



ABE Initiative Scholars

Africa Meets Japan



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Autocracy before achieving stable democracy

Asahiko Mihara Member of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Japan

I have been enchanted by Africa up until now since I met with a student from Ethiopia when I was studying in the United States.

Ahead of TICAD VII to be held late August this year, I think the public attention is centering on Africa albeit gradually. The Japanese have become conscious of Africa not as a far-away continent but as somehow close partners.

The degree of interest in Africa differs from place to place. Yokohama will be hosting TICAD for the third time. Kobe is home to a number of the ABE Initiative Scholars studying electronic engineering. Akita, well-known for its higher education in mining and resource science, also hosts ABE Scholars. Fukuoka has a

university doing research on power generation by the use of geothermal heat released from African Rift Valleys. These regions in Japan have been establishing a deep relation with Africa in academic research and education.

If Africa and Japan benefit from each other as I mentioned above, there will be an increased understanding about Africa through exchange with Africans coming to Japan, whether they are students, businesspersons or others.

Through my own experience, I can safely say that the most important factor to promote relations between Japan and Africa is the latter's peace and stability. With a few exceptions, African states have been



Author (third from left in front row) photographed with the third batch the ABE Initiative Program participants (September, 2016)

building their nations on their own since 1960's when many of them became independent from the former colonial powers. Currently, there are 54 independent nations in Africa including South Sudan which gained independence in 2011.

If you look at these African countries carefully, you will find that some are making steady progress in economic development and others remain stagnant or even getting retrogressive. Such difference is mainly caused by the existence of internal and external conflicts. The common denominator of the stagnant countries is domestic insecurity.

The unfortunate fact about Africa is that it lacks the three core factors to enable economic advancement, which are: capital, human resources and technology. However, globalization has made it possible for Africa to complement whatever she lacks from the international market. The only stumbling block will be the lack of stability and security in the country.

My instinct tells me that authoritarian development states will prove better for the country and people



Author shaking hands with the ABE Initiative Program participants at Africa Business Networking Fair (March, 2017)

than democratic states which often result in political instability, as long as the political leaders are selfless if not democratic. The case in point is Rwanda, which is an authoritarian state resembling Singapore.

The first things that developing countries need are: food, clothing and shelter followed by decent education and democratic governance. Unlike developed countries which prospered under democracy, developing countries must first achieve basic developmental goals while establishing political stability through autocracy. I buy this theory because I have seen so many examples to prove it.



Author (fourth from left in front row) photographed with graduate students studying geothermal power generation under the ABE Initiative Program at Kyushu University (January, 2017)



Asahiko Mihara is Member of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Japan. He serves as Chief Executive of House Special Committee on Disaster Countermeasures also as Acting President of the Japan-African Union Parliamentary Friendship League. Born in Fukuoka, he graduated from the Faculty of Law of Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, Japan and earned his Master's Degree from Carleton University Graduate School of International Affairs, Ottawa, Canada.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

35-year assistance for Africa and my commitment

Daishiro Yamagiwa Member of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Japan

The first event that brought Africa to my awareness was the 1984-85 Ethiopia Famine in which more one million people died of starvation. It grabbed attention of many people in the world as world class musicians and celebrities launched “Save Africa” campaign to raise fund for the affected people. Being a high school student, I was one of those who had broken their heart to see the miserable situations brought about by the famine through photo images and video footage.

Throughout my student days, I had in contact with many international students not from Sub-Saharan Africa but from North Africa including Egypt. 35 years ago it was not common for the students from Sub-Saharan Africa to study abroad in Japan, but things have changed greatly these days. I know a number of Egyptian students who are now teaching in their home country and holding government positions after return from Japan. It is really significant that many young Africans learn not only academic subjects but also the people and the culture of Japan.

I read biology at university, so I did research on non-human animals. I was interested in the places where various species of animals live. Africa was one of the most attractive places for me in terms of its biodiversity. Doing research on animals means interacting with humans who live together with them. Through such research experiences, I have had a strong conviction that all the humans in the world are the same whatever country they live in or whatever culture they embrace because they belong to the same animal species.

When I became a politician, I started to face Africa from political perspectives in an effort to confront with its poverty and underprivileged situations as a social challenge with an acute impression that I had with Africa in 1984 still in mind. Each country has its own trajectory for development, but it is fundamental for animal species including humans to prepare most suitable living environment. In the past 35 years Africa has grown remarkably but its development is



Author on the field visit to JICA's Project for Strengthening Operation and Maintenance of Rural Water Supply Systems (Rwanda, 2017)



Author (right), Mr. S. K. Maina, Ambassador of Kenya to Japan (center) and Mr. Mihara, Member of the House of Representatives (left) at TICAD VI held in Kenya in 2016

uneven across country and region. Some countries have reached the level of middle income country while others still remain in poverty. Some countries have become peaceful and stable while others are still mired in conflict. Many countries in Africa share common problems in politics and governance. Overall, however, Africa can be touted as a continent advancing remarkably with its diversity and dynamics.

It was at the time of TICAD V in 2013 that the idea of the ABE Initiative Program was tabled. In fact, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and JICA, its ODA implementing body, were less passionate about spending aid budget on human resources development in Africa. As a politician who had watched Africa's reality throughout its time lines, I had a conviction that Japan should do something that other countries cannot, something that she had comparative advantage in and something that Africa truly needed. That was the ABE Initiative Program. I had felt that aid to Africa had changed its colors reflecting diversifying needs and context all the time. The donor profile had also changed. The Western countries such as the U.K., France, Germany and the U.S. were the main donors for Africa 35 years ago. Japan joined the aid community in 1970's when she had recorded high economic growth at home. Nowadays emerging donors such as China and Turkey are playing a large part. That's why I thought we needed some new approach towards Africa.

Unlike other scholarship programs designed to nurture highly-skilled human resources, the ABE Initiative Program is unique in that it provides the participants not only with academic learning opportunities but also practical experiences of interacting with Japanese business communities. The program's achievement in



Author taking a photo of a gorilla in the forest of Rwanda

the past six years has been powerfully significant. We should enhance it both quantitatively and qualitatively as we move towards TICAD VII.

The main theme of TICAD VII will be "Africa as a Business Partner". When I think of those days when I was young, I am particularly glad that Africa has grown indeed to become our business partner. Looking forward, I hope that Japan and Africa will be strongly connected through the efforts of further developing human resources.



Daishiro Yamagiwa is Member of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Japan. Currently holds a number of posts of Liberal Democratic Party including Deputy Secretary –General / Chief Secretary, Election Strategy Committee/ and Secretary-General, Parliamentary Association for the Friendship between Japan and Africa. Obtained PhD in Veterinary Medicine from Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, the University of Tokyo.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My expectation for the ABE Initiative Program

Yoshifumi Okamura Representative of the Government of Japan for International Peace and Stability, Ambassador for TICAD

One busy day in 2013 when I was preparing for TICAD V, a group of Parliamentary cheerleaders for Africa came to me to propose the concept of the ABE Initiative Program saying the acronym “ABE” for Africa Business Education happened to be the name of Prime Minister. It was their wish that Prime Minister Abe who had come into power in the previous year would promote the idea with confidence and commitment. Apart from its naming, I thought the idea was quite relevant in the sense that it could provide young African leaders not only academic knowledge but also practical experience in Japanese business.

Japan is located far from Africa so the best way to attract future business leaders is to give them a chance to study in Japan and to participate in the internship with Japanese companies in order to acquire first-hand knowledge of how people work there.

Questions may arise that it would be better for them to study in Europe which has historical, geographical and cultural proximity to Africa. That is not necessarily the case. I was confident that there was something that Africans can gain from Japan only when they study or work there. During my previous tenure as Ambassador to Cote d’Ivoire for three years, I had also served as Ambassador for Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo and Niger. I visited many places in these countries and exchanged with people there.

Through such interactions, I came to realize that Japan and Africa have many things in common. Both people worship in forests and mountains in the belief that spirits dwell there. Young people respect the elderly and follow their instruction. Each village has its own tradition and custom. Everybody cherishes their family and hometown.



Author delivering a speech at Japan - Cote d'Ivoire Friendship Day (August, 2017)

Japan and Africa have a commonality not only in faith and creed for life but in social life as well. Japanese constantly nod aloud during the meetings. Westerners nod only when they consent. Africans often nod. It was almost a ritual that the village audience kept on nodding aloud to my speech when I visited there. I realized that people nodded to show that they were listening to me eagerly. It is a listening culture that both Japan and Africa nurture. African people never stand up to give their opinion. They listen first and then begin telling about themselves. Isn't that same with Japanese?

If you visit any village in Africa, you will find a big tree in its center surrounded by many chairs and benches. It is the place where people get together to discuss and solve issues of the village. The decision made will be approved by the village chief automatically without any intervention or objection. There remain many communities in Africa governed by the king. But the king never gives his opinion or idea. His minister only tells people with the king's authority what senior villagers have already decided after deliberation.

Such decision-making style resembles to the traditional leadership style in Japanese organizations. In the

Japanese companies, the rank-and-file staff members make a business plan after participatory discussion and coordination. The role of the company president is to approve it saying “Go.”

In the feudal period, the ideal attitude of the lord was to say, “Do as you like.” Thus motivating the subordinates has long been the secret for organizational management in Japan.

On the contrary, Western style leadership requires that a capable and energetic leader make a plan by himself and instruct the subordinates to implement it. The subordinates who can fully understand the policy of the leader and execute it without fail are highly evaluated by the leader.

The downside of this type of Western leadership is that all the staff members of a company tend to sit and wait for the instruction from the leader. In order to strengthen an organization, it is imperative for each individual member should endeavor to tackle the challenges with their own wisdom. If they execute a plan in this way under the good teamwork with the fellow workers, the chance of business success will be high.



Author addressing at the Plenary Session of the United Nations General Assembly



Author discussing peace building in Africa with Liberia's President Johnson Sirleaf (June, 2017)

What I expect young African leaders to do is to act on their own without blindly following the instructions from the above. This, I hope, will lead to further advancement of Africa. The Japanese style leadership and management will be effective in the African context because its essence can also be found in the African society and in the mind of African people as I mentioned earlier.

In this context, I appreciated the efforts of the members of the Japanese Parliament and looked forward to the ABE Initiative Program. Six years into its implementation, the program has produced a bunch of excellent graduates and business leaders who are just entering into the business between Africa and Japan. It is expected that the ABE participants gain deep knowledge about Japanese society and the corporate culture that are different from those of the West. I hope that they will showcase to their elite fellows who have been educated in former European colonial countries that Africa should have a different way of development that is more indigenous. I believe that will make Africa really great.



Yoshifumi Okamura is Planner and organizer of the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V, 2013) as Director-General for Africa. Charged with Africa-related agenda in the Security Council of the United Nations from 2016 to 2017. Since 2017, he has been serving as Representative of the Government of Japan for International Peace and Stability and as Ambassador for TICAD.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

ABE Initiative—Fostering a New Network across Japan and Africa

Masahiko Kiya Deputy Assistant Minister of African Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

It was in the autumn of 2015, soon after I was posted as Ambassador to South Sudan, that I was first engaged with the ABE Initiative Program. Security situation there deteriorated in December 2013 with Japanese nationals evacuating and JICA office curtailing operation for nearly a year. For this reason, South Sudan was only invited to participate in the ABE Initiative Program from the 3rd batch recruitment in 2015. Recruitment briefing organized by JICA at Juba University seemed full of passion of young people aspiring to study in Japan. I told them that the program was created at the initiative of Prime Minister Abe as its name implied and that I would interview all the candidates myself while wishing the successful candidates to serve as a bridge for business between Japan and South Sudan. At the ensuing Q&A session, one of them requested flexibility in age limit for application because he could not have a chance to receive university education until the age of fifties due to prolonged internal conflict. I really felt the difficulties that the country had faced. Local newspaper gave a top-page coverage of the event showing strong interest and expectation of the South Sudanese people.

More than 100 people applied to the Program in spite of the short recruitment period, and 30 some applicants passed document screening. As I was interviewing

them together with Director-General of Education Ministry of South Sudan and Chief Representative of JICA Sudan Office, I was struck by the passionate talk of the applicants in their twenties and thirties, who were officials of central and local governments, university instructors and business persons and who survived the turbulent decades of the country. 11 applicants were finally chosen as successful candidates. The success ratio against total population was among the highest levels of all participating countries of Africa. One of the most impressive applicants to me was a woman who was working at a local architectural design office after graduating from architecture department of Juba University. She passionately expressed her desire to integrate traditional architectural culture and materials with the latest Japanese environmental technology. I heard that the woman architect made a speech as the representative of all the 3rd batch ABE participants at the welcome ceremony held in Japan.

The recruitment process for the 4th batch started in the autumn of 2016 in spite of the fighting in July of the same year. This time round 8 candidates were selected making South Sudanese representation in the entire program increase more than the previous year. By the autumn of 2017, I had returned to Japan and changed roles as Deputy Assistant Minister of African Affairs Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote the ABE Initiative Program from the position of the Headquarters. As I attended various events such as welcome ceremonies in autumn and business network fairs in spring and listened to the voices from the participants from across Africa and those from the representatives of the internship providing companies, I deepened my understanding of the real importance of this program.



The ABE Initiative Program recruitment briefing held at Juba University in South Sudan



South Sudanese youth gathering at the briefing session

Supported by a broad spectrum of the stakeholders both in Japan and Africa, the ABE Initiative Program launched at TICAD V in 2013 has become a flagship program of TICAD process. Why did it happen? The reason, I believe, is that it unleashed the potential of both Africa and Japan and helped create a new value by linking the two.

The first potential is the excellent human resources Africa has at its disposal. There are many young people with strong motivation and excellent ability who aspire for high education. Japan can provide such opportunities to the future young leaders if we work to recruit and select best ones. In fact, there are some ABE participants who graduate as the top performing students.

The second potential is the host of universities across Japan which are strengthening their capability to provide international students with specialized knowledge ranging from ICT to natural resource management, global health and business management as well as to expand the choice of English-taught graduate courses in their efforts for internationalization. In particular, the efforts of the local universities are note-worthy. The local universities in Japan can be the window of international opportunities.

The third potential is the whole bunch of business

companies across Japan which possess various technologies applicable to developing countries. As Japan faces aging population and shrinking work force, the vibrant market of Africa can be a new stage for their business activities.

The key point of the ABE Initiative Program is that it connected these three potential tightly together. More than 1,200 ABE participants were active across Japan in five years as representatives for Africa. Its impact has been so huge that they stimulated internationalization of Japanese business, universities and local government organizations. Some are promoting not only business but cross-cultural exchange between Japan and Africa. Another good news is the establishment of KAKEHASHI AFRICA, which is the business network created by the ex-ABE participants by themselves to promote exchanges between Japanese companies and universities and their African counterparts.

Five years into implementation, the ABE Initiative Program is functioning as a lively platform to promote exchanges between Japan and Africa. As the official in charge of moving the TICAD process further, I am committed to developing it further, building on the success of the ABE Initiative Program.



