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Japan and Lusophone Africa: tepid outcomes, greater opportunities?

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As a continent, Africa has long held a preferential, if not controversial, focus on the international agenda. With varying degrees of commitment from the international community toward a region with a wide array of structural shortcomings, frequently disturbed by unrest, corruption and warfare, it is not unusual to witness multiple external actors vying to provide political, economic and technical assistance to the beleaguered continent. Among this group, one major power is frequently ignored in the public perception of international aid dynamics in Africa.

Indeed, for all purposes, Japan is often unacknowledged amidst these aid efforts, which contributes to sustain an erroneous image of tenuous disengagement with the African continent. This apparent low profile, however, is at odds with the country's own professed designs to expand its relationship with Africa, as evidenced by the successive Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (TICAD) in the last two decades, which have been used as a formal launching pad to accentuate Japanese influence among African countries, expand aid disbursements, and thus elevate Japan's overall foreign policy profile.

In this context, with three years on from TICAD IV, one possible case for an analysis of Japan's standing towards Africa may lie with Portuguese-speaking African Countries (*Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa*, or PALOP). Although these countries do not, by all means, provide the perfect representation of their own continent, they do reflect different realities, stages of development, levels of stability, availability of resources and economic opportunities. Hence, they can perhaps help to understand how effectively Japan has adapted its 'African strategy' to different contingencies emanating from local developments and how far Japan has inserted itself into these countries' own international priorities and aid strategies as a valuable partner.

This article will therefore examine the framework of Japan's current engagement with the African continent and more specifically with Lusophone Africa, trying to understand how this relationship – or lack thereof – has evolved up to the present day. In order to establish the required context, we will look at the magnitude of Japan's international aid commitments as well as its renewed interest in the development of the continent over

recent years. Using the last decade as an indicative timeframe, we can then focus on the relationship between Japan and the Lusophone African countries, with a specific focus on aid receptiveness but also including other vectors such as political and economic relations with each other. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as for Japan's actual insertion in these countries and the sustainability of its approach in the coming future, with implications for Japanese overall strategy in the rest of the continent.

Japan and Africa: the road taken

Contrary to a widespread perception that it has been largely a post-World War II phenomenon, Japan's relations with the African continent can be unmistakably traced back further, in particular to the colonial period of the early 20th century. Indeed, "it is a myth to say that Japan had 'clean hands' in Africa" during the inter-war years.¹ Although with an undeniably lower intensity than the remaining industrializing powers, Japan also took part in the so-called "scramble for Africa", vying to secure a cheap and stable supply of raw materials – initially focusing on cotton – while taking advantage of the low level of development of several colonies which ended up constituting valuable markets for, among others, Japanese manufactured textiles.

With the outbreak of World War II,² however, the context changed irrevocably, and in the war's aftermath variables such as Japan's own economic recovery process or Cold War geopolitics were bound to dictate the new terms for any 'new' approach to Africa. Retrospectively, Jun Morikawa identifies the existence of a "dual diplomacy" towards White and Black Africa, in which the former essentially comprised relations with the apartheid regime in South Africa³ and the latter included a generalized recognition of the newly-independent African states, essentially understood as potential export markets.⁴ This twofold policy was not, of course, exempt from criticism, and especially so if one takes into consideration the international pressure and sanctions that grew over the South African state. For Japan, this situation was a stark example of *seikei bunri* – separation of politics from the economy –, which clearly dominated the country's approach until the mid-1970s.⁵

Afterwards, with the oil crisis of 1973, Japan began to acknowledge the need to diversify and nurture relations with other partners in Africa in order to secure a steady supply of the natural resources it needed. In other words, "pragmatism rather than ideology prevailed in the behaviour, attitudes, and actions of Japan vis-à-vis the oil crisis and [the] search for alternative solutions".⁶ Moreover, disapproval and public outcry over Japan's pro-Pretoria policy reached new heights when Japan's candidacy for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council in 1978 was defeated precisely because of the support of Black Africa to other contenders.⁷ Subsequently, Japan launched an official drive to expand and improve ties in the region, as exemplified by the first ever visit of a Japanese high-official, Foreign Minister Toshio Kimura, in 1974 to Ghana, Zaire, Tanzania and Egypt, followed by Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao's visit to Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Tanzania and

Kenya in 1979, and by Foreign Minister Abe Shintaro, who travelled to Zambia, Ethiopia and again Egypt in 1984. In parallel, Japan would also eventually impose sanctions on Ian Smith's Rhodesia and, to a lesser degree, on South Africa – even though by 1982 Japan still remained South Africa's largest trading partner.

It is also interesting to note how Japan carefully navigated the multiple internal conflicts and unrest that spread though Africa around this time. As Takehiko Ochiai mentions, at least until the 1990s, “partly because Japan does not have any vital national interests in Africa, and partly because Japan cannot use military means in international relations, Tokyo did not take up any active measures toward conflict prevention and resolution in Africa”.⁸ Still, this pattern would later change when Japan began feeling the need to assume greater security responsibilities before an increasingly demanding international community. As such, Japan symbolically sent 53 men from its Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) in April 1993 and another contingent of 400 to Rwanda in September 1994.⁹

