



A four-year JICA project to help schoolchildren in the Burkina Faso capital of Ouagadougou

EDUCATING AFRICA'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN

The primary school children were eager to impress. Crowded around tiny wooden tables, some 60 youngsters scribbled on tiny black slates and noisily answered questions on basic mathematics as their stern teacher rapped the class to order with her wooden baton.

Japanese visitors to the Gounghin Nord primary school in the Burkina Faso capital of Ouagadougou watched the proceedings closely.

JICA is closely involved in helping to raise the standard of education throughout Africa, for both teachers and students, at all levels from primary to university and adult classes.

Since early in the new millennium, starting in

the West African nation of Niger, the development agency has undertaken projects in some of the poorest and least educated countries in the world.

A key component of such efforts is the establishment of so-called school management committees, similar to parent-teacher associations in some Western countries.

An Unqualified Success

The recent visit to the Gounghin Nord primary school was part of a four-year project launched in 2009.

Since then, according to project formulation advisor Tomoko Ebihara, a singular success has been the establishment of management committees in some 1,400 schools in three regions.

Generally the committees consist of teachers and school administrators, parents, local authorities and, where applicable, a pupils' representative. An official of the local authority meeting with the Japanese experts recently said the management committee had been an unqualified success.

"Parents never really cared before what happened at school," he said. "Now they have become deeply involved. And this has created a much better and closer community spirit. And because the parents care, the children take more interest in their lessons as well." Teachers point to specific progress. In 2006, the pass rate among more than 400 children was 67%. In 2010, the pass rate reached the magical 100%.

For any country, educating the next generation is a crucial part of building toward the future. JICA and its volunteers will continue to play their part in building a brighter future for Burkina Faso and other countries in Africa.

Japanese experts and teachers discuss a four-year JICA project to help raise the standard of education in the West African nation of Burkina Faso.



ETHIOPIA: AN INITIATIVE TO INTRODUCE THE KAIZEN BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

Ethiopia is one of the star performers in a newly burgeoning Africa, having registered double-digit growth for the past eight years. The current five-year plan aims to double the gross domestic product between fiscal 2010–11 and 2014–15. But several issues need to be addressed before Ethiopia can achieve further growth in exports and investment. Private-sector development remains sluggish, and low levels of quality and productivity remain a problem.

It was the late prime minister Meles Zenawi who had the idea of adopting *kaizen*, a Japanese business philosophy meaning "continuous improvement" that promotes quality and productivity improvement as well as human resource development. In response to a request from the prime minister, JICA launched a technical assistance project to introduce the *kaizen* concept to Ethiopia in 2009.

In November 2011, the second phase of the project began, and work is currently underway to build a framework for spreading the concept nationwide. The main aim of this second phase, which will run for three years through October 2014, is to help build a more vigorous private sector.

A Government Agency to Promote Kaizen

Efforts to promote *kaizen* in Ethiopia received a major boost in 2011, when the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute (EKI) was established under the supervision of the Ministry of Industry. Having been successfully applied in many countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, *kaizen* is no longer just a Japanese concept. Even so, Ethiopia is probably the first country in the world to name a government agency specifically for the concept. The establishment of the new agency reflects the strong example shown by Prime Minister Meles, who was one of the most influential opinion-leaders in Africa.

The absence of abundant resources makes incremental improvements in quality and productivity indispensable if companies are to develop. Small improvements can go a long way to achieving larger goals. *Kaizen* is both a tool and a philosophy to make this happen.

"*Kaizen* is not about trying to bring about innovation overnight," notes Toru Homma, a JICA senior advisor who has been involved in Ethiopian industrial development for many years. "The important thing is to make small but steady improvements over time." Homma was one of the organizers of the Africa Kaizen Event held in March to coincide with the ministerial meeting to prepare for TICAD V in Addis Ababa. "You need the right sort of framework so that improvements can take

place spontaneously from the bottom up. Officials and business leaders have been very responsive to the idea that *kaizen* can be an effective tool in turning workers' and managers' mindsets around. The concept was one that Prime Minister Meles was very interested in on a personal level."

Lowering Costs and Defect Rate

The EKI spearheaded a *kaizen* project whose first phase involved 30 companies, applying the basic principles of "small improvements," "bottom-up," "teamwork," and "continuity," implementing the "5S" workplace improvement practices (*seiri* = organization, *seiton* = neatness, *seiso* = cleaning, *seiketsu* = standardization, and *shitsuke* = self-discipline), and using tools to eliminate waste and improve workflow. The project had an immediate impact, resulting in average savings equivalent to \$29,000 per company and a dramatic reduction in the number of defective products.

The Africa Kaizen Event seminar in March attracted some 160 participants from countries throughout Africa, Homma notes. Panel presentations were held at the African Union headquarters, where the TICAD ministerial preparatory meeting was held, piquing the interest of many African officials. Representatives from several countries expressed a desire to emulate Ethiopia's success, suggesting that *kaizen* practices could be highly effective in helping not only Asian but also African countries to improve their productivity.



A JICA expert explains the *kaizen* concept to workers at a furniture factory. (Photo by Kenshiro Imamura)

Kaizen principles can boost productivity and improve workers' morale. (Photo by Kenshiro Imamura)