Photographed with the departing ABE participants in front of the Japanese Embassy in South Sudan



Masahiko Kiya is Deputy Assistant Minister of African Affairs Department and International Cooperation Bureau of Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2017. He also serves as Ambassador in charge of TICAD and NGOs. He was Ambassador of Japan to South Sudan from 2015 to 2017. After joining Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987, he assumed a number of posts at the U.K. as training attaché, and at the Embassies in Nigeria, the U.S., Bangladesh, and Belgium.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Looking back at the development of the ABE Initiative Program

Hiroshi Kato Senior Vice President of JICA for Sub-Saharan Africa

Five years into the implementation of the ABE Initiative Program, which started in September 2014, it has become Japan's flagship ODA program for Africa. A total 1,219 participants across the continent have studied or are studying under the program at 79 host universities in Japan, of which the number has ever been increasing. The ABE Initiative is a combined program of academic course work and internship at Japanese companies. The number of host companies have also increased from 66 at the initial stage to presently 156. These steady numbers are a testimony to the robust achievement of the program.

The ABE Initiative Program is aimed at cultivating human resources who are able to connect business between Japan and Africa. The record shows that 93 ex-participants or 15% of its total of 620, are employed by Japanese companies. 41 ex-participants who had come to Japan for study before 2015, or 10% of its total of 460, are engaged in business with Japan in some form or other. These numbers can be said as robust ones considering the fact that Japan-Africa business relations were lean before.



Author addressing at the African Business Networking Fair 2018

One of the reasons why the ABE Initiative Program has made such a great achievement is that it helped to deepen understanding between Japan and Africa by providing opportunity for the Japanese to recognize how talented people Africans are. Many academic supervisors teaching the ABE participants highly evaluate them as being serious and committed to contributing to the development of their countries. There are countless examples of their excellence. Some graduated as top students. Some received the most excellent thesis award. And there was a student who was asked to join the project team to promote Osaka in its bid for 2025 World Expo, which turned out to be a success.

The ABE Initiative Program also serves to help Africans to better understand Japan. The participants under study or after return unanimously say that they were able to understand Japan more deeply and to become more familiar with Japan which they had hitherto known only through the industrial products such as automobiles and electric home appliances. In addition, the participants are given the opportunity to experience Japanese work ethics and social behaviors during the internship at Japanese companies and institutions. I think that this is the value-added to the program enabling it to contribute to the cultivation of the real business networks.

Another aspect of the ABE Initiative Program is that it provides a fresh opportunity for the Japanese host companies. I heard from a company president that his company had hosted a greater number of African interns than that of his Japanese employees, which gave a huge impact on his company as it explored business opportunity in Africa. He said to me that no other ODA program is as useful as the ABE Initiative Program.

If ODA is to benefit both the donor countries and the recipient, then this program will be its role model.

As I mentioned above, the ABE Initiative Program has undoubtedly made great strides and are highly evaluated among all circles but its process for establishment was not without difficulty. It was launched by Prime Minister Abe at the time of TICAD V in June 2013 and the first batch of 156 participants already arrived in Japan in September 2014. It was not an easy task to establish its implementing system and detailed regulations and provisions as well as to obtain approval from the concerned authorities before accepting the first batch of students. Securing internship positions was extremely difficult at the initial stage because the program was little known to the Japanese companies. How to support African students in their academic study and life in an unfamiliar country like Japan was a challenge. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heart-felt gratitude and appreciation to the tremendous efforts made throughout all processes ranging from selection, acceptance, study support and internship to follow-up by all the people and intuitions involved including, most importantly the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE).

African population is predicted to reach 2.1 billion by 2050. Africa is likely to be playing a greater role than now in various fields such as politics, economy and culture by the middle of the 21st century if, as is often argued, economic power of a country or a region tends to grow in proportion to its population. The ABE Initiative Program is contributing to cement relationships between Japan and a continent with such an enormous potential. Looking forward, the Japan International Cooperation Agency(JICA) will be committed to its further advancement.



Hiroshi Kato is Senior Vice President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for Sub-Saharan Africa. He joined JICA in 1978 after graduating from the University of Tokyo. He later earned his master's degree in Public Administration from Harvard University in 1988. At JICA he has served at various positions, and before assuming his current post in 2013, he was Director of the JICA Research Institute.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Looking Back to Five Years I Worked for the ABE Initiative Program

Keiko Sano Director General of JICA Okinawa

The ABE Initiative Program was launched at TICAD V held in June 2013. Human Development Department of JICA was tasked to implement it. Based on a principle concept of the Program, i.e. academic study at Master's Degree Courses of Japanese universities and internship opportunities at Japanese companies, the staff rushed to design and establish the organizational setup. At the same time, selection of the first batch participants was conducted in eight countries. They partnered with JICE to approach to the private sector firms and universities for possible collaboration.

The number of the first batch applicants reached 676, which was an indication how passionate Africans were about this program. It was busy time in April 2014 that I was appointed to lead the implementation of the program as Deputy Director General of Human Development Department. My initial task was to smoothly kick start the acceptance of the first batch participants, to consolidate the management setup and to begin preparation for the second batch without delay.

Among many other higher education projects that JICA was handling, the ABE Initiative Program was the first-ever program in collaboration with government, academic institutions and the private sector. It may sound exaggerated but I had put on myself under intense pressure. JICA must fully utilize its accumulated knowledge and experience and not disappoint people both at home and abroad.

My efforts included to make sure that JICA bear the expenditures of the universities in such a way that they could manage the ABE participants smoothly, to coordinate



A first batch ABE participant presenting a token of gratitude to JICA

with other international education programs which had different institutional setup and to thoroughly examine the contents of the application guidelines and documents from the perspectives of overseas offices in charge of recruitment and selection. What was most challenging to me was how to make an effective approach to the private sector firms which JICA and JICE had not hitherto been in close contact with. We needed to have a completely different business mindset in order to comply with the requests and proposals from the interested private firms. I've seen many of my staff toiling and moiling to write and rewrite the implementing plans to be circulated and approved by the top management. It was in this way that the ABE Initiative Program came into implementation after a number of negotiations with universities and private firms.

In September 2014, I served as an MC for the welcome reception in honor of 156 first batch participants. A participant from Kenya made a speech on behalf of the cohort. I talked to her since it brought back memories of my days as a member of JICA Kenya between 2001 and 2004. At that moment I didn't even imagine that I was to be dispatched to Kenya again in the following year.

In September 2015, I was posted as Chief

Representative of JICA in Kenya. My duty for the ABE Initiative Program there in turn became recruiting, selecting and dispatching candidates from Kenya and three countries in charge. I served as supervisor of written exams as well as interviewer of the candidates. The most challenging task was to follow up the returnees to make sure that they would be a bridge in promoting business between Japan and Africa. I thought it was important for JICA Kenya not only to take care of each and every returnee based on the individual relationship to support them to actively engage in business between Japan and Kenya but also to feedback and propose improvement measures to JICA Headquarters. I assigned a dedicated officer and started various local programs because Kenya was the biggest sending country and its largest beneficiary. We held reporting sessions by the returned participants and provided consultations for those who wish to start up business. The largest event we organized was “East Africa Business Networking Fair” in Nairobi in May 2018 which brought together the ex-ABE participants from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Seychelles as well as more than 80 representatives from Japanese and local companies. Based on these initiatives, we launched a local internship program whereby ex-participants could learn further about Japanese business manner and



Author addressing to the East Africa Business Networking Fair held in Nairobi

brush up their skills for working in the different cultural settings. This local program gained a high reputation among both the participants and the host companies. In addition, we planned and organized an observation visit for the Japanese companies who had hosted the ABE participants to see what’s going on with them and to learn actual situations of business in Africa in the hope that we could give the participating companies a clue to how to explore business there.

In March 2019, I was posted to Director General of JICA Okinawa after three and half years' stay in Kenya. What I’m doing in Okinawa is to watch over the ABE participants studying here and help them when needed. I see with my own eyes many students who find it difficult to be accustomed to the different culture and life style and who miss their family left behind, which I could not be aware in Kenya. But I’m heartened to know that so many kind Japanese people stay by their side and support them.

Actually, a large number of people are involved in the ABE Initiative Program and support the participants throughout the program expecting their roles for bridging Japan and Africa in Business. Of course, I will definitely be one of them. I will do my best more sincerely than the past five years to make sure that the ABE Initiative Program will make further success.



An ABE participant who received “Numaguchi Award” from Graduate School of Environment Science, Hokkaido University as the highest-performing student reporting to author



Keiko Sano is Director General of JICA Okinawa. After serving as a JOCV in Zimbabwe, joined JICA in 1996. Gained careers in ODA projects in Africa including assignment in Kenya twice.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan





ABE Initiative Scholars **Africa Meets Japan**

JICE team members meet Africa

Nobuaki Hirakawa
Vice President of Japan International Cooperation Center

Takashi Akao
Director of Administration & Overseas Project Division,
International Training Department of JICE

Sayuri Hayashi
International Student Advisor of JICE Kansai Office

Chieko Yamada
International Student Advisor of JICE Chubu Office

How JICE has been Supporting International Students

Nobuaki Hirakawa Vice President of Japan International Cooperation Center

Twenty years into the management of international student programs starting with the JDS in 1999, we have accepted, since 2000, a total of 6,584 international students in the academic study programs as detailed in the table below.

The Government of Japan has been promoting a plan to accept 300,000 international students since it launched a plan to accept 100,000 students in 1983. International students contribute to the advancement of their home countries after return but also serve as a bridge between Japan and their countries. The students sponsored by Official Development Assistance (ODA) are expected to achieve the objectives set by country and region in advance by learning Japan's own development process and obtaining their Master's Degree in the Japanese universities.

JICE's international student service is built on our experience of managing international technical training participants from developing countries which we have been doing since our foundation. The participants in the training programs are expected to achieve the training objectives designed to contribute to the development of their countries by acquiring Japanese technology and knowledge while understanding Japan and the Japanese people and overcoming the differences in culture and living environment. Through managing these programs, we have been able to accumulate the knowhow with which to narrow the cultural gap between Japan and the participants' countries and to help them to motivate themselves and to lead to awareness and to promote understanding.

Program Title	Start Year	Number of Countries	Number of Students
1. The project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS)	1999	14	4,187
2. Master's Degree and Internship Program of African Business Education Initiative for Youth (The ABE Initiative Program)	2014	54	1,219
3. Project for the Promotion and Enhancement of the Afghan Capacity for Effective Development (PEACE)	2011	1	570
4. ODA Loans Scholarship Programs	2008	2	236
5. Japan Human Resource Development Scholarship for Chinese Young Leaders	2013	1	169
6. Human Resources Development in the Mining Sector (KIZUNA)	2014	21	86
7. Other programs sponsored by foreign governments, private organizations and universities, etc.	2010	41	117
Total		134	6,584

Note: Total number of countries means a cumulative total.



At the welcome reception for the Fellows from Uzbekistan that JICE has first-ever accepted (August, 2000)

Such knowhow has been fully utilized and incorporated in our international student service in the sense that we can motivate each student according to the specific objective of the program. For instance, ABE participants are expected to link Japanese and African business, and JDS Fellows are nurtured to be highly capable personnel to tackle with the socio-economic challenges of their countries. In full recognition of the



Author (third from left) photographed with the JICE staff and JICE Japanese language instructors in front of JICE Cambodia Project Office (August, 2001)

importance of each program's objective, JICE is always committed to helping students to achieve their own and institutional objective effectively.

However, this was easier said than done. Being manager in charge of kick starting the JDS in 1999, I was tasked to establish an operational setup for international student service including overseas representation and the working reactions with the universities, which we had not hitherto have experience in.

So I did so many work tirelessly ranging from promoting JDS to the Japanese universities to establishing overseas JDS offices, formulating management plans, consulting with the relevant government ministries of each sending country, preparing for pre-departure Japanese language training and arranging accommodation for the incoming students. We had to do all these in such a short period in time for accepting the first batch of JDS Fellows in the summer of 2000. I still remember the faces of the first 40 Fellows from Laos and Uzbekistan with a hopeful look. Twenty years into the provision of international student service, we deeply acknowledge the significance of the study abroad in Japan programs because there have been a number of students who are playing an active role in

their countries both as government and business leaders as in the case of the ABE Initiative Program with a broader view of the world.

We manage various international student programs with a strong management system and highly experienced professional staff by maintaining good working relationships with host universities and by fully mobilizing the functions of Headquarters, 5 domestic branch offices and 17 overseas project offices. We are able to provide a comprehensive service ranging from recruitment and selection of applicants, to post-arrival orientation, Japanese language training, startup support, academic monitoring, emergency support, matching and arrangement of internship opportunities and follow up after return. In addition to these, we provide various networking opportunities for the students while in Japan so that they can achieve the objectives of their study and build a long lasting human networks both with Japan and with their peers and colleagues.

Looking forward, we are committed to preparing highly skilled international personnel as part of Japan's contribution to the world with all our might as a leading organization for international educational exchange.



Contract Signing Ceremony with Viet Nam's Ministry of Education and Training (September, 2001)



Nobuaki Hirakawa has been the Vice President of JICE since June 2019. Joined JICE in 1987 after working for a private company. He was responsible for starting up scholarship grant project as manager in charge. Posted as Director of Kyushu Office and Secretary-General. More recently he was seconded to Hokkaido University of Education.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

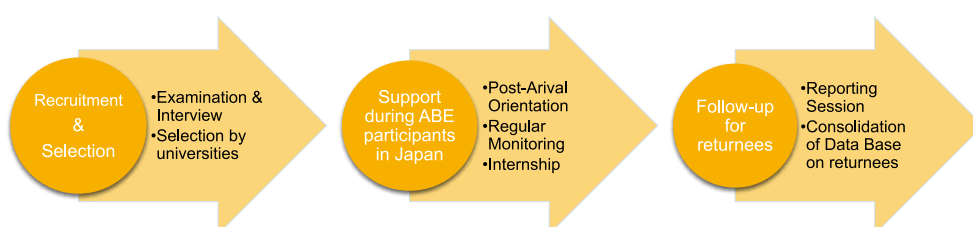
The ABE Initiative Program is “KAKEHASHI for Future”

Takashi Akao Director of Administration & Overseas Project Division, International Training Department of JICE

“What a big and challenging project!” This was the first impression that I had when JICA decided to award the contract to manage the ABE Initiative Program to JICE. Five years into its implementation, managing it has been most challenging and rewarding work to me. ↗

Unlike other authors, I should like to express the achievement of this initiative in numbers.

The main work flow of JICE in the ABE Initiative Program is illustrated as below.



It starts with recruitment and selection of most excellent candidates. Once successful candidates arrive in Japan as ABE participants, we conduct post-arrival orientation and various support services while in Japan including regular monitoring of their academic progress and living situation and matching and arranging of internship opportunities with Japanese companies. After return, we carry out follow up activities such as holding reporting sessions and consolidating career data base of the returnees. Built on 20 years’ experience and expertise for total coordination, we have been conducting such services in close cooperation with the

various organizations and people concerned.

The table below compares the target set at the beginning of the program and the current numbers.

As of the fifth batch cohort arriving in the summer of 2018, we have accepted 1,219 participants from 54 countries in Africa. I have visited seven countries out of eleven where JICE was entrusted to conduct recruitment and selection on the ground and had a chance of participating in the consultations with the Governments of the sending countries, through which I strongly felt the expectation of each government in this program.

Item	Achievements (from batch 1 to batch 5)
No. of Countries	Accepted from all 54 countries
No. of Participants accepted	1,219 participants
No. of Host Universities and Courses	72 universities and 129 courses
No. of Registered Companies having interest in Africa	585 companies
No. of Companies accepting ABE participants as intern	728 companies (cumulative total)

My responsibility as supervisor of all the services while in Japan included facilitation of the post-arrival orientation in which I cheered up newly arrived participants to start a new life in Japan. At the end of the orientation session, I was surrounded by many participants saying “Thank you for the useful information to start up my life in Japan.” This was



Author attending a meeting with Tanzanian government officials

the moment that I was filled with a strong feeling of support for these wonderful youths.