The most visible vector of Japan's engagement in Africa in recent decades, however, has undoubtedly resided in its Official Development Aid (ODA) disbursements.¹⁰ At first, Japanese aid diplomacy focused primarily on Southeast Asia, keeping in line with the rationale of making amends with the region on one hand, and promoting Japanese exports to nearby countries on the other.¹¹ ‘On-request basis’ aid and ‘self-help’ were concepts then formulated as integral components of this approach and helped Japan to rise among the developed world aid framework and to achieve significant results within its immediate neighbourhood. The 1970s oil crisis later helped to redirect Japan's aid focus toward the African continent. Yet, “although Japan embarked on aid to Africa primarily motivated by long-term economic security considerations, diplomatic priority was given to countries possessing rich natural resources, economic growth potential or influential political power”.¹²

Whatever the motivation, Japan's ODA to Africa increased from US\$5 million in 1972 to US\$268.2 million in 1982, and further expanded to US\$909.7 million in 1991. Furthermore, Africa's share in Japan's bilateral ODA also sharply increased from 1.1% in 1972 to 18.9% in 1980.¹³ By 1989 Japan had also become the number one donor country in terms of the absolute amount of ODA and from 1991 to 2000, Japan consecutively remained unchallenged as the world's number one donor among the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries.

The end of the Cold War would then bring new challenges along with a generalized international ‘aid fatigue’ that naturally reflected upon flows disbursed to Africa. Sustained by clear guidelines laid down by its ODA Charter approved in 1992,¹⁴ Japan thus sought to present itself as the “unsung hero of post-Cold War efforts to find solutions to Africa's economic malaise”.¹⁵ To that end, the first TICAD – co-organized by Japan, the UN and the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA) – was held in 1993, with the aim of setting the tone for a new phase of Japanese engagement with the continent's fate while promoting consensus-building and local ownership of a hopefully revitalized

aid process. The subsequent gatherings (TICAD II and III in 1998 and 2003, respectively) sought to build upon these laudable aspirations and, as such, they aimed to develop a common framework for the effective and concrete disbursement of aid throughout Africa.¹⁶ However, criticism also surged regarding what appeared to be an elaborated PR offensive that gathered previous Japanese initiatives towards Africa and did not add any new variables to the existing aid equation.

Table 1 – Japan’s total ODA disbursements and amounts assigned to Africa 1991-2009

	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009
Total amount	10 952.24	13 238.53	9 358	13 507.96	8 879.66	11 135.74	9 456.93
Africa	1 638.52	1 406.81	965.94	1 226.12	703.63	2 595.83	1 498.65

Source: OECD DAC / Net disbursement / USD million.

Still, the TICAD process undoubtedly served the purpose of realigning Japan with Africa. A good example lies with the visit by Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro, who travelled to South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria in 2001 – the first ever by a Japanese Prime Minister to Africa. Nevertheless, aware that it was losing ground and influence in the continent – especially when confronted with China’s overwhelming rise in the continent¹⁷ – with TICAD IV in 2008, Japan sought to renew its vows with Africa. Consequently, 40 African Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Prime Ministers travelled to Yokohama to hear Japan announce an overall reshuffle of the country’s aid paradigm, combined with a new set of significant promises: to double Japan’s ODA to Africa by 2012 to a total of US\$1.8 billion (excluding debt relief); increase grant assistance to US\$1.4 billion by 2012; create a US\$2.5 billion fund to help Japanese firms invest more in Africa and achieve the target of doubling Japanese private-sector direct investment to the continent to US\$3.4 billion by 2012. Boosting economic growth, achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and consolidating peace and good governance while addressing environmental issues and climate change, were cornerstones of the proposed agenda for the next five years, formalized shortly thereafter at the G8 Summit in Hokkaido.

In 2009, Africa thus accounted for US\$1403.22 million of Japan’s total ODA, an increase of 0.5% compared to the previous year, even though the country’s net disbursements totaled US\$9468.61 million – a 1.4% decrease from the previous year – and only ranked fifth in the world.¹⁸

Japan and Lusophone Africa

With the context of Japan’s approach towards Africa in the last decades duly established, one can now focus on addressing individually the main concern of this article, the Lusophone African countries.

Table 2 - Amount of Japanese ODA disbursed to African Lusophone countries 2000-2009

	Angola	Mozambique	Cape Verde	São Tomé and Príncipe	Guinea-Bissau
2000	21.47	19.95	10.74	1.23	---
2001	20.71	33.52	3.43	1.05	0.18
2002	27.21	69.66	6.31	1.29	0.12
2003	33.11	35.27	11.77	1.37	0.06
2004	25.47	19.41	3.94	1.46	0.01
2005	26.3	14.77	2.83	1.53	0.03
2006	12.41	106.83	2.53	0.03	0.04
2007	23.1	27.77	1.89	3.11	1.08
2008	17.75	23.72	5.29	7.22	5.83
2009	6.76	60.67	17.87	0.42	9.43
Total	211.28	411.57	66.6	18.71	16.78

Source: OECD DAC / Net disbursement / USD million.

Angola

Currently, among the Lusophone African countries, Angola is clearly the most coveted partner for any outside power with increased aspirations in Africa. Due to its vast natural resources, present generalized stability, and even to the business prospects that the ongoing national reconstruction process entails, Angola is growingly seen as an ideal destination for increased investment and focus.

