^{*1} MOFA website: The Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9)
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad9/index.html>

^{*2} MOFA website: TICAD 9 Yokohama Declaration
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100893431.pdf>

^{*3} MOFA website: Announcement of “Economic Region Initiative of Indian Ocean-Africa”
https://www.mofa.go.jp/ic/ap_m/pageite_000001_01171.html

^{*4} For details on the region-wide co-creation for common agenda initiative “Strengthening the Global Supply Chain through Nacala Corridor Development,” see Part V, Section 2 (2) on page 160.

^{*5} MOFA website: TICAD 9 Signing Ceremony – List of Projects
<https://www.meti.go.jp/press/2025/08/20250822001/20250822001-2.pdf> (in Japanese only)



ODA Topics

ODA Public Relations – Bringing ODA Closer to the Public –

● Communicating Japan's Development Cooperation

Many of you may have likely heard voices of doubt such as: “Why does Japan need to assist faraway developing countries when Japan itself is in a difficult economic situation?” or “Why should Japan support other countries struck by disasters when disasters frequently occur in Japan itself?”

Meanwhile, Japan imports much of its energy resources and food from abroad, and earns income by exporting automobiles and various other products. Japan and developing countries are in a relationship of mutual support, and building friendly relations with countries around the world is important for the Japanese economy. Furthermore, the international community faces global challenges such as climate change and infectious diseases, as well as multiple crises including challenges to a free and open international order, such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine. These challenges may seem unrelated to the lives of individuals at first glance, but they are by no means events in a distant world or someone else's problem. It is necessary for the entire international community, including Japan, to cooperate and help each other in addressing these issues.

The promotion of development cooperation is premised on the understanding and support of the public. Therefore, it is extremely important to communicate the significance of development cooperation to the public, explaining: that it contributes to ensuring the stable supply of energy resources and food; that it is necessary to enhance trust in Japan within the international community; and that development cooperation benefits not only recipient countries but also Japan itself, serving as an important tool for strategically advancing Japan's foreign policy.

This column highlights several initiatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) to disseminate information and policies regarding the significance of Japan's development cooperation.

● Go! ODA-Man

ODA-Man, now in his eighth year as MOFA's ODA PR character, has continued to disseminate various video episodes to help people understand Japan's ODA, which is beneficial worldwide. In FY2025, three new episodes are scheduled for release: one showing the ODA-Man's team traveling through Bangkok, Thailand, and experiencing the results of ODA; another comparing before-and-after footage of ODA project sites while explaining the benefits that ODA brings to both developing countries and Japan; and one featuring interviews with former Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) about their career development after returning to Japan.



Go!, ODA-Man

● Global Festa JAPAN 2025

“Global Festa JAPAN 2025,” a major international cooperation event, took place on September 27 and 28, 2025. Marking its 34th edition, the event was held under the theme “Your First Step Can Change the World – Plus One for International Cooperation” Approximately 180 organizations working in the field of international cooperation, including NGOs, NPOs, international organizations, companies, universities, and foreign missions in Japan, set up exhibition booths at the event. It also featured live sessions with diverse guests, and experiential workshops. Counting those who attended the venue and those who watched the online stream, the event attracted approximately 30,000 participants.

MOFA organized a range of programs, starting with the opening ceremony, including an on-stage presentation introducing examples of career paths of JOCVs after their return to Japan; a



Then Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Matsumoto and other participants at the opening ceremony



Live session: “Up Close with ODA: International Cooperation Forging a New Era”



A lively sub-stage filled with participants

stage program to learn about career development from people who realized their passion for fashion and coffee, as well as other interests as international cooperation work; a talk stage presenting new forms of international cooperation in which the public and private sectors flexibly collaborate human resources and funds, while also considering Japan's benefits; and a talk session introducing ODA railway projects, with experts and railway enthusiasts discussing railways that Japan received support for shortly after the war, as well as vehicles running overseas thanks to Japan's technical assistance. MOFA also held the award ceremony for its annual photo contest.^{*1} Under the theme “Your First Step Gives Someone Hope,” the contest received many submissions conveying human connections and emotions. Award recipients were selected from 298 entries and received certificates from Ms. Obuchi, Chairperson of the JICA Parliamentary League, who served as head of the selection committee. Other activities included a joint presentation by various international organizations hosted by MOFA's Recruitment Center for International Organizations, and a session reporting on NGO activities in international cooperation, attended by officials from MOFA's Non-Governmental Organizations Cooperation Division of the International Cooperation Bureau and NGO representatives. For details, please refer to the event report^{*2} on the ODA section of the Ministry's website.

● ODA by Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises from across Japan



The venue featured exhibits by foreign missions in Japan, international organizations, NGOs, and others. MOFA also ran a booth, clearly explaining how Japan's ODA contributes worldwide.

Companies participating in Japan's ODA projects for the peace, stability, and prosperity of Japan and the world, are spread throughout the country. MOFA has conducted interviews with Japanese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are actively contributing to the world, and articles detailing their journey to project participation, achievements, and thoughts on ODA are published on MOFA's website by prefecture. By participating in ODA projects, many SMEs have built local business models in the field, gained trust from local government agencies, improved their recognition and expanded their partnerships, enhanced their creditworthiness with financial institutions, and further expanded their overseas operations.



Series ODA NOW

● ODA Email Newsletter, ODA Public Relations X (formerly Twitter)

Starting in FY2025, the ODA e-mail newsletter has been changed from a monthly publication to a quarterly issue. Each issue features a timely topic and is also available on the Ministry's website. In addition, it shares information about ODA on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). As of October 2025, the newsletter has approximately 10,000 subscribers, and MOFA's X followers exceed 13,000.



MOFA's ODA account on X



ODA email newsletter



MOFA's ODA account on Instagram

^{*1} Report on the MOFA Photo Contest “Your Step Forward Gives Someone Hope” https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/press/event/pagew_001313_00001.html (in Japanese only)

^{*2} Global Festa JAPAN 2025 event report https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/press/event/pagew_000001_00355.html (in Japanese only)