

**Third Regional Dialogue on WTO Accession**  
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The 33<sup>rd</sup> African Union General Assembly has just concluded. Regional integration and the Continental FTA (AfCFTA) were some of the main subjects discussed. The new Secretary General of the AfCFTA was selected and the agreement is supposed to become operational this year starting on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July.

On behalf of Government of Japan, I would like to congratulate the AU and its members for their efforts. We hope regional integration will be accelerated and economic growth and development will accompany it.

Japan firmly believes in the role of a free and open trading system and WTO accession in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. That is why Japan has long provided assistance supporting the promotion of trade in various forms at different stages of accession. Today, I would like to share some Japanese initiatives that might be useful for countries to know about while moving forward towards WTO accession.

The benefits of WTO accession are commonly known especially among the community of the experienced negotiators. The accession process provides opportunities to reaffirm respective national strategies and reform economic and trade policies in line with the WTO agreement that covers 98% of current global trade. Such reforms would improve transparency and predictability for business, which in turn creates an important basis for trade and inward investment, and eventually economic growth. The growth and jobs created through these processes also serve as crucial elements for creating and maintaining lasting peace. A proactive accession process also sends a positive message to the international community as to the importance and relevance of the free and open multilateral trading system at this critical juncture.

Japan knows the benefits of being integrated into the global trading system due to its very own experience. Japan has achieved remarkable economic growth and improvement in people's quality of life under the free trade system. It was in 1955, 10 years after the end of the Second World War, when Japan joined the GATT, and 13 years after that when Japan became the second largest economy in the world. We can never stress too much the importance of trade for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth.

Based on the skills and knowledge gained from its own experience, Japan is fully committed to maintaining and strengthening the multilateral trading system, including through direct

support for WTO accession and for promoting trade.

I would like to share three brief examples of Japanese assistance focused on WTO accession.

First, Japan has provided technical assistance to reform the legal system of Vietnam, as support for its transition to a market economy and eventual WTO accession. Beginning in 1996, we provided technical training and dispatched experts in the areas of competitive law, tax and customs, and intellectual property rights, and Vietnam successfully acceded to the WTO in 2006.

Another example is the assistance we have provided through international organizations. Let me provide an example of Japanese assistance to an African country. For the last three years, since the resumption of the accession process in Sudan, Japan has been providing technical assistance worth a total of 1 million USD, through the International Trade Center (ITC), to develop the necessary documents and legislation for Sudanese accession to the WTO.

Serving as Chair of the working party for accession at the WTO is also an important part of Japan's contribution to the accession process. In addition to currently acting as Chair of the working party for Sudanese accession, Japan chaired the working party for Samoa's accession for twelve years, which contributed to Samoa's accession to the WTO in 2011.

Trade-related assistance is equally as important as assistance directly involved in the accession.

As one of the leading donors in Aid for Trade, Japan has provided a wide-range of support for developing countries to enable them to gain better access to international trade. Among others, I would like to introduce three initiatives that I believe contribute to promoting inclusiveness and sustainable impacts in the post-accession phase.

First is developing quality infrastructure. Specifically, in close collaboration with the AU-led PIDA, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, we support the development of economic corridors in Africa to enhance connectivity between landlocked countries and coastal countries by developing master plans and investing in infrastructure projects in East and West Africa. We are also working closely with the AUDA-NEPAD in this context too.

Second is trade facilitation. One example of this is improving the efficiency of administrative procedures in border areas as a key means of promoting economic activities at a regional scale. Japan has supported the introduction by African countries of the "One Stop Border

Post” system, which allows persons and goods to stop only once for CIQ, considerably reducing the related time and cost burden.

Last is human resource development in both the public and private sectors. This is a crucial focus, considering that it is people who enable positive changes in the business environment, and sustain them over the long term. This has always been one of Japan’s strengths as we have been able to contribute to human resource development through sharing our knowledge of governance and business in a number of African countries. In fact, at the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 7) last year, Japan committed to developing 3,000 industrial human resources over the next six years to promote business between Africa and Japan under the African Business Education Initiative, also called the ABE Initiative.

If I may add one more important element, that is empowerment of women and gender equality, which is also one of the focuses of the AU agenda. Japan is supporting female empowerment in the context of trade by helping women entrepreneurs, including through the ITC.

In these ways, Japan has acquired rich experiences and knowledge in trade and accession related assistance that would be helpful to acceding governments in Africa.

And without a doubt, these types of initiatives will contribute to supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA.

As we know, when we talk about the Continental FTA, the emphasis is put on the necessity and importance of enhancing intra-African Trade. But at the same time, I sincerely hope that this does not make Africa a fortress. Rather, this is a good opportunity to enlarge trade and investment between African countries and African partners, as well as to establish a fair and equitable global value chain within Africa and with partners.