However, bilateral ties with Japan have not taken off until quite recently. Although Japan promptly recognized Angola's independence and established official diplomatic relations in September 1976, relations were largely kept at bay due to Angola's long-lasting civil war. For its part, Angola also only acknowledged Japan's potential in a later phase, with the opening of an Embassy in Tokyo in November of 2000. President José Eduardo dos Santos himself paid an official visit to Japan in January of 2001, meeting with Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and seeking greater aid for his embattled country.¹⁹ Furthermore, in the aftermath of the ceasefire agreement between UNITA and the MPLA, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi also visited Luanda and Huambo in August 2002, seeking to express her country's support for the still fragile peace and pledge assistance for the removal of landmines spread throughout Angola.²⁰

In this context, it was therefore only natural that ODA took center stage in both countries' dealings as it coincided not only with Angola's national reconstruction needs but also with Japan's own self-professed TICAD *élan*, at the time in full-throttle. As shown in Table 2, Japan delivered on its previous promises of support and, immediately after the end of the civil war in 2003, disbursed its largest amount of aid ever, totaling US\$33.1 million, matched in the following year by US\$25.47 million and in 2005 by another US\$26.3 million. What's more, both in 2003 and 2005, Japan ranked as the OECD's second highest donor to Angola. Health, education, food aid and human security projects soon became

the designated targeted areas. However, despite this impressive jump start, recent years have come to show an inverted trend, hitting an all-time low of only US\$6.76 million in 2009, even though new aid announcements such as the US\$4.5 million to eradicate polio under UNICEF supervision²¹ or the US\$1.1 million for demining activities²² appear to contradict such a downsizing tendency.

Japan has also engaged with Angola in the trade arena, where a similar trend of climbing and then falling values has been exhibited. According to Angola's National Bank figures, Japan's sales to the country climbed first from US\$161.47 million in 2005 to US\$217.70 million in 2006 and then to US\$393.60 million in 2007, eventually reaching US\$601.15 million in 2008. Examining local customs figures, in 2009 Japan accounted for 4% of all Angola's imports, worth a total of US\$781 million, while in 2010 that number decreased to US\$509 million and a corresponding share of 2.8%.²³ As for Angolan exports it is no surprise that local oil weighs heavily in such calculations: its sale to Japan jumped from US\$63.2 million in 2005 to a whopping US\$665 million in 2006. However, since then, these numbers have also steeply declined until in 2009 they were reduced to US\$120.1 million – not even enough to cut Japan into Angola's top twenty export destinations in that year.²⁴ For its part, Japanese data regarding trade with Angola demonstrates a similar pattern.²⁵ Indeed, Japanese imports reached an all-time high of ¥81 billion in 2006, but they ended up trimmed by about 90% to a significantly lower ¥7.8 billion in 2010. Similarly, although Japan sold an impressive ¥32 billion in goods to Angola in 2008, two years later only ¥11 billion were exchanged. Despite some timely spikes, bilateral trade has evidently seen better days. Recent reports, however, seem to indicate a new Japanese willingness to increase its presence in Angola. For example, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is allegedly preparing to fund the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Cutato River in Angola's Bie province, at a total cost of US\$50 million,²⁶ while the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) is gearing up to finance a fertilizer factory project worth US\$2 billion in Soyo.²⁷ Moreover, on the heels of the visit of JBIC director Fumio Hoshi to Angola in August 2010, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Osamu Fugimura and Vice-Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry Chiaki Takahashi led a delegation of over 50 Japanese businessmen to Luanda – including, among others, representatives from Toyota, Sumitomo Corporation, Mitsubishi, Toyo Engineering Corporation, Sojitz Corporation, Marubeni Corporation and Itochu Corporation – with the aim of expanding private investment on the ground.²⁸ As a follow-up, in February 2011, Angolan Foreign Minister George Chicoti²⁹ then travelled to Japan where, together with his counterpart Seiji Maehara, he signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on political consultations which foresees the possibility of a joint Bilateral Commission – Japan's first ever with an African country. Likewise, Chicoti and Maehara took the opportunity to announce an agreement regarding the framework for a future Japan-Angola investment treaty, also a novelty for Japan in sub-Saharan Africa. The rationale behind these increased dealings is no secret: at the end of the day, "Angola has the potential to become Japan's major supplier of resources and an export destination of

Japanese infrastructure systems and plants”³⁰ and, as such, it requires a growing official focus in the improvement of bilateral relations.

Mozambique

Mozambique has also begun to attract more and more Japanese attention. With diplomatic relations established in January 1977, visits by official dignitaries were initially scarce at best, again reflecting the internal contingencies on the ground. In the case of Mozambique’s own civil war, however, Japan strikingly opted for a different course of action compared with Angola, choosing instead to engage and, as mentioned above, contribute with SDF manpower to the ONUMOZ mission in the country. In that sense, this mission ended up providing Japan with added arguments not only for its case as an increasingly responsible international actor but also as a deeply committed partner to Africa’s peace and stability, thus seeking to contradict the entrenched negative image of its “chequebook diplomacy”.³¹

Mozambique, though, has never figured high among Japanese high officials’ visits, even after Japan finally established an Embassy in Maputo in 2000. The same could not be said of Mozambican authorities, who have steadily included Japan among their priorities in the 21st century,³² as exemplified by President Armando Guebuza’s four-day visit in January 2007, when he met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,³³ and later on when he led his country’s delegation to TICAD IV in 2008 in Yokohama.

