

Tracing Botswana's involvement in TICAD

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Botswana's second president Sir Ketumile Masire was one of the five African presidents that participated in the inaugural summit of Japan's International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD I) in 1993.

Masire is not only the architect but also a lightning rod and pacesetter that paved the way for subsequent leaders to traverse as they navigate the pitfalls of foreign direct investment that have been the bane of many a leader. Indeed, FDI continues to pose an onerous task for Botswana in spite of her relative peace, stability, and good governance including sound macro-economic fundamentals, which under normal circumstances are the pre-conditions for the attraction of FDI. But lo and behold, Botswana's share of total FDI that flows into southern Africa is completely negligible!

Taking the cue from Masire, the country's third president Festus Mogae who inherited a strong economy that defied all the indicators set by credit rating institutions, continued the relations with Japan and attended TICAD II in 1998 in Tokyo. Mogae also participated in the World Water Forum in 2003 in Tokyo.

Botswana then went on hibernation with absence of high-level presence at the subsequent TICAD III and IV, the latter in 2008, only to resurface in 2013 when the country's fourth president, Lt. Gen. Dr Ian Khama, whose ascension to the country's leftist position coincided with a world recession, attended TICAD V in Tokyo. ✓

Although Botswana and Japan are celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations this year, which incidentally marks the country's Golden Jubilee, Japan only opened its embassy in Botswana in 2008 in an effort to further cement the cooperation between the two countries. As at 2014 imports from Japan to Botswana amounted to 3.3 billion Japanese Yen while exports from Botswana were 1.8 billion JPY - a situation Japan's Ambassador to Botswana, Masahiro Onishi has vowed to change during the remainder of his tenure.

Among the five Japanese companies operating in Botswana, Komatsu, renowned internationally for its high quality heavy machinery, is the most prominent especially since Tloaneeng diamond mine has deployed some of its trucks in its operations. In



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an interview early this year with *Botswana Guardian*, the Japanese Envoy promised to do everything within his means to encourage more Japanese private sector investment in Botswana. TICAD has certainly created a formidable foundation for Japan - one of the world's largest economies - to contribute to Africa's development.

And Botswana has benefitted immensely in many aspects, whether bilaterally through technical and financial assistance under Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) or multilaterally (TICAD framework), there's glaring and tangible evidence on the ground. In the areas of trade support, JICA is supporting Botswana to set up a One Stop Border Post project to speed up traffic along the Trans Kgalagadi Corridor, which connects with Walvis Bay so to increase trade with other SADC

countries by creating a single border crossing procedure. Botswana Unified Revenue Services (BURS) and Namibian Customs and Excise are the project implementers.

The Kazungula Bridge across the Zambezi River at the border between Botswana and Zambia is yet another road transfer project located at the heart of the North-South Corridor, which stretches all the way from Durban to Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo, being built with an official development assistance loan from Japan and the help of other international development partner.

At national level, Japan has helped Botswana to relocate from analogue to digital transmission by assisting the country adopt the Integrated Services Digital Broadcasting - Terrestrial (ISDB-T) broad-

casting standard developed by Japan. Furthermore, Japan also helps Btv with broadcasting content as the country endeavours to strengthen cultural ties with Botswana. There are also assistance programmes in the form of the grassroots human security projects through which Japan provides grants to help in community development projects that tackle social problems. And in the educational sector, besides the Japan's Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and Senior Volunteers programme under which Japanese volunteers are sent to Botswana to transfer skills to their local counterparts in the areas of environmental education, public administration, automobiles, computer technology and rural development among others, Japan through JICA also offers training courses for government employees in the fields of private sector development, regional development and environmental education.

With TICAD being hosted for the first time ever in Africa later this year August 27-28th under the theme, "Advancing Africa's development agenda with TICAD - Partnership for Prosperity", civil society organisations have a great opportunity to jump on the TICAD bandwagon and benefit from the various development programmes that will emanate from the three identified three priority pillars of Industrialisation, Health, Water and sanitation and Social stability, which will be addressed in the next three year cycle under TICAD VI.

Botswana civil society under the banner of BOCONGO - Botswana Council of Non-Government Organisations - could also position itself to take advantage of the opportunities to monitor the implementation of TICAD V or JICA sponsored projects in Botswana and additionally position itself to tackle these three key areas that are so fundamental to Botswana's wellbeing.

In the various interactions that president of the pan African civil society body - Civic Commission for Africa (CCA) Masungu Mooki - had with the leaders and members of BOCONGO recently including 'meet and greet' sessions with some of TICAD co-sponsors, the issue of mentoring alignment of national development plans and district development plans with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was reiterated. Civil society organisations are also called upon to play a watchdog role, to police governments' implementation record with a view to closing the loopholes identified.