

Japan's Developmental Directives for Africa: Principle and Partnership

Scarlett Cornelissen¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Political Science, Stellenbosch, South Africa

sc3@sun.ac.za

Japan's economic and aid relationship with the African continent has been highly variable over the past two decades, shaped in the main by changing foreign policy objectives and internal political conditions on the part of Japan, and changing reorientations and expressions of agency in African diplomacy. In recent years the emergence of new players from Asia in Africa's economy and politics (most notably the People's Republic of China) has largely overshadowed the role that Japan has played on the continent; this eclipse of Japan reinforced by the country's relative decline as a major aid power.

Yet Japan is still an important partner for the continent, being the source of a not insignificant volume of development assistance, and for some African countries, of investments in key sectors. In the past the country has also used its status as a member of the Group of Eight (G8) to effective diplomatic and strategic use in terms of its relations with the African continent. It was on the invitation of Japan, as host of a G8 Summit, for instance, that the protagonists of the New Economic Partnership for Africa (Nepad) first found a multilateral forum for the international launch of the Nepad idea. Following and sometimes setting the example for Western G8 members, Japanese leaders also tended to use the G8 setting for pronouncements about Africa's plight and for pledges of aid doubling.

Although the reality has been somewhat different, such pronouncements and many of the diplomatic actions that have flowed out of the G8 Summits have had important ramifications for Japan-Africa relations. By adopting certain rhetorical stances on the 'cause' of Africa, moreover, Japan has often found ways to express its (now possibly dwindling) middlepowership.

This paper reflects on the past patterns and contemporary dynamics of Japan's relationship with the African continent. It considers some of the substantive underpinnings of this relationship and the way in which it relates to key political processes underway both in Japan and on the African continent. The focus falls on Japan's bilateral and multilateral engagements with the continent, the significance of the TICAD (Tokyo international Conference on African Development) process, and the way in which the rise of the new powers is helping to reshape Japan's ties with Africa.