Still, as far as ODA goes, Mozambique can hardly complain. As demonstrated by Table 2, the country has received the largest amounts of Japanese aid among all Lusophone African countries in the past decade, with the exception of 2000, 2004 and 2005. In 2006, it even reached an all-time high of US\$106.83 million in ODA – placing Japan as the OECD’s second largest donor to the country – although such flows were later reduced to a mere US\$23.72 million in 2008. Nevertheless, in the following year these numbers climbed again to US\$60.67 million, thus standing once more as the highest among the other Lusophone countries. By all accounts, these cooperative endeavors have been met with considerable success. A 2009 external evaluation of Japan’s ODA to Mozambique stated as much and even went as far as to suggest positioning “Mozambique as a model for the TICAD process from a diplomatic perspective” given the overall accomplishment of the proposed objectives.³⁴

Food aid, in particular, has been prominent, largely due to local natural disasters that have impacted national food production in Mozambique. Between 1999 and 2006, Mozambique was granted over 78.000 tonnes of rice and 29.658 tonnes of wheat, while Japan announced in January 2011 the donation of another 17.000 tonnes of rice worth US\$10 million.³⁵ Moreover, among several social initiatives, other recent announcements include a US\$60 million loan to fund the repairing of the Nampula-Cuamba road,³⁶ a widely-touted US\$7.3 million investment in a joint Brazilian-Japanese agriculture development project³⁷ and a further US\$5 million for a five-year project to produce biofuel in Mozambique.³⁸

Mozambique's own economic potential is also not exempt from Japanese interest. Granted, Japan still ranks low in Mozambique's trade balance: according to the country's National Statistic Institute, as of 2009, the Asian country did not even account for more than 0.2% of total exports by Mozambique. However, it is worthy point out that, in the same period, Japan also held the sixth position as an importing partner, with US\$141.572 million in sales amounting to 3.8% of the African country's total imports – one position up from the previous year, when Japan accounted for 3.2% and US\$127.830 million.³⁹

If we look at disaggregated Japanese figures, similar conclusions are also evident. Although Japan kept its purchases of Mozambican goods at low levels throughout the years – with 2010 even reaching a decade-low of ¥945 million – the same cannot be said of its exports to the country which maintained a steady committed flow that eventually hit ¥8 billion in 2010 alone – the highest since 2002, when Japan's exports amounted to ¥10 billion.

Moreover, these exchanges have also been complemented by the manifested interest of some Japanese companies trying to enter into the Mozambican market. Japanese mega-conglomerate Mitsubishi Corporation is already present on the ground as a significant stakeholder of Mozal – the largest aluminum producer in Mozambique and the second-largest in Africa – as well as Maruha Corporation, which controls local fishing company Efripel. Trading house Mitsui & Co, with a 20% stake in the Rovuma Offshore Area natural gas field, and Nippon Steel, with a 23.3% interest in the Revuboe coal mines, are also other noteworthy examples. Likewise, Sojitz Corporation has announced similar investment plans for the local wood processing industry.⁴⁰ Probably keen on strengthening and multiplying these ties, in early 2010 a trade mission composed by 45 businessmen and headed by the director of the Africa Division of the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry, Asako Kokai travelled through the country, eyeing possible investment opportunities, including in the Nacala Development Corridor.⁴¹

Cape Verde

With both Angola and Mozambique receiving the greatest focus of Japanese authorities, it is only natural that the remaining smaller and more insular Lusophone countries are not granted as much effort and attention, though they still continuously seek to bring Japan into their immediate orbits of significant foreign partners.

Cape Verde provides a good example of the dynamic between Japan and the smaller Lusophone African nations. With formal relations established since July 1975, the archipelago has consistently tried to attract a steady flow of Japanese aid. That much explains the attendance of President Pedro Pires himself at TICAD IV in 2008, for example. For the most part, it is safe to say that Cape Verde has achieved its objectives with rather positive results. As demonstrated by Table 2, although it struggled to top the US\$11.77 million in 2003, Japan's ODA to Cape Verde reached a five-year peak in 2008 with another US\$5.29 million – disbursed through various local projects, like water prospecting and treatment – followed by a steep raise to US\$17.87 million in 2009. Given Cape Verde's own internal shortcomings, food aid takes, once

again, priority in this process, as reflected by the announcement of another US\$2.9 million donation in February 2011 – which brings the sum of aid to almost US\$50 million provided since 1980.⁴² Also worth mentioning is the US\$3.4 million emergency assistance granted to the island of São Nicolau after the heavy rains of 2009,⁴³ alongside significant investments in fishing installations throughout the islands.

Still, as one would expect, such ODA efforts did not lead to meaningful bilateral trade ties. Since 2000, imports from Japan have consistently held a negligible place in Cape Verde's trade balance, eventually reaching a decade low of 2.3% in 2010. Likewise, Cape Verde's only significantly profitable year in terms of exporting to Japan came in 2007, when it accounted for 7.3% of the total foreign sales.⁴⁴ From Japan's perspective, flows have also been tepid at best. While in 2006 and 2008, Japan exported ¥1 billion and ¥1.5 billion, respectively, in goods to Cape Verde, the following years witnessed a significant downturn that end up not surpassing the ¥677 million threshold. Despite the aforementioned exceptional year in 2007, 2010 again brought negligible flows totaling only ¥381 thousand in imports from Cape Verde.

These meager numbers, however, in no way affected Japan's stature in the small archipelago. In fact, recognizing the important role that Japan might play in its future economic growth and development, Cape Verde's own National Security and Defense Strategic Concept (NSDSC) already classifies Japan – along with China – as an “area of strategic interest”, given its professed commitment to the country's development and growth dynamics.⁴⁵ During the first meeting ever to review their bilateral cooperation on March 11th 2011, Cape Verde also disclosed its official request for Japan to integrate in the near future the country's Budget Support Group (BSG).⁴⁶ This move could eventually trigger further direct and/or sectoral aid to Cape Verde and thus facilitate the process of transitioning from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to one of the Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories (MICT) alongside the inherent aid refocus by international donors, Japan included.