ABE participants are studying at 129 master's degree courses in 72 universities across Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa. I was glad to hear that this has, in turn, contributed to the diversification of international student body of each university as well as globalization and revitalization of the research laboratories.

Furthermore, the ABE Initiative Program has impacted Japanese's business and industry. In the beginning stage, 99 companies were registered with JICE as having interest in this program and business in Africa. Currently, its number is 585. Out of them, 728 companies in total have provided internship opportunities for the ABE participants. There are a number of cases where such internship led to the actual business between Japan and Africa.

The ABE Initiative Program is aimed to prepare young African business leaders but it also has an impact on Japan's younger business generation. I think this is the reason why we are so committed and enthusiastic about it. It's private, but during the five years I

had been working for the ABE Initiative Program, I was blessed with two babies. In order to pass on international economic and political presence that Japan has established to the future generations, I think it is imperative for Japan to partner with Africa for further economic growth on both sides. It was an honor and pleasure that I was able to commit myself in the work for the ABE Initiative Program in a strong belief that each and every participant will definitely become a bridge to connect Japan and Africa stronger and deeper.

An NPO named "KAKEHASHI Africa" was founded at the initiative of a group of the ABE returnees to serve as a platform between them and the Japanese companies and kick started various activities in Japan as well as in Africa. KAKEHASHI literally means a bridge in Japanese. Let's join them to erect a big bridge between Japan and Africa.

In closing, let me introduce a proverb that I learnt from one of ABE participants.

～ If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together ! ～



Author and ABE participants attending post-arrival orientation



Takashi Akao is Director of Administration & Overseas Project Division, International Training Department of JICE. Until April 2019, he served as Director of In-Country Services Division, International Student Programs Department II of JICE, being in charge of the ABE Initiative Program as Co-Program Manager.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Africans — full of unshakable self-confidence

Sayuri Hayashi International Student Advisor of JICE Kansai Office

I have been working as JICE's International Student Advisor since 2015 to support the life of the ABE Initiative participants while in Japan. As I exchange with them, I have had a feeling that one of the differences from Japanese is that Africans are assertive in everything. Perhaps it is because they need to be so to protect their own rights and that of the community to which they belong in a diverse continent of 54 countries and with various ethnic groups cohabiting within the same country.

For example, they have a different notion about the rules. Japanese tend to abide by the rules without questioning them at all. But Africans tend to think that they need not observe the rules unless they agree with them. They often react acutely to what they think is a disadvantage or an unbeneficial thing without considering its cost-benefit on the entire group or society. Perhaps, we should learn from Africans about their assertiveness and ardentness in the pursuit of self-interest. Africans are full of confidence and good at appealing themselves. They can say they have five when they have one. I sometimes feel envious of their assertiveness.

Japanese is a firm believer in the proverb “When in Rome, do as Romans do.” But a few ABE Scholars made a surprising remark before leaving Japan that they need not adjust to the Japanese life but Japan should adjust to the global standards. I felt a bit sorry to hear that. They should have made efforts to understand Japan by overcoming the difficulties caused by the language barrier. But if you put it another way, they can be praised for having an unshaken self-confidence wherever they are placed.

Every year I make time for senior ABE Scholars to give advice to the new arrivals. I was impressed by one who said “When asserting or demanding something in Africa, it is always necessary to be aggressive concentrating only on the self-interest without consideration to others. But in Japan it isn't at all. If you ask something politely to Japanese people, they would accept it most of the time. If you do it in an African way, most Japanese would be embarrassed and stay away from you. The most important tip for having a smooth life in Japan is to view things in a calm manner by holding yourself down a little bit by thinking about other's position.” I think that is the most appropriate advice to Africans living and studying in Japan.



Joint program for 5 batch participants



A participant from Malawi (looking forward Tokyo 2020)



A participant from Malawi with Shigaraki ware



Dance performance by Kenyan participants

Also, there is a big difference in the relationships with friends. Japanese people change the way they speak in proportion to the intimacy of the relation such as best friends, friends, classmates and acquaintances but Africans treat everyone who greets you as a good friend. One of the culture shocks Africans encounter in Japan seems to be that of the friend relationship that many Africans are troubled with. While a Japanese recognizes an African just as an acquaintance, the African treats the Japanese as a good friend. So the degree of intimacy differs between the two. If a Japanese says after inviting an African to lunch, “See you again,” the African expects to be invited again in a few days. From the Japanese perspective, “see you again” means “not in one of these days but maybe someday in the future”. I heard of a similar case where an African kept asking to his Japanese friend, “When are you inviting me to lunch, tomorrow, next week or when?” And the Japanese stopped communication with the African. The Japanese tend to avoid saying NO to their friends but Africans say NO clearly when they have no intention to do something and that does not harm friend relations at all. Africans are honest to one’s feeling while Japanese make a

fake smile even to unpleasant things. If I look at an African, I can understand immediately whether he or she is in a good mood or bad mood. And even if in good mood he may get angry at the next moment. The mode of emotions gets changed instantly. If Japanese were like Africans, we would be able to lead a life with less stress.

The Africans who make strong self-assertion and the Japanese who cannot seem to be mutually incompatible like water and oil but with more and more exchanges happening between African countries and Japan both people may reach to a conclusion that it is best to have a high sense of moral and to be flexible to everything like Japanese as well as to have an unshakable self-confidence like Africans.

Also, as the mode of the emotion of Africans changes suddenly as I mentioned earlier, we should respond calmly to one by one after hearing all their claims without being overwhelmed by the emotional atmosphere. That is easier said than done in my experience but if we have a strong self and aren’t influenced by the others, we may be able to keep good terms with African people.



Sayuri Hayashi is International Student Advisor of JICE Kansai Office since 2015. After working in a private firm, she joined JICE and engaged in International Student Service including the ABE Initiative Program. She has been in charge of 142 international students from 27 countries studying at 5 universities.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Feeling different culture through the ABE Initiative Program

Chieko Yamada International Student Advisor of JICE Chubu Office

Every year I cannot wait for the month of September with summer heat still lingering because it's the season when we welcome a cohort of the ABE Initiative participants to Nagoya. They move in here after attending a week-long post-arrival orientation in Tokyo. We also offer an acculturation program for them. As part of the program, I make time for each of them to introduce themselves in a free Q&A style so that people from different countries and cultures can open up to one another quickly.

I felt a different culture strongly when I joined the Q&A introduction session in the first year that I took up my post. A participant introduced himself by saying "I have Father, Mother, six brothers, a wife, a three-year old son and a one-year old daughter. BUT I'M AVAILABLE." At first I understood what he said "AVAILABLE" as it was because he was from a polygamous country. Later someone told me that he made a joke to loosen things up. Perhaps it is the most impressive episode I can tell about Africa. By the way, I've heard that the same person is still making the same joke everywhere.

As I work for the young African scholars, I often feel wonder and admiration.

Many African women dress up in colorful and tight clothes which Japanese women shy away from. They know how to make themselves look most attractive. As for me, I tend to dress myself accordingly by choosing a jacket in sober color without caring whether it becomes me or not.

Another wonderful characteristics of Africans is that they are cheerful and love to talk. When I meet them for an interview to monitor their academic progress, they talk to me like a close family member about



A Tanzanian woman making a presentation wearing a nice African costume



Author and her colleague photographed with a friendly Kenyan participant

various events that took place during the interval. They never draw a line between nationalities and cultures but they know how to keep a comfortable distance when they talk to other people. They try to connect with me rather casually by inviting me to a Christmas party and by sending me the photos of their lovely children. I learned from them that we can unconsciously interact with people in keeping a comfortable distance and they value connections with people naturally.

Answering to the question I ask at last monitoring interview “What was the most impressive thing about Japan?” most of them say, “I learned the importance of

abiding by the rules and being punctual.” We sometimes feel cramped in observing rules and regulations and in being punctual but the young Africans appreciate it as a property of Japanese. They often say, “Japanese are shy but kind people.” I think it is their friendliness, in turn, makes us nice and kind to them with a natural attitude.

It is my ardent wish that I will be able to assist the ABE Initiative Scholars to make these precious few years in Japan in their lifetime more fulfilling and enjoyable. I hope their time in Japan would be meaningful and contribute to the development of their home country.



Photographed with the new arrivals and returnees at lunch



Chieko Yamada is International Student Advisor of JICE Chubu Office since 2017. After joining Japanese Language Education Assistant Program (J-LEAP), she joined JICE and engaged in International Student Service including the ABE Initiative Program. She has been in charge of 55 international students from 21 countries studying at 8 universities.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan





ABE Initiative Scholars **Africa Meets Japan**

“Discovering Japan” by participants of the ABE Initiative Program

Cameroon	Nnoko Nelson Ekote
Central African Republic	Carl Adams Kopati Gbali
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Kabi Olivier Katabaruka
Egypt	Mohamed Reda Elsayed Mohamed
Kenya	Christopher Mutuma Maitai
Lesotho	Mamotjoka Joyce Morai
Madagascar	Meva Wanda Randriamanarina
Madagascar	Njaratiana Faniry Adrien Rakotoarivelo
Morocco	El Mehdi Er Raqabi
Morocco	Soumaya Addou
Mozambique	Agostinho Francisco Trinta Ariande
Nigeria	Okechukwu Ignatius Eze
Senegal	Boubacar Sow
Republic of South Africa	Mbali Sexwale
Sudan	Omer Awad Elbasha Mohammedahmed
Tanzania	James Elikana Mmari
Tunisia	Oussama Ben Rabiha
Zambia	Paul Habasimbi

I Discovered Japanese Business!!!

Nnoko Nelson Ekote

Cameroon

Japan is the world most unique country. Best in many things, among which include technology and honest business culture. “This is Japan” is a phrase popularly used in Japan. Japan has a unique business style. I saw the unique nature of Japan as a student in Japanese university, in Japanese companies during internships, and in the society during business negotiations. The unique nature of Japanese business seems very fascinating and unique in many ways, among which include;

The overwhelming importance of personal relationships within the business cycle. Relationship comes before business rather than business being more important than personal considerations. Japanese people put in maximum amount of time and resources in the early stage of business. This often seems unusual for many foreigners, I had uncountable meetings with some Japanese potential business partners over lunch and dinner. During this period, they usually ask so many questions and quite often, they will ask the same questions many times in different circumstances and in different ways. They will carry lots of investigation about my personality. Business in Japan is more about the person than the product. This process might take months or even years before signing any contract of MOU.

Also, Group or Team work is a key concept of Japanese business. Group orientation and team working are not merely concepts and phrases in Japan but a way of life which permeates all aspects of corporate life at all levels. During my master’s degree program in Japan, there were a lots of group work, group assignments and group presentation, also attendance was more important than individual contribution. I had this same experience in Japanese companies. Hierarchy in Japanese



Coordinating group presentation

companies is based on consensus and co-operation rather than the top-down decision making process which often typifies western models of hierarchy. Everyone must be committed and actively involved. It’s slow down and lengthen decision making process which is usually based on large amount of information with 100% consensus. This therefore means that doing business with Japanese people, you have to be patient as forever. Also, waiting for a long period of time does not necessarily mean the decision will be positive.

In addition, the bottom to the top flow of information concept depicts the management style of Japanese companies. Most policies are originated at mid-level of the company before been passed upwards for ratification. Being a manager in Japan means you have to work harder than everybody in your department. Quite often, you are the first to come and the last to leave. during my Internship at CRT-Japan, work normally starts by 8am, but most often I will go to the office before 7am in order to arrive before my boss but unfortunately for me I will always meet him there. Also, even though work closes by 6pm, I will stay back even as late as 10pm, but unfortunately for me he will still be there. No matter how I tried, I discovered it was impossible for me to work harder than him, so I gave up. Another surprising thing about Japanese managers,

CEO's and presidents is their level of humility. They are very closed to their workers. In one of the company I did my internship, the office space was not very big, on my first day at work, the CEO offered me his own work space with chair and desk and he himself went and used the conference room for a period of a week. This is not possible in my country. Also, in another company, the chairman of a company worth billions of dollars used to work with us on an open space, interacting and talking with each other, In my country is almost impossible for a low level worker to interact with the CEO or the chairman to that extent. Japanese managers through humility knows everything going on in their companies and always optimize output.

Furthermore, punctuality is business in Japan. Time in Japan is the most valuable resource in Business. It is a sign of respect for the attendees and also a sign of reliability. It is surprising to hear that it is one of the key aspect that determines if the potential business partner can trust you or not. It is often said "time is money", but in Japan, I discovered "time is more than money". Coming five minutes late can cancel a business deal worth billions of dollars, forever. In schools, attendance is taken within the first five minutes and any student who comes after is considered absent. One day one of my potential business partners said "Nelson is reliable, he comes to our business meeting 15 minutes before the time, we can trust him" I was very surprised as I could not understand the relationship between punctuality and reliability except in Japanese business culture.

Finally, Diligent Commitment to Continuous improvement, research, development and innovation, is the core secret in the value proposition of Japanese business. It is the secret for outstanding Japanese products and services. Before coming to Japan,

technology to me was abstract, similar to witchcraft in Africa. But today, I see technology very real and natural, a result of human effort through diligent commitment. Many Japanese giant companies started very small. Toyota started in 1933 with the company being a division of Toyoda automatic Loom, involve in textile business. The first engine (Type A engine) which was produced in 1934, was completely artisanal work, competed after one year of hard manual work. Today, the Toyota production plant is fully automated and cars are being assembly by robots. In fact, Africa is far above the level of resources than Toyota started in 1933, yet in 2019, many countries in Africa today do not manufacture the least of any automobile parts. During my visit in the Toyota factory in Nagoya, I visited the Toyota museum, there the word technology was demystified. Today I believe we can do the same in Africa, Japanese business is all about eternal determination and total commitment.



With the Portrait of Founder of Toyota during field visit at Toyota Museum



Nnoko Nelson Ekote graduated Kwansei Gakuin University as an ABE Initiative participant (2nd batch). He earned his Master's Degree in Institute of Business and Accounting. He has been studying at the same university as a Ph.D. candidate after acquiring his Master's Degree.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My experience of the land of the rising sun

Carl Adams Kopati Gbali

Central African Republic

Coming to Japan was one of the best decisions I have made for my studies and to learn a new culture in order to develop my future professional career. My experience in Japan started during the process of obtaining my visa at the Japanese Embassy in Yaoundé (Cameroon). During the process I was surprised to see the JICA officer who accompanied me to bow each time when she met a Japanese visa officer. This way of doing things was totally different from my country. In Central African Republic, we do not bow down to greet a person but rather shake hands.

When I arrived at Narita Airport, I was surprised to see that the residence cards were issued at the airport during immigration formalities, unlike my country. In my country the normal procedure is that after arriving in the country you have to go to the immigration to file a request for this purpose. And it will be after receiving the request of residence permit that the immigration officers will be able to issue a residence card.

After the airport we had been driven to our hotel, Sun Road Hotel located in Shinjuku near Shinjuku subway station. I discovered that this metro station has an average daily pass of 3.5 million people. Is not it just incredible? Because this number represents about the

3 / 4 population of my country and in my head I said to myself 3 / 4 of the population of my country were passing by this station every day.

The same evening we arrived, I and my friends had gone for dinner at a Japanese restaurant called Yoshinoya. That night, we had our first experience with the chopsticks. It was difficult and fun at the same time because we were trying to eat the rice in a bowl with these chopsticks. Unable to eat with chopsticks, we asked the people of the restaurant to give us spoons.

