



# Join with Us as Partners

In March, ahead of the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) to be held in Yokohama in June, **Zimbabwe Ambassador to Japan His Excellency Stuart Comberbach** spoke with the *Japan Journal's* Alex Hendy about the nature of Japan-Africa relations today.

## You are the Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps (ADC) in Japan. Tell us about that.

This is my eleventh year in Japan and as the longest serving among my colleagues of the ADC, I serve as Dean of our Group. We are a big group of thirty-eight African embassies here. We have found that as far as possible it is better to coordinate and go with a collective position than to invade the Foreign Ministry thirty-eight times. We meet regularly and, so as to bring more focus to our collective endeavors, we

are divided into a series of thematic or sectoral committees. Whereas our primary task, as African Ambassadors is to pursue the bilateral relationship between our own countries and Japan, we are increasingly working together for the preparation of TICAD V, and there is a lot of interest and support from colleagues. We try to work out collective positions so that we work from a collective brief.

## How have Japan-Africa relations developed in recent times?

The relationship is encapsulated in the TICAD process, which started in 1993. With Japan at the core, TICAD has played a very significant role in raising awareness and mobilizing support for the African development agenda. TICADs I, II and III focused on social development, largely education and health, and TICAD at that stage was largely an ODA-based conference. One of the key new components for TICAD IV [2008] was the involve-

ment of the private sector. Within three months of the end of TICAD IV, three joint public and private sector missions had been dispatched to different parts of the continent, and there have been around twenty such trade and investment missions in the five years since. This has brought home to the Japanese private sector some of the opportunities which are there.

## What interests the Japanese private sector in Africa?

Of course there is tremendous interest on the extractive side—oil, gas, rare earth minerals, precious minerals, strategic minerals—but also in things like electric power generation, water systems, renewable energy... Africa's requirement for this kind of infrastructure development is huge and has

now been put into a continent-agreed blueprint called PIDA, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa. There is quite a lot of interest from the Japanese private sector in participating in the building of certainly some aspects of this infrastructure. In a large sense now I think

Africa has got its act together in terms of setting its own development agenda and is now saying, these are our blueprints, come with us, not on the

basis of ODA but on the basis of investment and public-private partnerships.

## **What about the potential for agriculture?**

There are 7 billion people in the world now, rising to 9 billion [in 2050]. We have to try to find a way to feed those extra billions. Africa has something like 52% of the world's unused arable land. Just in that statistic alone there is tremendous opportunity for the development of agriculture. Between 50 and 70% of the population in all our countries is involved in one way or another in agriculture, so

there is this knowledge about how to work the land and a willingness to do it. So the land is there, to a large extent the water is there too—we have these huge rivers—it just needs a kind of targeted infrastructure put in place: canalization, irrigation, the building of dams, and to a large extent in our countries and regions the blueprints for all of this are there. What we need now is partners to join with us.

## **What is on the agenda at TICAD V?**

The overriding concern is that we have an expanding population, the vast majority of which is young people below the age of thirty-five, and there is no work for them, or not enough. Therefore our focus as a continent is on building industry, promoting development which creates employment and gives the youth on the continent some stake in the future. Our exports worldwide are generally raw commodities, basic materials. The thrust from the whole continent is that we need to industrialize; we need to boost our manufacturing capacity; we need

to add value to our raw materials, minerals, agricultural produce. But for that, we need a certain minimum of infrastructure, electric power being probably the most essential, then road and rail networks which interlink the countries of the continent. It is very difficult to sell a banana to Japan or a grape to Europe or a fruit juice to South America, so one answer to that is boosting trade between and amongst ourselves. For that you need a minimum of infrastructure.

## **What about Zimbabwe- and Southern Africa-Japan relations today?**

We have a very correct relationship with Japan. Other countries have put sanctions on Zimbabwe, but the Japanese have never done that or supported moves by western countries or their G8 colleagues to isolate Zimbabwe or ramp up the pressure. We're holding a referendum this month and that should lead to full blown elections around July, and the Japanese have been very supportive of that. Zimbabwe is a member of SADC [the 15-member Southern African Development Community], twelve of whose member states have embassies here in Tokyo—and, as with the larger ADC, we engage as

a collective to promote the region here in Japan. Last year we had an SADC-Japan infrastructure investment seminar which was attended by more than 170 Japanese private sector representatives, and in May this year there is a seminar being organized by METI [Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry] and JOGMEC [Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation] involving many countries in southern Africa, which is an indication again of this growing Japanese interest in natural resources development as Japan debates the future of nuclear power and the need to diversify its sources of fossil fuels.