São Tomé and Príncipe

São Tomé and Príncipe's situation is slightly different. Much like Cape Verde, the country's independence was recognized by Japan in July 1975 and afterwards political contacts remained at a minimum level, with the notable exception of Foreign Minister Ovídio Pequeno, who represented the country at TICAD IV.⁴⁷ However, the aid pattern evolved to a much lesser degree in comparison with Cape Verde, which is particularly demonstrated by the last decade's ODA data. Indeed, as shown in Table 2, from 2000 to 2006, Japan's ODA values only reached a little more than US\$1.5 million and in 2006 it even plummeted to the strikingly low amount of US\$3 thousand. Those numbers then rose to an all-time high of US\$7.22 million in 2008, which allowed Japan to rank as the OECD's second biggest donor to São Tomé and Príncipe, just behind Portugal, but again declined to US\$42 thousand in the following year. One possible reason for these varying numbers in recent years may reside in Japan's occasional reduced trust in local authorities and in their ability to effectively and

accountably make use of international aid in a timely manner. The best example occurred in 2004 when a corruption scandal worth an estimated US\$4 million was revealed in São Tomé's Aid Management Cabinet, at the time in charge of the money obtained with the sale of rice previously donated by Japan.⁴⁸ As a consequence, Japan suspended its food aid assistance to the archipelago for almost four years, opting instead to channel its efforts through international multilateral institutions on the ground, like the UNDP. However, in 2008 Japan decided that improvements had been achieved in the oversight capabilities of São Tomé and Príncipe's state structures and therefore resumed its food deliveries.⁴⁹ Since then, Japan announced in November 2010 the added delivery of 3.320 tonnes of rice worth US\$2.2 million,⁵⁰ after the donation of another extra 4.000 tonnes worth US\$4.6 million in the previous year.⁵¹ Furthermore, in 2010, after mutual consultations, Japan also gave its approval for the use of nearly US\$715 million from the proceeds earned with the sale of Japanese-donated rice to help support the legislative elections of that same year.⁵² Similar assistance also took place for the presidential ballot in August 2011.⁵³ In the midst of all this, bilateral trade is barely worth mentioning, as it does not even account for meaningful amounts. Indeed, Japan rarely, if ever, gets anywhere near São Tomé and Príncipe's main exporting partners. However, its importing numbers do show some progress: in 2010, according to the country's Central Bank, São Tomé and Príncipe had bought in around US\$1.4 billion in goods from Japan. More importantly, such figures had already been surpassed by mid-2011. Still, this rising trend is apparently contradicted by Japan's own numbers regarding its exports to the country. Still, this rising trend is apparently contradicted by Japan's own numbers regarding its exports to the country: they appeared to have peaked in 2008 with ¥942 million but since then eventually declined until reaching only ¥179 million in 2010.

Guinea-Bissau

Finally, Guinea-Bissau is undoubtedly at the bottom of Japan's Lusophone African relations list. Still, it is curious to note that Japan's recognition of Guinea-Bissau's independence in August 1974 – "in advance of other Western countries" – was seen as "a diplomatic coup designed to win support in Africa".⁵⁴ That early tie, though, never really translated into a sustained bilateral relationship, despite Prime Minister Caetano N'Tchama's visit to Japan in 2000 and President João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira's own attendance of TICAD IV in 2008.

The political instability and unrest that have been nearly constant in post-independence Guinea-Bissau are possible explanations for such detachment, as exemplified by the 2003 coup that led to a general suspension of all but some minor Japan's assistance programs – as had also occurred when the 1998 civil war erupted. Full economic cooperation thus only resumed in 2007, with the following year reaching US\$5.83 million and with 2009 marking a new high of Japanese ODA, totaling US\$9.43 million; unsurprisingly, these funds are mainly allocated to food aid projects.

On the other hand, given the international focus on the political and conflict developments in Guinea-Bissau, Japan has sought to coordinate its initiatives with other partners such as the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), through which Japan has, for example, channeled US\$2.9 million to fund Guinean school canteens.⁵⁵ Furthermore, nearly US\$2 million were also granted in March 2010, aimed for the purchase of first necessity equipments and the financing of local development projects.⁵⁶

Amidst all these developments, it is no wonder that bilateral trade remained frequently at bay: according to Japanese data, the Asian country only exported a mere ¥116 million to Guinea-Bissau in 2008, while its imports frequently came down to zero. However, it is important to mention that, according to Guinea-Bissau's National Statistic Institute, by 2009, Japan still accounted for 1.2% of the country's total imports, which could indicate a slight recovery trend.

Reassessing ties with Lusophone Africa

After a review of current ties between Japan and the African Lusophone countries, some considerations are inevitably in order. First and foremost, if one takes these particular countries as an example, in every major aid grant or loan given in the last decade, Japan has constantly reaffirmed its will to strengthen its cooperation under the aegis of 'TICAD IV'. Food aid for example, has become one instrument among many to support these nations as it allows a quick fix for some immediate and burgeoning social demands, with notorious political and goodwill gains.

However, it is also evident that the level of financial commitment in terms of ODA is painfully lower than the TICAD momentum initially led to believe. Indeed, for all the talk of increasing aid, the numbers allocated to this particular set of countries do not exactly demonstrate an overwhelming change in Japan's policy towards the continent. With the notable exception of Guinea-Bissau's unlawfulness and possibly São Tomé and Príncipe's previous worrying graft episodes, the remaining countries are consensually walking down a path of economic growth and social stability and as such, it would have been expected by now a greater engagement from Japan's end.

