

Address by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, on the Occasion of the Japan-African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) Summit Roundtable

"To Bring Cash More into Farmers' Pockets"

15:00-16:00, Thursday, 26 September 2013

NLB Meeting Hall #5, United Nations Headquarters, New York City

Your excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
A little more than three months
have passed since TICAD V. I am
extremely pleased to have this
opportunity to meet you, my African
friends, once again.

Before I begin my speech, I would
like to say a few words. Many lives
were lost by the terrorist attack on
21 September in Kenya. We firmly
condemn these despicable and
unforgivable acts of terrorism.

Japan pledged to strengthen
support for the fight against
terrorism at TICAD V and, we will
actively engage ourselves to this end
in collaboration with the
international community.

You will remember that in the
Yokohama Declaration of TICAD V,
we established a goal of
empowering farmers as mainstream
economic actors.

NEPAD, headed by Dr. Mayaki, is
moving forward with the

Comprehensive Africa Agriculture
Development Programme (CAADP).
And, a large number of regional
economic communities also appear
to have made agricultural
cooperation into a major pillar,
something which I find very
reassuring.

Today is an opportunity for such
participants along with Japan to
engage in stocktaking. I very much
hope that we have candid
discussions with each other about
what we are now thinking and
implementing and what we now
need.

I always hold in high regard the
members of the Japan Overseas
Cooperation Volunteers, or JOCVs,
including those who are young
enough to be my children.

It is admirable and encouraging to
me that within the JOCVs, there has
emerged a sprinkling of volunteers
in Africa who have started their own
agriculture businesses with high
levels of added value.

For example, there is Ms. Yuko Morishige, who succeeded in commercializing products once she discovered that soaps gentle on the skin can be prepared from the shea butter made by the women she met upon beginning her assignment in Burkina Faso.

The brand of soap is called n-Se, which I understand is how the women say, “I’m home!” in one of the languages of western Burkina Faso.

It seems that when Japanese hear this word, it sounds utterly gentle and carries an ambiance of wind blowing across a field of grass.

Another woman, Ms. Hiroko Samejima, a former JOCV, has been using the world’s finest sheepskin procured in Ethiopia to produce bags that are pleasing to the eye with their vivid use of color and also delightful to the touch. The brand name, “Andu Amet,” means “one year” in the Amharic language of Ethiopia.

These women went to Africa and, becoming conscious of entrepreneurship, launched businesses having extremely high levels of added value. I consider

them to be magnificent role models and I respect them greatly.

As it happens, my own plan to revive the Japanese economy has harnessing the power of women as an overriding imperative, and I chose the empowerment of women to be a major point within the themes of the address I delivered to the General Assembly today.

I would be very glad if many, many more come to follow after Ms. Morishige and Ms. Samejima, drawing inspiration from their successful examples.

What’s more, there are important hints to be found in Ms. Morishige’s and Ms. Samejima’s achievements. It seems that on the expansive land of Africa, there is no limit to the potential to create businesses or develop commercial crops together with Japan, does it not?

Japan is a country that did not have an “Industrial Revolution” so much as an “Industrious Revolution,” in that from the beginning, we cultivated with great care our nation’s areas of arable land, which are only very limited, seeking to increase the amount of yield per area of land.

Proof of that can still be found even now in our landscapes of rice terraces, which are breathtakingly beautiful when the terraces reflect the setting sun. My home region also has this kind of scenery, and I am always very proud of it.

I believe that it is for this reason that in our engagement with Africa as well, whenever Japanese set down to work, their natural approach is to work in good harmony with the changes of the seasons and the passing of time as they try to cultivate the potential of agriculture.

If this were not the case, then most likely, they would not have been engaged in the development of NERICA rice -- “New Rice for Africa” - in the way they did.

Through NERICA rice, the plan to double Africa’s rice production output has been moving forward under the ten-year plan launched in 2008.

We will continue to make solid efforts to assist with this plan.

We envision the harvested crops being processed and heading to all parts of the world from various seaports and airports around the continent.

We envision a distribution network extending in all directions, with Africa becoming one organic body moving energetically with a pulse. These are the dreams that I dreamed together with all of you this year at TICAD V.

As I said at TICAD V, it is not enough for us to aim at “agriculture that enables the farmer to eat.” We must also aim at “agriculture that enables the farmer to earn money.”

If farmers are able not only to secure enough food for themselves but also to derive a cash income by selling their surplus crops to the markets or producing commercial crops, then the problems of poverty will disappear on their own.

And having farmers, who make up a large portion of the African population, become affluent is, in other words, the creation of a large consumer market that will support economic growth.

I have come to have confidence that this is a dream that is within arm’s reach and is realizable in the not so distant future.

Today I would like to reconfirm together with the Chairs of the

various RECs both the visions and the realities underfoot in an Africa that will grow in the area of agriculture. I also wish for us to exchange our vibrancy with each other.

Thank you very much.