After spending few days in Tokyo we headed for our last destination which was our university called the International University of Japan. Everyone in the bus was excited to arrive quickly to IUJ to see what the university look like. Unfortunately upon our arrival we realized that IUJ was in Utsunomiya more precisely Minamiuonuma a city of Niigata prefecture. The majority of the inhabitants of this small town are farmers and the university is surrounded by mountains and rice fields.

We were a little discouraged because we thought we were going to be in a big city. But after some time we found that the environment of our university that we hated at the beginning was one of the most beautiful in Japan since each season it changes and gives us a stunning view. For example the spring called SAKURA and the winter are the most beautiful periods in Minamiuonuma. For me I would say that my best season is winter because the whole landscape changes to become white and beautiful even if sometimes the temperature sometimes went down to minus 3 degrees. And yet for a person coming from a hot country it should have been difficult but contrary I loved the snow because I could go snowboarding with my friends. Also,



Graduation day



IUJ SKI DAY at Hakkaizanroku ski resort

every morning I used to stand at the window of my room to contemplate the beautiful view of the mountain.

Regarding studies, the experience in Japan was unique. I will say that Japanese universities have adequate infrastructure to facilitate learning. For example in my university the library was the place where I could escape and have access to all the books relating to my courses, the study rooms were the place where I and my friends met to prepare our assignments. The gymnastic room was the place to play sports in order to stay in good shape. Basically the education system is very organized and the university tracks student performance to ensure success. In my university, upon arrival, a supervisor is given to each student. And it is only in my university that you can find this diversity.

This supervisor holds periodic meetings with the student, advises him and directs him on his academic performances. For me it was my first time to experience to see this practice. This really helped to achieve my

academic goals. Also, I considered the lectures as the place of sharing experiences and learning new skills from the lecture as well from the students because most of the students are professional with different background.

Apart from studying, I have also done some tourism. I had visited more than 17 cities in Japan and several temples including the golden temple of Kyoto (golden temple). However, my favorite place remains the city of Minamiuonuma. Because of the wonderful festivals like the Naked Pushing festival, delicious menus like koshihikari rice, Yairo watermelon and sake as well as school activities with schoolchildren who remain unforgettable memories.

Japanese culture is the root of Japan's development. Some elements of this culture such as humility, respect for time, respect for the rules and the way of working will be useful for my daily life.

Finally, I will say that my stay in Japan have helped me to develop personally and professionally.



Golden temple Kyoto



Carl Adams Kopati Gbali worked at the Telecommunication Regulatory Agency in Central Africa. Earned his Master's Degree in International Management from International University of Japan as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

I Desperately Worked Hard to Obtain MBA within 1 year under the Supervision of My Professors

Kabi Olivier Katabaruka

Democratic Republic of the Congo

My name is Olivier Katabaruka Kabi, Master of Business Administration from Nagoya University of Commerce and Business. I am an ABE Initiative Scholar.

I was born and brought up in Bukavu, eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Before going to Japan, I graduated in Chemical Engineering and was working at Banro Corporation, a Canadian gold mining company.

After six years working experience I started looking for opportunities of postgraduate degree in management, I believed Management education and skills would widen my career prospects and provide value to my CV.

Then came the ABE Initiative Program with scholarship providing all the necessary funding to complete a master's degree and Internship in Japan. I decided to jump onto this opportunity and luckily my applications to the Scholarship and 1-year MBA program at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB Business School) were successful after a series of tests and interviews.

I had always wanted to live and explore the Japanese culture. In my country everybody believes in superior quality when it comes to the "Made in Japan", but we, Congolese, know less about Japan. I was very curious to know those people behind the cartoons like Manga, the Samurai...

I started experiencing the slowness of the Japanese administration from my scholarship application. It took me 8 months, from November 2015 to June 2016, to receive the final notification about my application.

Time to organize with my family and my employer, I finally arrived in Nagoya on the 09th September 2016, after two weeks of orientation program at Tokyo International Center. My ABE Initiative colleagues



Graduation ceremony of his university on September 2017

and I were temporarily accommodated at the JICA Chubu Center. We had to stay there for a few weeks until we move to the universities' dormitories or private apartments.

As we were approaching the deadline, we got the message from our JICA supervisor, that there was possibility for the one-year MBA students of the NUCB Business School to be accommodated at the JICA Chubu Center. This center is located near a train station and is closer to the campus and cheaper (almost half price) than the Global Center dormitory that I was considering for accommodation.

For me it was a very good opportunity and I did not hesitate to accept the offer.

I lived in the JICA Chubu Center for a full year. The dorm served as a guest house for the JICA trainees from all over the World. Every month I could meet new people, make new friends while enjoying the quiet environment. Being a long-time resident gave me the chance to befriend with the JICA, JICE and the restaurant staff.

My university experience started on the 12th September 2016 during the matriculation ceremony, almost 3 days after the curiosity brought me to just see how our building looked like. That day, dressed fashionably, I met the men and women who could become my

Professors and Colleagues. We were 5 students from Africa in an auditorium of 60 students from different nationalities. We, five, were all ABE Initiative scholars. 3 of us were enrolled in the 2-years program while Yacin from Morocco and I were enrolled in the 1-year MBA program.

The two programs lead to a MBA or MSc Management degrees upon completion of 40 credits. The difference is that students who qualify for the 1-year MBA program are required to register a minimum of 18 credits per semester, plus case writing (equivalent of thesis) of 4 credits, and pass these credits at a minimum GPA of 3.0.

Yacin and I lived in the same dorm as well, he later became one of my closest friends.

Coming back to the matriculation ceremony, I remember the feeling I got when the School Staff explained the curve grading system which is the performance appraisal system applied at NUCB. The class participation, meaning how active is a student in class discussions and how relevant is his contributions, accounted for 50% in this grading.

Indeed, unlike many other countries where the performance appraisal system in higher education is fixed by laws, Japanese universities in general and private universities in particular, can decide on their performance appraisal system. The NUCB system was copied from the Harvard Business School.

Grading on the curve is viewed as motivational by teachers because it fosters competition. Competition enhances dedication to work hard and achieve more in order to stay in the race.

For someone like me who did all my education in

Absolute Grading Method systems, the curve grading seemed intimidating.

Just after the ceremony I was afraid not to meet the graduation requirement for 1-year program, and decided to change from 1-year to 2-years program less knowing that Yacin made the same decision.

Unfortunately, the reply from JICA was that it was not possible to approve this change since the budget had already been allocated.

This reply motivated me to study hard, since I knew there was no other choice.

My typical daily schedule as student was: Waking up at 7am, going to School at 8am, coming back to dorm at 10pm, revising materials (mainly business cases) for next class from 11pm to 2am, going to bed at 2am. I used to take the breakfast at the JICA Center's restaurant, the lunch either at School or at a nearby convenient store, the dinner either at the JICA Center's restaurant or at any restaurant on my way back to the dorm.

This schedule paid off; for the whole study period I registered 46 credits and proudly graduated on 19th September 2017 .

As quoted previously, my class was much diversified, with over 90% “gaikokujin” (foreigners). I was able to connect with many Japanese colleagues and other international students and learn about their cultures. We remain very good friends today.

I had and still have very good relationship with all my Professors, especially my Supervisor, Professor Iwasawa. For many times we could go and have drinks together. He was always available to assist me even in private matters like applying for visa for my wife.



Kabi Olivier Katabaruka obtained his Master's Degree in Business Administration from Nagoya University of Commerce and Business as an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch). After graduation, He founded the company named “LAMPYRIS SARL” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and works as a Managing Partner.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My Career Transition to the World of IT and Big-data

Mohamed Reda Elsayed Mohamed

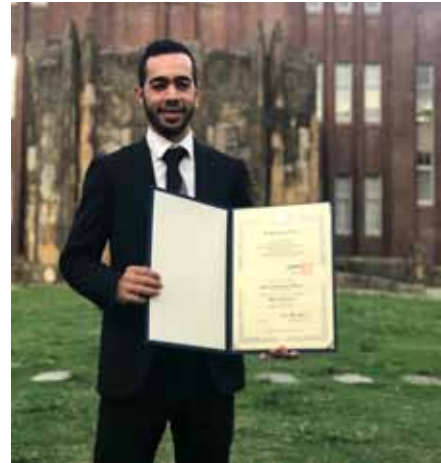
Egypt

Japan is one of the farthest countries an Egyptian like me can go to. The country is geographically far, culturally different and has a different set of customs and traditions than most countries in Africa. In that sense, there have been many challenges and interesting experiences associated with my two years journey in Japan. In this Essay, I want to thread my background, previous experience and state what got me interested in Japan. Then I will follow that with my experience at The University of Tokyo and some achievements associated with it. Lastly, state how my Japan experienced led me to a career change into the IT industry in Tokyo and what I think my future will look like.

I hold a B.Sc. in Geomatics. Before joining the ABE Initiative, I used to work as a teaching assistant for a University in Egypt. Most of my professional work was in the geolocation and mapping domain and applied in the construction industry. I saw a unique opportunity in the ABE Initiative to broaden my mindset and establish myself as a multicultural professional. My personal opinion is that “the idea of combining a master’s degree alongside a practical training in a Japanese firm is one of the kinds, that made the ABE Initiative standout and attract best professionals”.

Upon arrival to Japan, there are many unique experiences any African will face when stepping foot in the country. Food, compact urban planning and cleanness are some. But what I find truly impressive is the lack of uncertainty. Trains are on time; meetings have a respected start and end time and a lot more. Once you get used to it, it’s quite easy to double your productivity and enhance time management.

The University of Tokyo gave me a unique experience and a genuine flavor of the country. Life wise, I had



Graduation from The University of Tokyo

an intensive Japanese language training, cultural activities and an ample of opportunities to grow my personal characteristics. On the research side, it could have never been better. My laboratory was the lead in its fields. I had opportunities to work on multiple international projects along with my professor and a lot of senior researchers.

During that time, I was involved in a research project in Mozambique and Rwanda. I was invited to Transform Africa Summit 2018 that was held in Kigali where I met with a lot of African leaders and discussed strategic topics. I also had the opportunity to visit Egypt with a private Japanese company and kickstart a new collaborative research project between The University of Tokyo and Cairo University. The project is around Big-data applications in transportation planning. All those experienced combined gave me the best education experience a graduate student could have hoped for.

As part of the ABE Initiative Program, I joined an internship at Japan Space Systems. Japan Space

Systems is a specialized institution in remote sensing and geospatial applications, which was my field of study. We received strong training program over two weeks period. The training was let by professional that tough us practical applications with real case studies in Africa. It felt like a project with a well-defined outcome. We also went on a field trip to Hakone mountain with satellite imageries as our final project during the internship.

Career wise, I transitioned step by step from the construction industry into the world of IT and big-data. I started with choosing a research topic on machine learning and Big-data, then learned how to code to support my research. Engaging in multiple coding seminars and meetups definitely helps and Tokyo offer so many of those events. I then interned in an AI startup incubator owned by SoftBank called DeepCore to develop more skills in the same domain. Six months before my master's graduation, I decided to move into the tech industry and that is how I joined my current company.

I work in Rakuten, Inc. an IT company in Tokyo and



Attending international conference in Budapest, Hungary



At workplace



Presentation at the World Bank

the has businesses in multiple countries. I was hired as a mid-career Data Scientist in its headquarters in Tokyo. As a data scientist, I collect, aggregate and analyze big-data sets to extract business insight and build artificial intelligence applications on top of it. It's an interesting job. I was motivated to join Rakuten for its diverse multicultural environment. MY team has people from Asia, Europe, Americas and me from Africa. Whenever we are solving a problem or developing a project, everyone has a unique perspective.

For me, Japan is that unique country where cultural heritage meets state of the art technology. The country has something to offer for almost everyone despite his taste and aspiration. Lastly, the land of the rising sun will always possess a great place in my heart.



Mohamed Reda Elsayed Mohamed is working as a Data Scientist developing at Rakuten, Inc. He earned his Master's Degree in engineering from The University of Tokyo as an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Amazing Japan

Christopher Mutuma Maitai

Kenya

1. I was wowed when I saw the professors at the university dining together with students in the same university cafeteria. In Kenya, university professors dine in a separate restaurant with different prices as student cafeteria. Actually, university staff have their own staff cafeteria while students have their own separate cafeteria. Of course, the prices are different, even though the menu would be the same. Food prices are higher in staff cafeteria and much cheaper at the student cafeteria (subsidized by the university management). In Japan, both students and teachers dined in the same cafeteria and paid the same prices for the same menu. Slowly by slowly, I came to like the idea that I could dine with my professor. Actually, I miss the "NOMINATION" episodes where we discussed important matters over dinner and with a drink. After drowning a few bottles of Sake, people got a chance to open up and express themselves freely! Such opportunities are rare in Kenya.

2. Just like cafeteria in point number 1 above, the same situation happened regarding staff toilets and student toilets.

3. Another cultural difference was the public bath Onsen (Japanese hot spring). Never in my wild imagination had I imagined taking a bath with elder men the age of my father and younger men the age of my younger brothers, all in the same pool. Nevertheless, I came to accept my situation and I enjoyed the public bath. I miss the experience, especially after returning back to Kenya.

4. The four clear seasons in Japan was a sort of mystery for someone from Africa! How the end of the month brought in several changes into the new month as if nature was counting days in a month and nature knew

that the month was over! It was not easy to understand how the afternoon weather could be the extreme opposite of the weather in the morning of the same day.

5. Senpai - Kohai system was so entrenched in day-to-day lives of the Japanese people and I liked this idea because it brought order and respect for elders in all spheres of life whether at school, home, at work, in the community, etc.

6. Japanese work ethics and time management was top of the world. In the three Japanese companies where I had internship, I enjoyed 5 minute departmental meetings every morning, followed by 10 minutes aerobics exercises for all employees. I think the workers were more motivated and they had higher productivity when these programs were incorporated into the workplace.

Good time management ethics were everywhere: in class, at home, community meetings, shrines, churches, restaurants, train stations, buses, etc.

7. The honesty and kindness of the Japanese people cannot be forgotten. I remember how I misplaced my wallet at Shinjuku train station. The wallet had the cash, my train ticket, debit cards, credit cards and other



In one of the Company's Power & Energy Projects



In one of the Company's Solar Projects

personal documents like resident card and national health insurance card. I got stranded for two hours worrying what I could do to save the situation. I went to a KOBAN (police booth located in almost all major stations) to ask for help. Alas! I found my wallet intact, with all the items in!!!! This is a very rare trait in my country, especially in public spaces.

8. Cleanliness, waste separation and care for the environment. It was awesome how every Japanese who lived in my neighbourhood took a personal initiative to separate waste, keep the environment clean and avoid littering. Actually, it was difficult to see litter bins in big cities and yet those cities were very clean! I realized that people in Japan carry their waste to dispose it when they reach their homes.

9. Despite all the technological developments in Japan and great inventions to solve today's problems of mankind, Japan is still a very traditional country. For some time I visited Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Kumamoto and Okinawa. The common thing I saw in all these places is that people practiced their local

culture even though they were living in the era of modern technology. Right in the heart of big cities, small cities and rural areas, you could see people gathering for various traditional festivals whether or national. In the modern twenty-first century Africa, we lack this forward celebration and maintenance of cultures, especially in the post-colonial era. Many African (and Kenyan communities), have been culturally alienated and somehow brainwashed by the Western cultures.

