

TICAD7 Side Event Report : Participants of ABE Initiative Program become “KAKEHASHI” (Bridge) between Japan and Africa.

The 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7) is held at Yokohama from 28th to 30th of August. On 27th August, participants of JICA's ABE Initiative Program attended an official side-event of TICAD7, introduced KAKEHASHI AFRICA, a professional business platform that provide integrated solutions to Japanese companies who want to develop business ties with Africa.

【What is ABE Initiative Program】

ABE Initiative is short for African Business Education Initiative for Youth. This program offers opportunities for young and eligible African youth to study at Master's courses in Japanese universities as international students and to experience internships at Japanese enterprises in order to develop effective skills and knowledge in various fields for contributing the development of industries in Africa. The ABE Initiative was launched based on the speech of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V).

【Bridge (KAKEHASHI) between Africa and Japan】

KAKEHASHI AFRICA is established and ran by participants from Africa who have earned master's degrees in ICT, agriculture, business, engineering and more in Japan through JICA's ABE Initiative Program. They are young leaders with passion who aim to address difficulties faced by Japanese companies in Africa, and become the “Kakehashi”, which means bridge in Japanese between Africa and Japan. During the event, they also participated in the panel discussion regarding “Hardships that Japanese companies face when doing business in Africa.” Here are some opinions from the members.

Arthur Sati: I think many Japanese companies they first face the security issues. Because many African countries they do not have infrastructures well-equipped, so Japanese companies would cost a lot on personnel and equipment.

Abdon Koko: I would say that the difference of market systems in African countries is the biggest challenge for Japanese companies. For example, in some countries, they adopt common law that is a market-driven law, so you can do business freely, but others are not. This is what I think very challengeable and Japanese companies should be aware of.

Maha Elkhamlichi: The fear of “unknown”, I would say. I used to work with a Japanese travel agency to help them with establishing a local branch in Morocco. There were many things they could not deal with because the local environment is too different from they expected. Things you hear and see from books and internet are true, but not enough for companies to do business. What you really need is a more local mindset and observation.

To address difficulties like these, participants of ABE Initiative established KAKEHASHI AFRICA to provide a professional platform to help Japanese companies to access reliable knowledge and local partners for expansion into African markets. Moreover, KAKEHASHI AFRICA has recently been recognized as a NGO in Kenya. We hope all our talented participants of ABE Initiative could be the bridge of Japan and Africa and achieve success in the future.