True, Japan's willingness to invest further is inherently dependent on propitious conditions in each of these countries. But there also appears to be a structural prudence in any disbursement growth, even in countries which could have been presented as potential 'role-models' for Japan's approach to Africa. From all the five cases analyzed, only Mozambique appears to be closing in on such a designation. However, even if such a supposedly 'rewarding' perspective were to be true, Japan's decade-long detachment regarding Cape Verde – internationally recognized for its good-governance credentials and democratic environment – stands out as difficult to explain. Even though aid numbers kept on climbing, they remained far lower than what would be expected and thus helped to sustain a continuing lack of Japanese interest in Cape Verdean developments. Given the self-evident logic in "the asymmetric nature of interdependence" between Japan and

Africa – “Japan wants Africa’s raw materials; Africa needs Japan’s market, economic aid, and investment”⁵⁷ – this does not exactly come as a surprise. Cape Verde is certainly no match for the bigger and more resource-rich African countries who continue to receive the bulk of Japan’s aid funding. Still, it is worth asking how such a trend is compatible and/or consistent with the values that TICAD embodies. A possibly new cut with such a pattern might thus lie in the announced political predisposition to bring Cape Verde and Japan closer in the near future.

Valuable lessons can also be drawn from previous cooperation projects on the ground. Indeed, insufficient coordination between donors is often the reason behind the failure of many international good intentions. Inversely, when every invested actor opts to join efforts, there is potential for greater efficiency in results and in the use of the resources allocated. As such, trilateral endeavors, like the one involving Brazil and Japan in Mozambique for example, should be seen as ideal platforms upon which to build. Joining forces with other Lusophone peers – like, for example, Portugal – or even with the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (*Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa*) own initiatives in several of these countries can then confer an added dose of credibility and leverage to Japan’s African approach, while multiplying the odds of success in a given local situation.

Finally, one possible alternative comes with the increase of private investment on the ground, which in turn could end up producing some much needed dividends for the respective local economies. With the notable exception of Mozambique, though, attractive countries with countless business opportunities like Angola are still not recipients of a consistent and coherent focus by Japan’s private sector, which undoubtedly undermines the latter’s goal of greater involvement of its national businesses in its African endeavors. If Japan is really keen on overcoming its traditionally cautious aid paradigm like it announced during TICAD IV, then it should try to further promote the end of preconceived notions around these countries and actively present them as ideal windows of opportunity for the expansion of Japanese economic interests in Africa. The latest developments regarding a possible investment treaty with Angola can therefore be clearly considered a good step forward from the previous official neglect in this area.

Conclusion

Amidst all the re-engagement rhetoric, it is unsurprising that many African nations, including Lusophone ones, end up feeling let down by the low intensity of Japan’s announced new commitments, as they clearly expected much more in terms of political focus, trade/investment growth and aid disbursement than what eventually came through. As Kweku Ampiah pointed out, “[p]erhaps [the] hopes were misconceived, for – despite the grand gestures and high-profile initiatives – TICAD has always been what Tokyo saw it as from the outset: a process and a developmental framework, not a pledging conference”.⁵⁸ One could then understand how different expectations came about. At the

end of the day, however, such a vague model is probably not what African leaders have in mind as they circle the world in search of new partners and for subsequent concrete flows of investment and support to their own economies.

China, for example, is becoming more and more of an indispensable aid and investing partner to Africa, pouring billions of dollars into local development projects and consolidating its preferential role on the continent,⁵⁹ as evidenced by its strong relationship with Angola, for instance. Although China's "resource" diplomacy is naturally not comparable to Japan's – who explicitly adheres to its own strict ODA charter and works closely with other international organizations – the simple possibility of China establishing a fruitful and enduring economic foothold in Africa, is probably enough to keep on fueling Japanese fears of losing influence on the continent for the time being.

As such, it is not too farfetched to assume that Japanese policymakers have already identified the perils of leaning only on a loose relationship with Africa. Bearing in mind the inescapable need to secure stable natural resources suppliers – a constant in the country's contemporary history – Japan is painfully aware that it needs to develop good relations with a multitude of African countries while promoting greater private bilateral investment. At the same time, keeping up the kind of international high profile that Japan claims to uphold, inherently implies the maintenance of visible aid disbursements on a general basis and, to that end, Africa is an unavoidable target for such efforts. Juggling this array of objectives, though, also requires an enduring and cohesive political will, supported by a focused and broad diplomatic action aimed at advancing the kind of initiatives and endeavors that can push these relations forward. On this particular front the odds are not so favorable, especially if we take into consideration that, since 2008, Japan has already witnessed six different Prime Ministers with the respective reshuffles in their cabinets and an inherent lack of policy direction and coordination, clearly manifested in the conduct of daily affairs.

Nevertheless, if one is to believe the latest assurances by Japanese officials, favorable prospects may well be in order as preparations for a new TICAD round grow near. For example, in early 2011, former Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara declared that "Japan intends to further strengthen its diplomacy toward Africa".⁶⁰ After, yet again, another governmental shake-up, his successor, Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba also appeared to follow the same line of thought when recognizing that "Japan and Africa are geographically far apart from each other, but (...) are linked through a bond of trust".⁶¹