I am not condemning or demonizing Western cultures; but every culture has both negative and positive elements. Sometimes negative elements get amplified at the expense of positive cultural gains. How I wish that the 21st century Africa can go back to rediscovering their 12th Century culture and let the culture coexist with technology (just like Japan).

10. Finally, the people of Japan (especially in Kyushu and Okinawa where I spent most of my 2-year stay in Japan) are very friendly and welcoming to foreigners. I could be greeted by strangers in the supermarkets, churches, temples, shrines, convenience stores, izakayas, etc.



In one of the Company's ICT Projects



Christopher Mutuma Maitai is the CEO of Aviva Technologies Ltd in Kenya. He earned his Master's Degree in Engineering in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from University of Miyazaki as an ABE Initiative participant (1st batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My Learnings in Japan as a Special Education Teacher

Mamotjoka Joyce Morai

Lesotho

My experience studying in Japan has been very important to me and for the development of the education of the children with disabilities in Lesotho. It has not only explored me to the academia, but it has honed my knowledge and skills personally that have all contributed to me being a better teacher I feel I am today. I am a special education teacher in one of the two schools for the deaf in Lesotho, the Kingdom landlocked by the Republic of South Africa. Before coming to Japan, I taught for three years and the challenges I experienced during teaching deaf students propelled me to be in Japan today. To generalise, many children and adults with disabilities in Lesotho lack skills to improve their livelihoods and promote their independence as active participants in their societies.

Being in Japan explored me to the education and the services offered to children with disabilities, especially the deaf or the hard of hearing children from elementary grades to when they graduate from high school into job opportunities or universities. I have taken on this role to visit the schools as much as possible to observe, learn and understand how education is provided to the children with disabilities in Japan. I have been invited to visit the schools during days of classroom observations, sports days and other schools' activities. I have got the chance to interact with teachers through discussions after observing their classrooms and I learned to integrate some of their strategies not teaching my students. So far my experience has been eye opening and additional to the skills I already had. It has generally been an informed progress from when I arrived in Japan and I still would like to continue to learn more when I have time to visit the schools.

I have visited some special schools in Hiroshima and Yamaguchi. I have also visited the Non Profit making



Cold day in Yamaguchi! This was taken at the entrance of Yamaguchi Minami Special Needs school we visited for open day. Photo credit to my student supporter who used to be a teacher in this school.

Organisation (NPO) in Yamaguchi where we visited the deaf people who are working in the NPO as the employees of companies that give them the work to do from their NPO - they do not have to work from the companies' premises. It was a wonderful how they were all working enthusiastically with knowledge and skills of what they were doing. It was the great opportunity to have visited, and everyone was welcoming. We spent the whole day interacting with them. I was happy to see that the NPO had the afternoon school for the deaf children too. The cram schools are famous in Japan and I think they work very well; it was only that I had not seen the cram school for the deaf children. Recently, I just heard there is one in Hiroshima city which I plan to visit soon. I like the cram schools and I believe they are important to provide individual support to students who may be struggling at school. They are not very common in my country especially for children with disabilities who need extra support with their learning. During last summer I had an internship in Tokyo in one of the cram schools and I learned a lot on how to teach children individually.

When I visited the elementary grades in special schools, I learned that children had good relationships with their teachers and their parents are part of their learning in

school. Which I believe it enhances children's abilities to attain more skills with double support from teachers and their parents, in school and at home. I also learned that vocational skills are part of learning as students proceed to higher grades. I remember in one school they were learning simple vocational skills like fixing the door hinges together and other activities. The school had various opportunities for children to learn and acquire skills to live independent lives. Not many children are exposed to such learning opportunities in many special schools in Lesotho. Not because the schools only lack resources but because the teachers lack skills to teach these skills to students. Parental involvement is very low too in special schools in Lesotho because schools are in the cities and children go home only once or twice in a year.

Furthermore, adults with disabilities have no jobs because they lack skills needed by employers. Those who are deaf may not be literate in writing and reading. It is therefore hard even to advocate for their employment opportunities because they do not possess the necessary skills to get them jobs. The deaf or the hard of hearing children graduate from high school



This was the English camp in Okayama where I participated as the international volunteer for two days. 'Blue Team!' So much fun spent with the kids.



A picture taken by my friend at Kamakura Daibutsu, Kotoku-in temple, after the NISE International Symposium on Special Needs Education we attended with our supervisor in Tokyo.

with no skills at all, in basic literacy and in vocational training. Often, they go back to their special schools to live there because there is nothing to eat at home.

The two years I have spent in Japan have taught me that there is still more to be done in the education of the children with disabilities in Lesotho. It is not easy to be working to develop a country where many people are left behind. People with disabilities are needed to develop their countries because when they are left behind, it makes a significant impact in the economy of their countries and many goals are not achieved. They need to be empowered with skills to improve their livelihoods and live independently like everyone else so that their input into their communities improves the development of their countries.

I am also encouraged to see the deaf graduate students at Hiroshima University. It is encouraging because I see it is possible for my students to reach this level in the future if issues that prohibit their access to early quality education are addressed such as ensuring their enrolment in schools at an early age not when they are eighteen years to twenty one years like they do in Lesotho, because those are the years they should be in university not starting primary school.



Mamotjoka Joyce Morai was a Special Education teacher and sign language interpreter at St Paul School for the Deaf in Lesotho. She is in the second year of a Master's degree in International Development and Cooperation at Hiroshima University as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

I learned about Japan — the land of Paradox

Meva Wanda Randriamanarina

Madagascar

Traveling to Japan, the land of the rising sun always has a dream of mine. For someone from Madagascar, going in Japan seems like going to the moon: an unknown adventure with a mind already full of imagination about what will happen. Expectations are high. Japan is the land of technology, a futuristic country. However, since my arriving, it has not ceased to surprise me. I will say Japan is the land of paradox, where the modern and the traditional have lived peacefully together. Moreover, this paradox is the real beauty of Japan.

The first paradox was the landscape. Seeing all the tall buildings and lights, signs of the hectic life in big cities like Tokyo or Osaka, gave me dizziness. Life pace was so fast. Many people are walking on the street, fast. Trains are arriving and departing every minute. Malls are full of people — stores in every corner. People always on their phone. It seems like there is no time for a break. Everything needed to move constantly.



Me wearing Kimono during Sakura blossom on our IUJ sakura tree line. With the help of the local communities (called UMEX), I had the opportunity to wear this beautiful red kimono with the cute umbrella. It is quite hard to walk with the shoes but it was a nice experience.

Growing up in Antananarivo, capital of Madagascar, tall buildings and lights are not typical. The city, like every capital, is the most feverish on the island. Messy people walking on the street, load of street sellers, traffics. These are the scenery of everyday life. However, compared to Tokyo, the security and the order do not exist. Japan has mastered

to control the population. Laws are active, and the public institution has authority. Thinking about it deeply, Japan's secret for a comfortable life is mostly the education. Civic education is critical to maintaining order in a big city. The government in developing countries need to realize that fact and foster a practical approach to ensure that education and operative public institution are established and prioritized.

Then I moved to my university, which is located in Minami Uonuma. The contrast was high. The International University of Japan is located to a remote area, surrounded by rice field. The quiet place offers a new landscape. No buildings, just mountains. No lights but a changing color scenery: orange and yellowish in autumn, white during winter, pink for spring and green during summer. Shrines and parks are everywhere. Rivers and waterfalls are the main attraction. Traditional festivals, such as the fire walk festival or the naked man, are a way to discover the real traditional Japanese culture. Sakes and sticky rice reflect the real taste of Japan. This disparity happens only in the 1h30min distance apart by Shinkansen. It means you can move from a wild place to a peaceful one in just 1h30min. Seems unusual, but in Japan, it represents how the country achieved to be an economic leader in the world while it preserves its beauty — learning that all developing nations need to follow. Our uniqueness and values should not be forgotten during our quest for development.

The second paradox I encountered was more about the people and the culture. Moving around Tokyo during my first day in Japan, I noticed the stern face of people on the street. Watching people walking uniformly and quietly was quite intimidating. This image is quite different from what I expected. From the media, I

always visualized Japanese people as extravagant people with unique hairstyle and fashion. I imagined the public transportation to be a bit chaotic. People busy and on hurry pushing each other in the train station. Salarymen are talking loud on the phone.

However, in my surprise, that was not the case. Everything seemed to follow a particular order and rules. The queue in front of the door and the rule of letting people getting off before entering are just an example of that respectful culture. Strangely, walking on the left rule was convenient to avoid any congestion. Again, education is the core. From their young age, the Japanese are taught to be respectful towards others and the public space. Humility and hospitality are values that I appreciate from them. I noticed these when I was doing a school visit. Kids waited in line quietly, holding their curiosity while we are entering the classroom. Respectfully, they asked questions feeding their thirst of knowledge. The shocking and fantastic moment was when they clean themselves the school. It is I guess the best practice that all education system over the world needs to adopt. It teaches you to respect the place you live by keeping it clean. It makes you realize that an agreeable and convenient life is everyone's responsibility.

As I was participating in other extra-curriculum activities, I encountered Japanese friends who always remind me how wrong my first impression was and how media only showed one piece of the big picture. Warm people meet my way in every place I go to. Local people help you even if they do not speak English. I realized that the Japanese are just people like me. Only the physical appearance and the environment change. Language is not a barrier since even with limited Japanese proficiency, I could communicate with



The landscape in our campus during spring. The mountains are still covered with snow while the flowers are blossoming. Living with this landscape for two years makes me forget sometimes that just 90min far away, we have Tokyo with all the buildings.

Japanese people. It was challenging but not impossible.

Traveling to Japan helps me to have a more open mind towards each culture. Mindset reinforces by my stay at my university. Indeed, in the International University of Japan, more than 100 nationalities are gathered. Being in touch of this much diversity make you more curious about all cultures. Every day is learning of acceptance and patience. Every conversation feels like a journey to a new country. Everyone seems different at first glance, but after a while, you might recognize the similarity in every human being. We are all one, with the same dream.

At the end of my almost two years stay, I gained a lot, not only on the academic side but also in the personal development side. Being immersed in Japanese culture facilitates the comprehension of the business culture. The process of establishing a successful venture between Africa and Japan seems less complicates for both sides. The program is a real experience that I hope all young African leaders, desiring to expand to Japan, can undergo.



Meva Wanda Randriamanarina worked as Executive assistant of Maika Assistance, Madagascar. As an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch), she earned her Master's Degree in International Management from International University of Japan, Niigata, Japan.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Union forms power. Japan being a model of development, I will contribute to improvement of my country

Njaratiana Faniry Adrien Rakotoarivelo

Madagascar

Staying for almost three years in Japan was a great experience in several aspects for me. Everything surrounding us in Japan can be considered as good examples and illustrations to learn how one country became much more developed compared to other countries in terms of every sector. In my opinion, Japan's case can be a model of development for my Country, Madagascar, for all sectors. I am going to express some of my points of view about things I have experienced during my stay in Japan in this document in order to show some differences between Madagascar and Japan and suggest some ways to improve my country.

SOCIAL ASPECT

Japan is known as one of the most developed countries in the World in terms of technology, infrastructure, economy, and so on. During my stay there, I found that its development is due to its well structured social. The respect for others and disciplines forms a strong guideline for Japanese people, which allow them to live in a safe and harmonious life. Besides, Japanese education system gives those people a high

and good quality education level. I am convinced that development is not a magic way; it is from a logical way; it is from everyone's effort and initiative based on common vision and objective initiated by good leaders who really conduct their work for patriotism. Japanese people always show in their daily life their union, their respect for, their works, other people by respecting time and avoiding bothering others, the nature and environment, their public properties, and everything which surround them shown by the surprising cleanliness of all private and public places. Providing good quality of products and services also a common way for Japanese companies and entities. This social background has become a strong basis for a development promotion in this specific country, and it has become a life style. Consequently, initiating and running development plan of several sectors became easier for Japan. In Japan, everyone feels responsible for the well-being of their country. Thus, all development plans work well and become sustainable.

In contrast to Madagascar's case, the basis of social structure has not been well installed yet. In addition to that, the education level is still low because the literacy rate is low. This situation provokes instable social organization. As a result, the insecurity rate in increasing, people do not feel safe, public properties are not sustainable; investors are hesitating to invest because the risk to lose their investment is very high. So, the situation has become a vicious circle, and figuring out solutions to rescue the country from its misery situation turns out to be more and more difficult. However, initiating and promoting development in Madagascar is still very possible. Madagascar's leaders and population have to set a common vision and objective. Using Japan as Model, I am sure that installing a well structured social allows implementing



Graduation ceremony of Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine



At Hinode Sangyo Co. Ltd.'s laboratory

a strong social basis to be a strong pillar for a sustainable development.

Japan shows that social structure and people are main resources and the engine of country's development.

ACADEMIC ASPECT

As I mentioned above, Japan has a good quality and high level of education. I found that the policy of Japanese government prioritize the education. They allocate considerable budget for education development, because they already knew that well educated people are the engine of Japan's development in all sectors. Japanese educational system is well structured, and serves people's needs. Their laboratories are well-equipped, and all research topics tend to resolve current challenges of development. All research results focus on technology updates to promote a continuous innovation aiming to satisfy users' needs. All of these efforts for education and researches impressed me, and opened my eyes to see that education is the main tools to create a strong society in order to achieve the goals of development strategies.

Since Madagascar has weak educational background, I think that it is obvious if every development plan to implement and run did not work, because the majority of population cannot understand the real and final objective of every action plans. In my opinion, I think that, like Japan, prioritizing education also is an unavoidable way to built a strong country and promote its development. Adopting Japanese educational system and adapting to Madagascar's local situation can be one of better solution to improve educational situation, level and quality.



Best poster presentation award

OTHERS

The big differences between Japan and Madagascar in terms of culture, know-how, weather, and stuff enrich my experiences and knowledge. These differences allowed me to understand how two countries resemble and are different each other in order to elaborate appropriate development policies.

Staying in Japan woke up my mind and my sense of patriotism to face the challenge and conduct some strategies to help my compatriots and my country to develop and move forward. However, working alone cannot achieve big things. Union forms power, partnership and collaboration between Japanese, privates and publics companies and investors, and local private and public sectors in Madagascar is a key of development success. Then, using Japanese know-how and mind-set we discovered there, and adapting them to our own social situation and background may lead to a real and sustainable development.



Njaratiana Faniry Adrien Rakotoarivelo, as an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch), earned his Master's Degree in Agro-environmental Science from Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine. At present, He runs his own business such as production of organic fertilizer and selling of local agriculture products.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

“7S” Broadened My Horizon

El Mehdi Er Raqabi

Morocco

Five years ago, I was reading "The Toyota Way: 14 Principles of Management". Among the 14 principles, the 12th principle "Genchi Genbutsu" or "Go & See" ignited in me the curiosity about going to Japan and seeing the land of the rising sun. At that moment, it was a dream that seemed quite difficult to achieve until I got the ABE Initiative Scholarship opportunity two years ago. After achieving it and with a high threshold of expectations, I took the plane from Morocco to Japan. I reached the International University of Japan, and was shocked to see that it's located in the middle of a jungle and later I understood why our university is also called "I & U in the Jungle".



My first day in IUJ where I started my dream with a high threshold of expectations and with a huge pride for being my country ambassador in Japan.

