

A Transition to Innovation will Transform Africa

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For Africa to bridge the development gap it has to move away from being a consumer of products, services, and ideas of the developed world, and fully embrace innovation in all sectors, especially in science, technology, social affairs, politics and economy. The countries of East Asia that rapidly grew their economies and successfully bridged the development gap with Western countries were able to do so because of innovation in governance, management, production processes and service delivery. That is the journey that Africa has embarked on, and thanks to the emergence of new technologies of information and communication, it is travelling at a much greater speed than these Asian tigers.

African countries, including my own Rwanda, are leaping the development ladder, and the examples highlighted in this issue are just a small selection of the exciting developments taking place. Rwanda consciously made the choice to drive its development through knowledge and technology, including massively investing in modern IT infrastructure such as dense fiber optic and 4G network deployment throughout the country. Conscious of the fact that innovation is driven by well-trained people, Rwanda has created and attracted top training institutions in science, technology and management from around the world, and they are setting the foundation of knowledge for future success. Rwanda has also worked with its development partners, especially JICA, to create innovation/incubation hubs, and these will serve as launch pads for stimulating and commercializing innovations.

JICA has been at the forefront of supporting innovation in Africa by training future innovators and creating a conducive



environment for them to thrive. Some excellent examples of JICA's contribution have been highlighted in the preceding articles, but I have especially high hopes for the ABE Initiative*. This initiative will provide young bright Africans access to excellent training in top Japanese universities, and internships in top Japanese companies, and enable them to experience the whole process of creating innovation at university, and transforming it into a commercialized product or a service. These ABE graduates are expected—and have actually started—to play a big role in pushing Africa's innovation forward and in linking Africa to Japan.

Innovation drives creation of wealth and sustains the development and competitiveness of a nation; there is no doubt that Japan has a lot to share with or teach Africa, and JICA, as the Japanese Government's instrument for sharing its development's experience with other nations, is expected to continue to play a major role in this endeavor. The rapid expansion of connectivity gives me great hope in accelerating the transformation of Africa, provided, however, that we ensure that all Africans get access to electricity, without which they will not be able to enjoy the full benefits of the digital/technological revolution taking place in Africa.

Profile:

Charles Murigande holds a PhD in Mathematics from the University of Namur in Belgium, and has extensive international work experience. He has served the Government of Rwanda as Ambassador to Japan, and as Minister in various portfolios including Education, Cabinet Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and Transport and Communication. Currently he is Deputy Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement of the University of Rwanda.

* African Business Education Initiative for Youth