It is not yet clear, however, if Japan has fully interiorized Africa in its own foreign policy. When it comes to the Lusophone African countries, the interest has remained tepid, at best, although with some visible promises of improvement. To put it simply, the opportunities in these states are nearly as great as the needs of the local populations. Japan should therefore position itself as an increasingly significant actor for such a set of countries – both on an aid and investing level – while elevating its profile in the remaining region. Granted, it could be said that "while Japanese can understand economic explanations with

no trouble, they still seem unable to feel any personal, visceral response” to developments on African soil.⁶² Ultimately, however, if Japan wants to deliver on its public commitments and posturing, it has to greatly step up its efforts towards the continent. A passive and careful approach of ODA disbursement has surely born some fruits in the past, while private investors prudently kept their distance from any opportunity on the ground. Still, as Africa’s abundant natural resources and robust economic growth attract more and more international suitors, Japan would do well to not be left behind.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Jun Morikawa, “The Myth and Reality of Japan’s Relations with Colonial Africa – 1885-1960” (*Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 1985), p. 40.
- 2 Four African nations officially declared war against Japan: the Union of South Africa on December 8, 1941, the Ethiopian government-in-exile on December 14, 1942, Liberia on January 27, 1944 and Egypt on February 26, 1945. All of these countries would later become signatory parts of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the rest of the international community.
- 3 For example, as evidence of Japan’s previous privileged dealings with South Africa, its first consulate in Africa was established in Cape Town on August 14, 1918.
- 4 See Jun Morikawa, *Japan and Africa: Big Business and Diplomacy* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997).
- 5 See Mary Custy and J. J. Van Wyk, “*Seikei bunri* and apartheid: an analysis of the Japanese-South African relationship 1985-1991” (*Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1994), pp. 64-79.
- 6 Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, *Japan-Africa Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 176.
- 7 In 1986, Black African countries also did not support another Japanese candidacy for an UN seat, but Japan would still manage to win it by only four votes. Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, p. 87
- 8 Takehiko Ochiai, “Beyond TICAD Diplomacy: Japan’s African Policy and African Initiatives in Conflict Response” (*Tokai University African Study Monograph*, Vol. 22, No. 1, May 2001), p. 39.
- 9 In light of Article 9 of the 1946 Constitution, Japan was bound to a strict pacifist view regarding international relations, including participation in international peacekeeping operations. As such, “excursions” like the ones in Mozambique or Rwanda were only possible after the approval by the Japanese Diet of the International Peace Cooperation Bill on June 1992. Even so, major public debate and controversy soon followed.
- 10 Japan’s aid modalities comprise both bilateral and multilateral assistance. The first can be divided into grants and government loans. Grants refer to assistance provided gratuitously to developing countries as “grant aid” or “technical cooperation.” Meanwhile, government loans consist of “loan aid (ODA loan)” that are premised on repayment by developing countries in the future. Multilateral assistance includes contributions to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), contributions and investments for the World Bank and so on.
- 11 Curiously, as Japan stepped up its aid efforts, it remained a major recipient of World Bank’s assistance loans from 1953 to 1966, receiving over US\$863 million during this period. The last repayment of these loans was only settled in 1990.
- 12 Makoto Sato, “An historical analysis of Japan’s aid policy in Africa”, in Howard Lehman (ed.), *Japan and Africa: Globalization and Foreign Aid in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 14.
- 13 Takehiko Ochiai, “Beyond TICAD Diplomacy”, p. 40.
- 14 The 1992 Charter stipulated, among other issues, the coexistence of environmental concerns with development efforts, the prohibition of aid being used for military purposes and the need to pay attention to the recipient country’s military expenditures as well as to local democratization processes and respect for human rights. It would be later reviewed in 2003 to encompass new concepts such as “human security” which then took frontal stage in Japan’s ODA strategy. See for example Sadako Odaka, “Human security: the centre of Japan’s aid agenda” (*This is Africa*, 1 December, 2008).
- 15 Kweku Ampiah, “Japan in Africa: a distant partnership” (*Open Democracy*, 6 June 2008).
- 16 For an evaluation of TICAD’s progress see, for example, Shinsuke Horiuchi, “TICAD after 10 Years: A Preliminary Assessment and Proposals for the Future” (*African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2005), pp. 465-483; and “Evaluation of Japanese Assistance to Africa through the TICAD Process” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 2008).
- 17 See Kweku Ampiah, “The Ideological, Political and Economic Imperatives in China and Japan’s Relations with Africa”, in Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu (eds.), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon? China and Africa* (Scottsville: University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2008), pp. 294-313.
- 18 However, in gross disbursements, Japan retained its second place among the remaining donors, as in the previous year. “Japan’s ODA White Paper 2010” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2009), pp. 38-39.
- 19 “The Visit to Japan of President José Eduardo dos Santos of the Republic of Angola (Overview and Evaluation)” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 5 February 2001).
- 20 “Visit to African countries by Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs (Ethiopia, Angola, and South Africa) (Outline and Evaluation)” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 6 September 2002).
- 21 “Governo japonês disponibiliza mais de quatro milhões USD para erradicação da pólio” (*Angola Press*, 25 January 2011).