Still, IUJ represents the perfect environment to nurture the global leaders' profiles. Within IUJ, on the academic aspect, everything was enjoyable including lectures, multicultural group meetings and presentations, assignments, and research. The different opinions and cultures made classes quite exciting and funny. This is why learning in IUJ is a passion. Similarly, on the non-academic aspect, interactions with different cultures and mindsets as well as going through ups and downs enhanced significantly our skills. IUJ Facilities allowed us to practice different kind of sports and activities. Additionally, the different food smells in shared kitchens made me feel that I am living in an international restaurant. Outside IUJ, there is also a lot of excitement. A lot of activities were available including snowboarding, Ekiden marathon, football



My second participation in Ekiden marathon in Minamiuonuma. I was the first runner with the Samurai Bandana. The only foreigner among the first group of runners.

Tournaments, snow shoveling, interaction with local community, etc. All these aspects together made us enjoy every moment within this paradise that I consider the most beautiful place in Japan.

Seven aspects, which I call 7S, contributed to shifting from my local perception in Morocco to a broader way of thinking in Japan. It helped me in sustaining my Moroccan culture as well as fostering the global spirit that ensures my success with different cultures and backgrounds. I was not always successful. Still, I improved significantly.

First, “Senseis”. The exchange of insights between Professors and Students is the key for efficient learning experiences. This exchange enhances students' ability to enroll into discussions and think differently compared to the status quo. A Professor has a mine of knowledge, which needs to be explored by Students.

Second, “Subjects”. The MBA is a true journey through several topics related to Business. The learning approach contains group work, cases studies, presentations, analysis and design, class discussions, and field trips. For my case, Finance is definitely the most enjoyable area. It provides new perception perspectives and lead to enhance the level of understanding.

Third, “Squad Theory”. Group work is a requirement for success in such a context. Usually, we have to



Farewell party of one of my best finance professors. I made some surprise slides after my team final presentation where we expressed our love and gratitude with a cake.

work with members from different countries and backgrounds. As I noticed, any group will end up being a team. Through Ups & Downs, relationships become stronger and more efficient.

Fourth, “Sugoi Neighbors”. More than 60 countries in a small area is a special way to shift from a Local Culture to a Global Mindset. While each one of us keeps his/her own culture, the global mindset fosters interaction between us. Several nationalities are sharing the same dormitory, the same kitchen, the same class. Learning to be Global is the only way to survive.

Fifth, “Sugoi Community”. Compared to the stressing big cities, Urasa is a calm paradise suitable for research and studies. Interaction with the local community is among our duties. They are kind, peaceful, and always smiling. They are curious about other countries and ready to participate in any special event into which cultures gather.

Sixth, “Some Internships”. So far, I had two internships. The first one within a Japanese Company "Japan Space Systems" for two weeks. It was quite insightful about working in a Japanese company, and especially in terms of scheduling, teamwork, and hard work. I took the train twice a day and experienced Tokyo life. The second one within a Multinational in Japan "ProQuest" for six months. It was also very special in terms of creativity, leadership, and impact. While I was one

of the interns in the first one, I had the chance to be project manager in the second one.

Seventh, “Special Context”. In Japan, I experienced both the rural life and the urban life. I found life in Tokyo quite stressing. It seems that the company life is dominating the way of life there. The context is quite special in terms of hard work, seniority, and lifetime employment. The shift between Urasa and Tokyo led me to notice the huge difference.

Over the two years, I had enough time to observe, learn, and compare the Japanese culture with Morocco’s, US, and Europe’s cultures that are quite known to me. The rising sun culture is totally different from others. Lifetime employment and seniority are more required than efficiency and performance. This unique feature made Japan one of the most developed countries and showed a different way of achieving success on the social level compared to the US model based on entrepreneurship and shareholders’ value maximization. My Japanese adventure led me to complete the image about the different countries’ models, how they operate, their underlying principles and values, as well as their operating systems. The uniqueness of Japan lies in the balanced distribution of wealth among its citizens that several countries are not able to achieve.



Probably my best picture that shows how my passion towards coming and studying in Japan led me to achieve the Valedictorian of my MBA Class of 2019. This is a huge honor for me and for my country as well, especially that I was studying with students from more than 60 countries.



El Mehdi Er Raqabi was Operational Researcher and Data Scientist of FOSTERGY in Morocco. As an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch), he earned his Master’s Degree in International Management from International University of Japan.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

I Discover Japan that I Have Always Loved and Find Charming of Japan

Soumaya Addou

Morocco

The experience of living in Japan has been and is one of the very special occasions and opportunities that anybody may experience during his lifetime.

In my personal case, the decision to come and study in Japan was influenced by two principal factors: first is the unique cultural, traditional and natural environment that characterizes the country because of the specificity of Japan as a homogeneous society. The second reason is the reputation of the country as a global leader in cutting-edge technologies including evidently Earthquake Engineering that was my field of research and study in Tohoku University.

My first university choice when I applied for the Master's degree was Tohoku University that is located in Sendai city in the north east of Japan. Fortunately, I could join it in October 2016 as a student in Civil Engineering department. The Tohoku region has become famous worldwide after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, that event made more interested in that region and more willing to learn about the efforts made by the people and the government as well as their contribution to revive the region and overcome the difficulties that have followed the disaster.

For that, I set as an objective to achieve during my stay in Japan allocating as much time as I could to discover Japan and the Tohoku region in particular in my spare time. Therefore, travelling, which is by the way my favourite hobby, was one of my priorities as part of my life in the country.

Since I arrived to Sendai, I should admit that I started discovering the city and its surroundings since the first week. Sendai is known as "The city of trees", because of its many parks, gardens and tree-lined streets.



With snow monkeys in Jigokudani monkey park in January 2018

Therefore, in my first weekend, I bought a day pass ticket that allows me to ride the famous Sendai loop bus that goes around the famous and most popular tourist spot in Sendai for unlimited times during the same day. The main attractions that characterize Sendai are essentially historical spots such as the remains of 17th century Sendai castle, built for Samurai Lord Date Masamune, the founder of Sendai, on Aoba hill. I also had a stop at the amazing Zuihoden, which is a colourful, wood-carved replica of the original mausoleum housing Date Masamune and his heirs.

My first day trip in Japan was to Matsushima, a small city very famous as one of the best "Three views of Japan", characterized by the formation of hundreds of forested islands that dot the waters of its bay. What interested me even more is the oysters cultivated in the bay. As one might expect, I had a meal composed mainly of oysters, it was my first time eating them and I could immediately feel the amazing taste of these delicacies and understand the reason they are so popular not only in Matsushima but also throughout the entire country.

My trips were not limited only to Sendai area. Gradually I started travelling far away for extended days during holidays. However, solo travel was something that I have never experienced before, at first worried to take such an unusual step, but since Japan is a safe and well-organized country with trains and buses departing and arriving on time, I decided to take the lead and push my boundaries. My first long vacation travel destination was to the Kansai region. That first experience was amazing, it allowed me to learn to be independent, step out of my comfort zone and to discover my own potential. During that travel that I did in a busy golden week, I focused on exploring the city of Kyoto that was the imperial capital of Japan for over a thousand years. Kyoto is famous for its numerous Buddhist temples, as well as gardens, imperial palaces and Shinto shrines. I could feel the traditional Japanese culture and Architecture in Kyoto than in any other part of Japan since Kyoto was preserved and maintained as a traditional city. Many attractions were fascinating, but mostly the Kinkakuji or Golden temple amazed me along with the Fushimi Inari shrine. Kansai is not limited only to Kyoto so I visited also its major cities such as Osaka, Kobe and Nara that was the capital of Japan before the emperor moved to Kyoto. Nara is



In February 2017 , Author went to Aizuwakamatsu to attend the Aizuwakamatsu winter festival

famous especially by its park where hundreds of deers roam freely along with other attractions that are located there especially the Todaiji temple.

That trip encouraged me to travel more. Therefore, I followed it by other destinations in other regions such as Kanto, Hokkaido and Hokuriku, in addition to the southern islands of Okinawa. In order to deepen my knowledge of each region I visited far more, I joined numerous bus and cycling tours that were conducted by competent guides, throughout those tours, I could exchange talks with the guides and other participants to get a better view on the culture and the traditions of the regions I visited. It was also a great occasion to get recommendations about places to visit and food to try.

Overall, I noticed that each region has its special traits regarding food and culture and I am grateful that I used this valuable occasion of studying in Japan to discover the country that I have always loved. I am happy with the choice I made and I advise everyone who is capable of visiting Japan to do it.



Author's first day trip was to Matsushima in September 2016



Soumaya Addou is an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch) who earned her Master's Degree in Civil Engineering from Tohoku University. She used to work in the field of Road Operation in Morocco.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Japan — Island of Dream

Agostinho Francisco Trinta Ariande

Mozambique

My first contact with Japan was in 2015. It was on a training mission in the basics of LNG organized by Chiyoda Corporation. From there the doors kept on opening for me. I returned to Japan in the following year in order to deepen the knowledge obtained in the previous course. Through these, a passion was born in myself to obtain an academic degree there because I felt that Japan was surrounded by excellent professionals and technologies. So I returned again in 2017, to study in the Master's Course in Engineering and Materials Science. In this small article, I will share my experience in Japan with regard to: safety, commitment, and convenience.

Safety

Although some isolated cases of "insecurity" occur, since I do not want to qualify them for crimes, Japan, more specifically, Tokyo, where I have lived for two years remains the safest place that I have ever been and lived in. Following are the signs to show how secure Japan is.

It is common to see elementary school children going to and from school without being accompanied by any

adult persons or school attendants. Some children ride on bicycles and kick scooters or take buses or trains alone to go to school.

The police in Japan are, in fact, guarantors of public security, protection and tranquility, unlike some places where I have been, where the police are a sign of threat (insecurity) to citizens. In December 2017, we got together among colleagues from different nationalities living in the same condominium and went to a New Year's Eve party. Everything was good until the time that I thought I was tired and wanted to go home. My friends were not ready to go so I decided to go back alone. It was past two o'clock in the morning and the last train had already gone. So I walked home about an hour without any problem.

However, it happened that one of the colleagues who had stayed in the party lost his briefcase containing important documents such as passport, student card, resident's card and money. He reported to the nearest police box (Koban). The policeman asked him which was the last place he dropped in before returning home.



Credit photo: Kemigawa High School's teacher. March 2018 under JICA's activities, I joined the group that have visited and talked about our home countries into wide perspective (Education, Culture, Sport, Economy, Politic, and so on) to the students of Kemigawa High School in Chiba prefecture.



It was taken by Amadou Ka (friend and schoolmate of mine) in January 2018 in Kiba at Ito Yokado Mall and it was our first greatest experience once in our home countries no snow.

After making a phone call for about five minutes to somewhere, the policeman told him to go to the police box near the party spot. There he retrieved his brief case with everything intact.

Not everything is like "a thousand wonders", because here also occur isolated cases, as happened to me on one evening when I was biking home from school after a very tiring day of classes. I was called by the police and demanded to show documents. So I showed them and, to my surprise, they asked me to let them search my bag. I confess I did not expect such an action so I was unprepared.

Commitment

This is the word that I think characterizes the Japanese people, which is deep rooted and applied in all sectors. The teachers, the civil servant, the clinics, transport services, remote assistance services, etc. all respect punctuality and are committed to doing their best to satisfy the clients. As geography has defined, Japan

is an island, but it is also a linguistic island, so many services, from virtual shopping, menu to restaurants, etc. ... are accompanied by the images (photos) to help foreigners to understand. I noticed that the images were as exact as the real products so you could get exactly the same product as shown in the image photo. That's simply fantastic!

Convenience

"Convenient Japan," that's how I like to say it. One of the ways to combat malnutrition is to provide services where people can acquire quality food at any time (24/7) at affordable prices. In Africa there are many countries that fail in food education programs or awareness campaigns. At any corner in Japan, you can find convenience stores or vending machines operating 24 hours a day without being burgled or vandalized thanks to civil education, commitment and honesty of the Japanese people.



It is selfie where I was the shooter in March 2018. It was in Toyosu area nearby the school, Shibaura Institute of Technology (Toyosu Campus), after having a small farewell party to Shinozaki-san (the gentleman) moved to Osaka. Actually, the lady isn't and/or wasn't a labmate, she is our common friend working at Graduate school Department, Noguchi-san (lovely and kind person).



Agostinho Francisco Trinta Ariande used to work for Mozambican Pipeline Company. He is currently studying Materials Science and Engineering at Shibaura Institute of Technology as an ABE Initiative participant (4 th batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My Passion for Humanity The Hiroshima Experience

Okechukwu Ignatius Eze

Nigeria

Japan is a country endowed with rich cultural heritage and cutting edge technology. It is a very clean and healthy environment with a beautiful, mountainous and green topography. Most importantly, Japan probably has the nicest people in the world. As a student, I had the opportunity to study in a small countryside called Urasa in Niigata prefecture. One year into my program, I decided to live my passion, which is reaching out to affect lives wherever I find myself. My passion always is to engage in activities that have positive impact on humanity. Of course, the world is too vast to be changed by one person and so it is only a collective resolve to contribute to human welfare that can ensure a peaceful and just world.

Studying in Japan is entirely an act of kindness from the Japanese people who not only are charitable enough

to sponsor a handful of Africans annually through the ABE Initiative but are also significantly hospitable to all the participants. As an ABE Initiative participant, I feel Africa has benefited a lot through this initiative and Japan should be seen as our best friend. A friend in need, it is said is also a friend indeed.

The flood incidence in the southwestern Japan that resulted to loss of more than 200 death and properties worth millions of Japanese yen brought unimaginable pain and uncertainty not only to the flood victims and Japanese people but also to all Japanese friends and well wishers. I consider this time as most appropriate to show my empathy to government and people of Japan in complementing their effort of containing the situation and providing relief to the victims.



A picture taken at JICA office in Tokyo during JICA | Padeco - Africa Business Startup Workshop Competition. I work with a team of 5 students and we won the excellent with a business proposal developed by Emeka Variciuos the third batch ABE participant from Kenya.

My time working in Koyaura community in Saka-cho region with other volunteers of varied background ranging from old men aged above 60 years and few young men and women availed me the opportunity to impact humanity positively and also to learn a thing or two. I felt a strong community spirit while working with them and this inspired me to tap into their strength of character and resilience. The entire working environment was peaceful and there was a sense of respect for each other. In volunteering, I have learnt how to overcome challenge through collective effort and individual sacrifice for the greater good of man.

I appreciate the Japanese culture of humility, patience and hard work and will strive to continue to demonstrate this culture wherever I go. I would like to go back to Nigeria bearing this in mind to spur me to

work towards improving the lives of the rural populace whom I am aware are mostly subjected to unimaginable living conditions. Thank you Japan.



A picture taken during my first summer internship with Japan Space Systems, where I learnt how to use GIS and Remote Sensing, a computer-based tool for mapping and analyzing feature events on earth.



A picture taken during my Volunteer in Hiroshima. I was cleaning a flooded house that belongs to 86 years old women in Koyaura community with other volunteers and locals.



Okechukwu Ignatius Eze has worked at the Honda Manufacturing Nigeria Ltd. He earned his Master's Degree in International Relations from International University of Japan as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch),



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

I Encountered Excellent Researchers and Discovered Japanese Culture in Sendai, Beautiful “City of Trees”

Boubacar Sow

Senegal

I’m from Senegal (West Africa) and currently I’m completing the ABE Initiative Program by doing my internship at LANEX corporation in Sendai. It’s a single honor for me to summarize in this document my life experience in Japan.

Back in 2012, I was very fortunate to visit Japan for the first time, taking part to a short training program organized by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) in Yokohama. At that time, I was fascinated by number of things in this great country. I found a country where work hard is a culture, where life goes hand in hand with safety, where science and technology are top notch. In addition, I found the uniqueness of Japan in terms of cultural diversity, seasonal changes, quality of life and many more. To put things succinctly, this picked my interest about Japan and this is where everything started.

Prior to 2015, by chance I discovered in JICA website, the program called ABE Initiative short for the African Business Education Initiative for Youth. A program which offers the opportunity of young Africans to study in Japan. Unquestionably, the opportunity caught my attention, because I had a high desire not only to complete my studies in renowned university but also to visit again Japan and learn more about Japanese culture and society.



Taken during My graduation speech at Miyagi University

While working for the Senegalese ministry of vocational training, I was interested in pursuing my studies and the ABE Initiative Program just came at the right moment.

In my eagerness to make it happen, I applied for this program and succeeded to all selection steps. And I always remembered the day I received the notification result informing about my selection at Miyagi University. At that moment, I realized that my life would be totally changed, but I was full of hope because of my great desire to challenge myself, knowing that my only parachute is learning and innovation.

Coming back to Japan for the second time was both memorable and amazing. I arrived in Japan in August 2016 and stayed at JICA Tokyo International Center for two weeks before reaching to Sendai. The questionable thing this time is what drive me to choose Sendai (Miyagi prefecture) and Miyagi University?

Above all, studying abroad must be a reasoned decision, answering to few questions can help to take a right decision. “Where will you go?” “What will you study?” “How you will communicate?” even “What will you eat?” I decided to come to Sendai because of many reasons. My previous experiences taught me that Sendai is that beautiful city in the northeast of Tokyo. The city has beautiful scenery (it’s even called the “city of trees”), lot of historical places and warm people. Sendai is also known as “academic city”, it has many universities and research institutes. Besides the weather which can be terrible in winter, Sendai is a quite nice place to achieve a cutting-edge research.



Introducing Senegal to local people in Nobiru

Miyagi University is one of the public institutions in Tohoku region. I found that the university has a high-quality of education and research. The graduate school of project design made me master diverse skills in computer science and artificial intelligence which will boost my life forever. Every single day spent there was unforgettable: full of joy, wisdom, practical knowledge and challenge. The Master's course provided a truly great opportunity for me to learn in an amazing academic environment, with lessons taught by expert faculty members. Its friendly environment makes Miyagi University great, with a real feeling of hospitality. I believe that when I came to Miyagi University my hope was rewarded. So, my gratitude is higher than my expectations were before I came to Japan for this program.

Studying in Japan has become an impressive part of my life as it opens the gate of success. I have not only completed my Master's degree, but I have also achieved understanding of many aspects of Japanese society which definitely make the world better. I have involved in disparate cultural activities including visiting cities affected by the great east Japan Earthquake, participating in local festivals and so on. However, I was really impressed by the effort made to recovery many cities attacked by the disaster and the Fukushima

nuclear power plant: This should be appreciated.

Living in Sendai is all about discovering fabulous places, eating delicious seasonal foods and enjoying festivals both in summer and winter. The seasonal changes in Sendai affect not only the weather but also people's daily activities. I could always remember cherry blossoms viewing during spring in many famous spots and parks around Sendai. When it comes to summer, me and many of my friends including foreigners and Japanese used to spend hours and hours at "Tanabata Festival" or "Jozenji street Jazz Festival". Speaking for myself, summer is somehow the best time to be in Sendai.

In Japan, I have also been involved in several community activities such as teaching French language to young Japanese and introducing African culture to local people in Sendai. I am not a drummer expert but many of senior people living at "Sakuragaoka 7 chome" (Sendai city) highly appreciated my participation in diverse local events.

To sum up, I want to make my readers aware that studying in Japan is a privilege. What I really want to point out is being in Japan as a foreigner student has enormous advantages as it leads to get a world class



education, uncover the exotic Japanese culture and connect with excellent researchers in various disciplines.

Tea Ceremony during my summer internship



As an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch), Boubacar Sow obtained his Master's Degree in Project Design from Miyagi University. He was a teacher of Computer Science in Senegal before coming to Japan.



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Grown up with broader perspective through my stay and study in Japan

Mbali Sexwale

Republic of South Africa

Living and Studying in Japan has been a fantastic and massively life changing experience that gave me the opportunity to evolve and clearly identify my career path. I fondly refer to it as the metamorphosis of my young adult life into a more disciplined and independent individual.

I first moved to Japan in 2013 on an Exchange and Teaching Program known as the *JET Program* which is a grassroots internationalization program for college graduates initiated by the Japanese governments Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education. Although I had traveled abroad multiple times, this was my first experience living abroad and so far away from my family. Many thought it would be a daunting process but I relished every moment. Being the sole foreign member in my work place changed my way of thinking and taught me to be adaptable, culturally sensitive, service minded, leadership oriented and of course, disciplined.

I was fully immersed in Japanese culture and in order to make the most of it, I began the uphill battle of learning Nihongo. I was fascinated by the language and how my demeanor automatically changed when I had to speak Japanese. I spoke more calmly and politely and I listened more attentively to ensure that I understood what was being said to me, but also because the verbs go



at the end of sentence. ‘*Sumimasen*’ (which has many meanings depending on the context it’s been used, for example, excuse me, sorry, thank you) and

IUJ Sakura Lane.



At Joestu Takada Park, the third largest Sakura viewing park in Japan. This picture shows a good contrast of winter and spring. Cherry Blossom and snow covered mountains.

‘*wakarimashita*’ became my two most commonly used words immediately followed by a bow.

I quickly grew besotted with Japan, the culture, the unmatched hospitality (*omotenashi*), the food which is a theatrical experience on its own, the efficiency and the person I was becoming. Walking down the streets of the big cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto was always a fascinating experience, everything grabs your attention, the people, fashion, vending machines and the overall cleanliness. My confidence grew immensely as I learned to independently navigate my way around the cities and my new home town, Imabari, either on the train, by foot, or on my trusted *mamachari* bicycle. I became more attentive and also fell more in love with my country too because as a cultural ambassador, it was my duty to exchange my culture as a pathway to global cooperation and integration.

When I found out about the ABE program, I was beaming with excitement. The prospect of doing my Master’s degree in a country that had become my second home was an opportunity I could not pass up. I applied to the International University of Japan (IUJ) for its phenomenal International Relations curriculum and the rich diversity of students from all corners of the world.

The minute I set foot in IUJ I was extremely overjoyed and filled with an abundance of gratitude. Some called the university jail because of its remote location, I felt

differently about it. Waking up to the beautiful scenery of lush green trees in summer, majestic snowcapped mountains in winter, and the ‘sakura lane’ lined with cherry blossom trees in spring was pure bliss. People pay large sums of money to see such views and I got to experience it for free. I thought it wouldn’t get any better than that, but it did.

IUJ took me out of my comfort zone and removed any feelings of complacency. My courses were extremely broad and I learned a great deal from the multiple perspectives and viewpoints of my global classmates. Even though my concentration was International Relations, I took a multidisciplinary approach by selecting courses from management and economics to give me an all rounded degree and enhance my scholastic experience. Furthermore, the university provided infrastructure that allowed for academic excellence along with professors who were PHD graduates from leading global universities. All these elements were a pathway that led to my stellar academic performance and success, earning me a spot on the Dean’s List.

Outside the classroom, I actively volunteered my time participating in different organizations and councils in service to the university. I was Vice President of the Student Body executive Council as well as the International Relations Council. Furthermore, I participated in business competitions such as the *Hult Prize*, emceed a few events, the most memorable being the inaugural *TEDxIUJ*, organized and performed in cultural events such as Culti Festa and Open Day. This gave me a good balance between my academic & social life. As a result of being an active member in a multi-cultural campus environment, I was able to hone new skills and greatly improve my communication, negotiation, decision



Participating in Tea Ceremony, a ceremonial preparation and presentation of tea. One of my favorite hobbies.

making and management skills, whilst also gaining a better understanding of how the university worked.

As an ABE Initiative Scholar, I had the opportunity to go on field trips to various parts of Japan such as Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Nagoya and Okinawa to visit historical sites, United Nations offices, the Maritime Self Defense Force, the DIET (Japanese Parliament), MOFA, the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) and many more. These trips facilitated more refined knowledge about Japan’s economy and politics as well as Japanese culture. So not only was I a student in Japan, I was a student of Japan gaining a more profound insight of the country as a whole, its global success and innovativeness and how to use this to become a bridge between South Africa and Japan.

Studying in Japan has been a worthwhile experience that has left a lasting impression on me in addition to grooming me into a well-rounded individual and global citizen. It has taught me to pay attention to everything, no matter how big or small and to strive for constant self-improvement through the principle of ‘*kaizen*’. I have made lifelong friendships and learned a great deal about the world from my university which characterizes the United Nations due to students from multiple countries and nationalities with similar development goals. This was a unique experience and I highly recommend Japan to anyone wanting to study abroad.



Mbali Sexwale used to work at SCF Capital Solutions in South Africa. She has three years of working experience in Japan. Earned her Master's Degree in International Relations from International University of Japan as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Developing a global network through cross-cultural experience

Omer Awad Elbasha Mohammedahmed

Sudan

Japan is famous for its fascinating mixture of modern lifestyle, beautiful nature and ancient cultural heritage, and people who are polite, hardworking and with high attention to details. Japan is the world second largest developed economy and the third in terms of GDP. Japan is like a floating factory depending on different industrial sectors that experienced notable success specially hi-tech and automobiles. It is home to six of the top ten largest automobile manufacturers in the world like Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Suzuki and Mazda. Many of the world's major electronics companies are based in Japan such as Sony, Panasonic, Hitachi, Ricoh and Toshiba. I came to Japan two years ago as part of JICA African Business Education (ABE) Initiative which gave me an excellent opportunity to experience this unique combination on daily basis and be in positively influencing culture.

Since I was undergraduate student, I set a target to resume my post-graduate studies in a field that is

needed to contribute towards the betterment of my community, my country, and the whole world. After gaining relatively enough practical experience, I came to realize that many resources and talents are wasted due to lack of systematic management approach and absence of clear vision. Therefore, I chose to do my master's in management and Business Administration. The program offered at the Graduate School of International Management (GSIM) is the perfect fit to help me achieve my goals. International University of Japan (IUJ) offered me an opportunity to study a world-class MBA in the beautiful countryside of Japan with a dynamic diverse student body.

IUJ is in Minamiuonuma-shi in the countryside of Japan. In my daily interactions with the local community, I am exposed to the true untouched traditional Japanese culture. I loved riding my bicycle or taking long walks around the farms, rice fields and the surrounding mountains. The view is captivating, and the air is so clean that gave me a fresh feeling every single moment. When winter came everything turned to clear white in a mesmerizing sight. Minamiuonuma-shi is called the snow country, but you can feel the warmth in people kindness.

During the two years I was fortunate enough to visit many places in Japan. I met incredible people from all over the world and participated in wonderful events. I travelled from the beautiful Okinawa warm beaches in the south to the cold Sapporo streets in the north. I went from Tokyo Skyscrapers in the east to Kanazawa gold leaves in the west passing through the beautiful Kanto region. Each city and village I visited had a unique story to tell.

In Kyoto, I learned about the history and ancient



Trying the Kimono for the first time



Wearing my traditional dress at entrance of my university
IUJ

heritage of Japanese culture from Fushimi Inari, kiyomizu dera, Arashiyama and Kinkakuji. I was specially amazed by the nightingale floors in Nijo Castle. As you step into the corridors the floor squeak making beautiful birds sounds, it was originally built in 1603 as a security measure against intruders. I was very touched when I visited Nagasaki, where the Fat Man (the second atomic bomb) was dropped killing and injuring around 150,000 Japanese mostly civilians. I saw the resilience and strength the city showed to rebuilt from scratch. In Nagoya, I saw the miraculous recovery of Japanese economy after World War II portrayed in the Toyota story. I explored the methods and philosophies used in the Japanese management style. I learned about the 14 principles of the Toyota way, The five S's, the Kaizen, the Nemawashi and the Genchi Genbutsu.

Throughout my stay in Japan, I made sure to participate in as many social and academic activities as possible. I recognized that in order to build beneficial strong relations it is essential to work on mutual trust ground. I was able to mix and group with people who are in the process of becoming decision makers in their organizations in the near future not only in Japan but around the world. I started developing a real global

network. I capitalized on the multiple opportunities to expand business and social network through events, business competitions, social gatherings and volunteer activities. I was able to build bridges and foster good relationships with my class mates, the local community and my colleagues during my internships. I acted as goodwill ambassador promoting myself, my family, my people and country, while opening channels with others expanding the business and social network and exploiting all opportunities. This cross-cultural experience made me more capable of reaching common objectives with people from various cultural backgrounds which is a key skill in today's globally competitive market. In Class, I learned how to transform ideas to actual plans and strategies that can be applied and implemented. I am ready to employ business data analysis and management know-how techniques, that I gained to enhance my decision-making skills, and contribute significantly to the betterment of my company and my community. I am certain this will eventually revive the national economy, and lead to welfare of Sudanese people.

My time in Japan was absolutely different, unforgettable, challenging, eye-opening and perspective-altering, life long experience. I had a hands-on experience on the daily habits that enabled Japanese to build-up their country from scratch time and time again. I understood how with all the modern change and technology advancement Japanese were able to preserve their conservative and cultural values. The great African leader Nelson Mandela once said "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world", "It is in your hands to make a better world for all who live in it". I believe my experience in Japan brought me closer to exactly achieve that.



Omer Awad Elbasha Mohammedahmed belonged to The Sudan National Petroleum Corporation, also known as Sudapet. Earned his Master's Degree in International Management from International University of Japan as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

Living in Japan is a Lifelong Learning

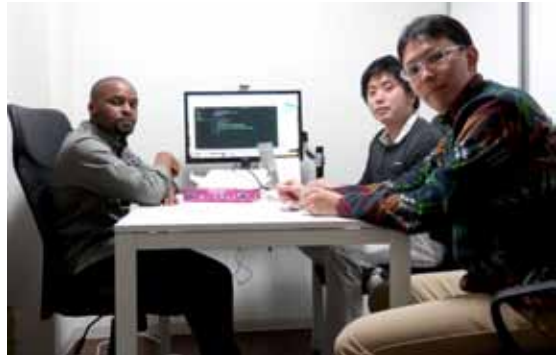
James Elikana Mmari

Tanzania

Starting life out of your raised country is not easy to many of us. Starting from coping with the new weather condition, time differences to learning or understanding a new culture, language, laws and the similar. Not forgetting the feelings of missing loved ones back in your home country and accepting new people and friends in that new country, it becomes even more challenging when you meet with people from different countries, that means you are not only exposed to the culture of that new country itself, but also to more other countries presented by those people forming this international community. It is really an experience filled with mixed feelings; excitement, joy, sadness and surprises all come at different times in this period, some days you could experience all of them in a single day!

I wasn't exceptional to the similar situation when I started my new academic life in Japan! It was really an awesome moment of life, filled with mixed experience and emotions, although it was not my first time to be in a foreign country, but this one was a bit different and I could feel it. Japanese culture and lifestyle were totally different from the previous country I happened to be and of course from my country as well-by far away. Although I was exposed in the International community, however Japanese culture, lifestyle and norms were still very dominant and one could not avoid to face in a single day. Imagine standing in a queue waiting for a train or bus, hearing the phrase“irasshaimase” in a “konbini”-store every time you get in, standing in a queue to pay for your purchased items, just few to mention for now; it was totally new amazing experience to me.