- 22 "Japan Donates US\$1.1 Million for Demining Process" (*Angola Press*, 25 March 2010).
- 23 "Angolan Customs Annual Report 2010" (*Angolan Custom Services*, 2011).
- 24 Data provided by Angola's National Bank.
- 25 Data provided by Japan's Ministry of Finance. For the purposes of this paper, Japan's trade data will be used in its raw form, since varying exchange rates and discrepancies in official analytical methodologies between the different countries may compromise its objective value.
- 26 "Japan to fund construction of mini hydroelectric dam in Angola" (*Macauhub*, 1 February 2011).
- 27 "Japão pretende financiar projectos industriais em Angola" (*Angop*, 26 February 2011).
- 28 "Japão e Angola assinam acordos de comércio e investimento público-privado" (*Lusa*, 30 August 2010).
- 29 Throughout the past decade, Angolan officials have frequently stopped in Tokyo. Former Foreign Minister João Bernardo de Miranda travelled to Japan in 2001 and again in 2005 while then-Prime Minister Fernando Dias dos Santos travelled there both in 2005 and 2008, on this last occasion to represent Angola in TICAD IV.
- 30 "Agreement in principle on Japan-Angola Investment Treaty" (*Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry*, 21 February 2011).
- 31 For an analysis of Japan's engagement with ONUMOZ, see Makoto Sato, "Japanese Strategy in Africa: The Case of Mozambique" (*Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 21, No. 59, January 1994), pp. 105-110.
- 32 Prime Minister Pacoal Mocumbi visited Japan in 2001, immediately followed by Foreign Minister Leonardo Simão in the same year. Afterwards, former-President Joaquim Chissano – who had represented Mozambique in 1998 during TICAD II – paid a visit in 2003 and in 2006, Foreign Minister Alcinda Abreu also traveled to Tokyo.
- 33 "Moçambique: Presidente Guebuza de visita oficial ao Japão com acordos de cooperação em perspectiva" (*Angop*, 22 January 2007).
- 34 "Country Assistance Evaluation of Mozambique – Summary" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 2009), p. 11.
- 35 "Japan Donates 17,000 Tonnes of Rice" (*AIM*, 7 January 2011).
- 36 "Japan grants loan to Mozambique to repair Nampula-Cuamba road" (*Macauhub*, 11 March 2010).
- 37 Jun Hongo, "Japan, Brazil sow seeds of hope in Mozambique" (*Japan Times*, 22 August 2009).
- 38 "Japanese cooperation agency to fund biofuel production project in Mozambique" (*Macauhub*, 29 March, 2011).
- 39 "Statistical Yearbook 2009" and "Statistical Yearbook 2008" (*Mozambican National Statistics Institute*, 2010).
- 40 "Japanese company invests US\$10 million in wood processing factory in Mozambique" (*Macauhub*, 3 August 2011).
- 41 "Mozambique to welcome business mission from Japan" (*Macauhub*, 26 January 2010).
- 42 "Japan provides food aid to Cape Verde" (*Macauhub*, 1 February 2011).
- 43 "Japão atribui 5,2 milhões para Cabo Verde reconstruir a ilha de São Nicolau" (*Lusa*, 23 March 2010).
- 44 Shoes, hats, leather products and the like comprised the bulk of the sales. Data provided by Cape Verde's National Statistic Institute.
- 45 "Conceito Estratégico de Segurança e Defesa Nacional" (*Ministério da Defesa Nacional*, July 2009), p. 15.
- 46 This group is currently made up of five bilateral partners (Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg, Austria and the Netherlands) and three multilateral institutions (the EU, the World Bank and the African Development Bank). See "Governo pede entrada do Japão no Grupo de Ajuda Orçamental" (*Lusa*, 11 March 2011).
- 47 President Fradique de Menezes was due to attend TICAD IV in 2008, but had to pullout at the last minute because, back home, Prime Minister Trovoada had suffered a censure motion by the National Assembly, which prompted his resignation and Menezes immediate return to São Tomé. See "Na sequência da crise política o Presidente Fradique de Menezes interrompe digressão ao estrangeiro" (*STP Press*, 21 May 2008).
- 48 Several other embezzlements of foreign aid later emerged. See "Ajuda estrangeira a São Tomé e Príncipe na origem de escândalos por desvios" (*Lusa*, 2 October 2009).
- 49 "Japão retoma ajuda alimentar à favor do povo de São Tomé e Príncipe" (*Téla Nón*, 11 August 2008).
- 50 "Japão oferece 3300 toneladas de arroz a São Tomé e Príncipe" (*Lusa*, 24 November 2010).
- 51 "Japão oferece quatro mil toneladas de arroz a São Tomé e Príncipe" (*A Semana*, 19 September 2009).
- 52 "Governo indicou financiamento das eleições legislativas como sendo o projecto prioritário na utilização dos fundos de contra-partida do Japão" (*Téla Nón*, 19 February 2010).
- 53 "Japão envia missão ao arquipélago para apoiar presidenciais" (*Lusa*, 18 April 2011).
- 54 See Kusuhara Akira, "The Attitude of the Japanese Government on the Recognition of Guinea Bissau" (*Africa: News and Reports*, No. 17, February 1974), cited in Morikawa, *Japan and Africa*, p. 82
- 55 "Japão dá 2,23 milhões de euros à Guiné-Bissau para programa de cantinas escolares" (*Lusa*, 15 September 2010).
- 56 "Japão dá apoio de 1,5 milhões de euros à Guiné-Bissau" (*Oje*, 9 March 2010).
- 57 Seifudein Adem, "Africa in Japanese Diplomatic Thought: An African Perspective" (*Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5, May 2010), p. 885.
- 58 Kweku Ampiah, "Japan in Africa: a distant partnership" (*Open Democracy*, 6 June 2008).
- 59 See Deborah Brautigam, "Africa's Eastern Promise" (*Foreign Affairs*, 5 January 2010).
- 60 "Japan vows to strengthen ties with Africa through aid, investment" (*Japan Today*, 13 January 2011).
- 61 Koichiro Gemba, "Speech by H.E.Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan at the Africa Reception at the 66th U.N. General Assembly" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 23 September 2011).
- 62 Ogura Kazuo, "A New Outlook on Africa: Reconsidering Japan's Foreign Policy" (*Gaiko Forum*, 2003), pp. 57-64.



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