Although Japanese culture and environment in terms of infrastructure development and technology driven



After Graduation Internship Program. Discussing with colleagues about the features and development approach to our new app. From Left: James, Kambe, and Taichi

lifestyle and economy are really far and different from my country-Tanzania, I happened to love and easily coped with them. One of the big reasons is the truth that, I was impressed and agreed with many of the norms and Japanese lifestyle. Things like respect of the law, thinking of others first- I understand some people do not buy this yet, but what I mean here is; the point where a Japanese hesitates even to say “NO” just because is fearing to hurt someone’s heart, or can not take someone’s dropped or forgotten item, like a wallet, phone; simply because of how that person will feel and suffer if could not find it? - “so just leave it where it is, the person will come back looking for it in the same way” - or clean the leftovers and the trushes first before you separate them, so that it will not be messy to the collectors; leave the seat for elderly/disabled people in the bus and trains, do not make noise in the train/apartment, stand in the queue to get served- since there are people who came before you; these are what I would call, thinking of others first before you, and to me this is one of the very key human values for making the world a better place for everyone; however it is not easy to maintain them in many countries, even to very developed ones, but I could find them in Japan, and was really impressed. I can write a lot about Japanese

culture and lifestyle, since was among the things that moved my heart and made me appreciate how Japanese could maintain a lot of human values even without much forces from the authorities or religious community.

Obviously, no one is perfect, and the diversity is what makes us alive and active, among the disappointment I had in Japan was in social life, which of course it is due to the reality of my Tanzanian culture; to us “greeting” was an important thing, even to a stranger, we can not pass the street without saying “habari?” “Mambo?” to person nearby, however doing this in Japan, even to my very close neighbours, I received a strange look, was shocked in the beginning. It was not common for them, even if the greeting was in Japanese, and it took me a few months to get their reply back. Therefore, Social life was a bit difficult in Japan, even what we called social events, needed formal preparations, sounds funny but was the real situation, of course we enjoyed those moments and we made friends for life.

Back to the Academic life, I’m proud to say that I was blessed to study at the Institute that focuses on ICT for Development in Japan. I know it was not that



Infiolata Kobe - The famous Flower Arrangement festival in Kobe City, International Students we had an opportunity to learn and joined this festival with the aim of showing how Kobe City is connected with Africa and Kobe Institute of Computing as one of the Intermediate University. From Right (African): Antonio, Christa, James and a bit far standing is Gilberto



Out of school life we had a good community of Japanese friends whom we could meet and have funny moments. I and Gregory joined Shiro and other friends for the Yakiniku party

big university, yet the purpose and focus that Kobe Institute of Computing has in its mission plays a big role and fits to what most of our developing countries are looking for. I have seen how many students were able to come up with some tremendous Research Projects that could bring changes to their lives and to their country as well. I was among those students and I can still see how our Research Projects could be very helpful to our countries and could serve the purpose of our Scholarship Programs. The opportunity that we are given to think more of our countries’ challenges from the point of view being in Japan is very helpful, since we can see how Japanese were able to conquer those challenges, then we learn how we can adapt to our specific countries, how we can customize those solutions to fit the needs in our own countries, this was such a great experience I had, and has made a great impact to my career, professional and academic life.

Living in Japan was a lifelong learning process that has given me a more active mind set in developing ideas, human-centered design and challenge solving study oriented culture, which I do hope will bring more impact to my community and will keep me connected with Japan.



James Elikana Mmari is Assistant Lecturer (ICT areas) at Arusha Technical College, Tanzania. He is also PhD Student at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary. He earned his Master's Degree of Science in Information Systems from Kobe Institute of Computing as an ABE Initiative participant (2nd batch).



ABE Initiative Scholars
Africa Meets Japan

My adventure to discover Japan ~from season to season~

Oussama Ben Rabiha

Tunisia

I am Oussama from Tunisia, a student from Hokkaido University. I have been staying in Japan for a little less than two years now, I have experienced a lot of things and I have a lot to tell about my stay in Japan and how I am enjoying my time here.

Something special in Japan is that every season has its own color and taste. When I just came to Japan, it was fall season, so I had the chance to enjoy the leaves turning red (*Kouyou*), we are blessed that we have such a huge and beautiful campus so that you enjoy the scenery while you are studying. There is a famous street inside the campus called Ginkgo street where leaves turn to a beautiful golden color.

When winter came, I was a little bit excited and worried at the same time, winter here is so long and very cold, I wasn't prepared to see over a meter of snow every day for about months, and I was thinking at first that I would spend the whole season between the apartment and the school, I was thinking like that because I came from a Mediterranean country where winter is little bit cold and snow is rare. Hopefully, it was different than my expectation, the whole region was covered by snow, such a peaceful and quiet atmosphere. During winter season, there were a lot of indoor events such as *Takoyaki* party, *makizushi* party and other exchange parties, and during Christmas season, they have held an event called white illumination.

Same as many countries all around the world, Japan welcomes the new year with a special ceremony called *Shougatsu*, where people usually go to shrines during the New Year's Eve to pray for their family fortune and good health. At that time, I went to a nearby shrine and I had the chance to ring the bell and wish something for the future, it was super cold that night, hopefully,



Sightseeing in Otaru

inside the shrine, some priests were serving warm drink called amazake, it was sweet and sour, seasoned with orange peel powder. At the end old January, I joined a volunteering circle at Hokkaido University, and I participated in *mochi tsuki* (rice cake making) event with primary school students and other local people, where I tried rice pounding using traditional tools and then making rice cake seasoned with sweet beans paste “*anko*”, soy beans flour “*kinako*” and sesame paste. I enjoyed sharing eat with kids after having a warm bowl of *Ozouni* (soup containing rice cakes and vegetables: New Year's dish).

Every year in February, they hold the Sapporo snow festival, the biggest snow festival in Japan, where you can enjoy beautiful snow sculpture that can reach a few meters tall. After that I had the chance to visit Shikotsuko lake, where I enjoyed the ice festival and fireworks as well, but it was very cold so that I couldn't take many pictures.

Spring vacation had started at the end of February, but it was still winter in Sapporo, so I decided to travel outside Hokkaido. Before coming to Japan, I was always thinking about travelling to Kyoto enjoying



Trip to Hokkaido in front of Former Hokkaido Government Building Office

beautiful shrines and the old capital of Japan. Since I am the only Tunisian student in Hokkaido university I started missing my family and friends, so I said I must visit some Tunisian friends in Tokyo and Nagoya before going to Kansai region, I travelled to Tokyo first where I enjoyed the modern part of Tokyo such as Harajuku, Ginza and Shinjuku and I really enjoyed the scenery near Odaiba and Yokohama port. Then, I went to Nagoya where I visited Nagoya castle, Atsuta shrine and Osukannon temple, I enjoyed my time there with my friends and the weather was warm and nice.

I continued my trip to Kansai region, where I started from Kyoto, my dream destination, I have a long list of visited spots, but my favorites are Gion district, Fushimi Inari shrine and Kinkakuji temple. When I first arrived at Kyoto, it was the cherry blossom season “Hanami”, pink and *sakura* is all around. Then I visited Osaka and I was guided by my Japanese friend, and we went to many places such as Osaka castle and Dotonbori street. Then Nara, where I visited the famous Nara park and Todaiji temple to see the great buddha and other spots. Finally, I have ended my trip at Kobe, where I enjoyed the night view at Kobe port.

After a while, spring has come to Hokkaido, cherry trees started to bloom, and snow started to melt. At the beginning of May, they have one-week vacation called the golden week and guess what, in Hokkaido you can enjoy the golden week and the cherry blossom at the same time, in addition, in Hokkaido they have a custom to hold a barbeque party while enjoying the spring scenery.

During my stay in Sapporo, I had the chance to visit Shinyo High School where I introduced about Tunisia and, I visited Shiritsu Kohoku Elementary School where I enjoyed interacting with kids and learn about the teaching system in Japan and, I enjoyed having a school lunch with them, it was such a nice experience.

Summer has finally come, my best season, Summer season in Japan is very festive, a lot of festivals a lot of fun and a lot of things to discover. I enjoyed Hokkaido shrine festival, *Yosakoi* festival, *Awa Odori*, and *Obon*, such a spiritual atmosphere that takes you back to the Edo era. We can’t talk about summer without mentioning about “*Hanabi*” the fireworks festival or camping, since summer is cool in Hokkaido and nature is beautiful, camping is something necessary, hopefully I have experienced camping with my lab-mates at Abira, and we enjoyed our time there and we had barbeque as well.

My adventure hasn’t been over yet, there is a lot of things to discover and learn, so I should do my best on my research and future work.



Snow in Tsudome (Sapporo)



Oussama Ben Rabiha participated in the ABE Initiative Program after earning a Master's degree in Tunisia. He is currently studying Engineering at Hokkaido University as an ABE Initiative participant (4th batch).



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Contribution to my country's infrastructure with simple and innovative technology in Japan

Paul Habasimbi

Zambia

My name is Paul HABASIMBI from Zambia and I studied Engineering in Japan at Ashikaga University (MSc in Construction & Environmental Engineering) as a 3rd Batch ABE Initiative student. I arrived in Japan in 2016 and this was my first time to visit an Asian country. Before I go into the details about my experience and the things I learnt while in Japan, let me briefly introduce my country. Zambia is in the Southern part of Africa. The country is politically stable with very low crime rate and has many natural resources. Like Japan, the people are very kind and welcoming. Copper mining is the major economic activity though the government is now trying to diversify the economy from dependence on copper. Currently, lots of infrastructural projects have been introduced through Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements which require private sector investment participation. One such project is the Link Zambia 8000, where the government intends to build 8,000 kilometers of roads to open the rural areas, connect the Districts and Provinces. My inspiration for studying in Japan was therefore to enhance my knowledge and acquire the necessary skills to provide leadership for delivery/improvement and eradicate poor delivery and/or ensure reputable roads/infrastructures are developed.

Having studied in Japan for almost 3 years, my experience of Japan was very interesting. In the first instance Japanese people are very polite and they have a rich culture of traditions which are well respected. I was amazed to see people bowing as a sign of greetings which is different from my country where we usually handshake for the same purpose. I had the rare experience to visit and appreciate many Japanese traditional shrines, temples and old-style traditional houses while living in Ashikagashi located in Tochigi Prefecture. In addition, lots of public places if not all



Conducting experiment at Ashikaga University Laboratory

are in very clean conditions because recycle bins are placed everywhere for people to throw their trash. In terms of technology, Japan is famous for its world class technology. Public transportation is mostly by trains as opposed to buses or road transport commonly used in Zambia. The experience I had of boarding on a bullet train called Shinkansen sightseeing beautiful places around Japan is something I will forever get to remember. Train stations are well located with vending machines to buy a variety of food stuffs and refreshments. Most fascinating was the experience I had of using a Japanese high technology electronic toilet which had spray functions, warm water jets and heated seats. The pulsating spray provides massage to delicate areas of a human being. This was quite amazing.

In addition to the things mentioned above, I also had the experience to learn Japanese language (Nihongo) and work as an intern at two Japanese companies namely Kuriyama Motors Limited and BumpRecorder Co, Ltd. The first company specialises in the sale of used motor vehicles which are mostly exported to Africa while the second company provides Civil Engineering services. While undertaking internship with these companies, I had gained a superb understanding of the Japanese business culture and currently, I am collaborating with BumpRecorder Co, Ltd to find business opportunities in Zambia and search for any potential market for

expansion in other African countries. BumpRecorder Co., Ltd of Japan is offering simple mechanisms using Android smartphones to identify defects on the road from vibrations of a running vehicle. Their software application called “BumpRecorder” determines bumps on the road surface based on the level of vibration. Built-in sensors collect the vibration data and automatically compute the International Roughness Index (IRI) of the pavement. This parameter is used by highway professionals throughout the world as a standard to quantify road surface roughness. In a nutshell, this kind of technology satisfies the needs for low-cost, quicker and handy measurement of pavement surface condition which is suitable for Zambia and many other African countries.

During my stay in Japan, I discovered several things which are not common to my country. Firstly, I came to discover that one can arrange for different services such as booking for a bus, train, shopping, food and even accommodation online and the services get to be delivered on time. Such services made my life as a student much easier and convenient.

One of the profound things I learnt while at Ashikaga University is to work hard and most importantly approach work in a way that best works for myself. I enrolled in the faculty of Engineering at Ashikaga University and studied Civil Engineering. My research was on geotechnical engineering and this required hard work and dedication. The University has advanced laboratory equipment which is used for research and this kind of equipment is expensive and many Universities in Zambia cannot afford to buy it. This gave me a challenge to understand the equipment and perform the experiment to the expectation of my supervisor. With hard work and dedication, my research

findings were accepted by my supervising Professor and to this effect, I even had the opportunity to publish my research work in two accredited international journals. This rare achievement not only puts my name on the world map but also promotes my country, Zambia.

Japan is a developed country while Zambia is still a developing country and therefore a lot can be tapped from Japan. For instance, the BumpRecorder technology I learnt from Japan is one such technology that is simple and applicable to many African countries including Zambia. This innovative technology has huge potential to expand to many African countries. Another point of interest is that in Japanese business culture, employees rarely change jobs. The employee remains with the company for the rest of his or her working life. This is a rare case in Zambia. Secondly, Japanese business cards are a very important aspect of Japanese business etiquette. Exchanging business cards is without a doubt a standard protocol in Japanese business culture. Lastly, dress code and appearance hold a very high value in Japanese society. This kind of business etiquette is not common in Zambia. It is therefore obvious that a lot can be learnt from our Japanese friends to enhance our service delivery and conduct.



As Exhibitor at TICAD VII Business Forum



As an ABE Initiative participant (3rd batch), Paul Habasimbi obtained his Master's Degree in Civil Engineering from Ashikaga University. His previous job is Principal Engineer (North Zambia) in the department of Construction & Rehabilitation at Road Development Agency (RDA).



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EDITORIAL NOTE

Many Japanese feel Africa is far from Japan not just geographically but culturally and psychologically. Indeed, African continent with 54 nations is more than ten thousand kilometers away from Japan. But I hope that after reading this booklet, many have realized a human face of Africa and gotten familiar with it.

Five years into the implementation of the ABE Initiative Program, it has evolved tremendously with the tireless efforts of the participants as well as the people in charge of planning and managing it. It is an amazing fact that more than 1,200 youth from 54 African countries have participated in the program. They studied in Japan, exchanged with Japanese people and deepened mutual respect and understanding. It is also true that Japanese people who are ten times more than African participants have been able to feel Africa without travelling there thanks to the ABE Initiative Program. If you read the 28 articles in this booklet, you will quickly understand how the seed of the program starting with the 1st batch of 156 participants five years ago have borne such a rich fruit. I would like to take

this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the authors who contributed to the booklet.

This booklet depicts not only tangible results of the program which is the combination of Master Degree study in Japanese universities and internship at Japanese companies but also intangible assets that the program has brought to both Japan and Africa. It is our pleasure that we are able to publish it on the occasion of TICAD VII held in Yokohama in August 2019. It is my sincere wish that the relationship between Japan and Africa will be enhanced sustainably and continuously through further expanding the networks developed by the ABE Initiative Program.

JICE, which has been involved in the program from the beginning, will be committed to cementing the relations with Africa as a partner of Japan in collaboration with ABE participants and “KAKEHASHI Africa”, a non-profit organization established at the initiative of ex-ABE participants.

Hiroshi Kawagoe
Secretary General

Photo : Noriyuki Takahashi (p.15), Azusa Ishikado (p.25)

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