

Policy Speech by Mr. Masahiko Koumura, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

"Education for All: Human Resource Development for Self-Reliance and Growth"

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Introduction

I would like to extend my warmest welcome to you, who have been working to bring about Education for All (EFA) in countries around the globe. Japan has consistently supported the EFA process led by UNESCO since this initiative began, and I would like to begin my remarks today by stating that we will continue our support for EFA into the future.

Today is the day that the 'World's Biggest Lesson' is taking place. This 'Lesson' is an endeavor through which children around the globe learn about the importance of education on the same day. Here in Japan I understand that 243 schools and 28,415 children participated. Allow me to extend my deep respect to those of you who have made many efforts to make this project a success.

The year 2008 is an important one for the world and for Japan. For the world, this year marks the halfway point as we work to achieve both the EFA Dakar Goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For Japan too, this year will be one of great significance; we are taking up development-related issues intensively as we prepare to host both the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) next month and the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit in July.

Today I will be explaining my thoughts on the relationship between development and education. I would also like to share with you some concrete proposals regarding what Japan aims to achieve through the upcoming TICAD IV and G8 Summit.

An Overview of the Current Situation

Let me start off by giving you a brief overview of the path that has led us to where we are today.

In the year 2000 we welcomed a new century, and that became a sort of starting line for the international community to come together to engage in significant efforts

towards expanding and enhancing education in developing countries. This is demonstrated prominently in the EFA Dakar Goals, which UNESCO took the lead in formulating. The EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI), launched under the leadership of the G8, is another groundbreaking approach in promoting international partnerships in primary education.

The first thing I would like to touch on here is the fact that these efforts to expand and enhance primary education are now beginning to produce positive results.

The report by UNESCO tells us that in the six years between 1999 and 2005, the number of out-of-school children around the globe dropped by as much as 25%, from 96 million to 72 million. Improvements in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and West Asia stand out in particular.

Now, of course, that means that some 72 million children remain out of school. If we also consider the issues of raising the adult literacy rate and achieving gender parity in educational opportunities, it becomes clear that we are only halfway to accomplishing our goals of improving access, quality, and equity in education.

Having said that, what the 25% decrease in the number of children unable to attend primary school tells us is that we *can* achieve our goal if we set our minds to it. It has demonstrated that, when the self-help efforts of developing countries mesh well with assistance from the international community, positive outcomes ensue.

Japan's Basic Approach

Next I would like to touch briefly on the topic of supporting education. My comments here are not simply my own personal views, but rather, points that a great many Japanese people have come to think of as important.

First of all is the understanding that raising a child is a community-wide job. A second point involves the relationship between basic education on one hand and technical education and vocational training or secondary and higher education on the other. Specifically, rather than first expanding access to basic education and then turning our attention to more advanced forms of education at a later stage, both types of education should be promoted simultaneously.

It goes without saying that basic education is absolutely essential. For human beings to utilize their potential to achieve personal fulfillment and live in dignity, it is necessary for them to acquire the abilities to read, write, and think critically.

Without these abilities, freedom from fear and freedom from want remain ultimately out of reach. In other words, we cannot achieve “human security.”

Currently, girls are less likely to have opportunities for basic education. This is something that we must not waste any time in remedying, in light of this connection between basic education and human security. We cannot overstate the importance of achieving gender equality if we are to move towards overcoming social and economic problems as quickly as possible.

At the same time, we must not forget that basic education is something that takes root more firmly if fostered by local communities.

Each school in Japan has its own school song. The lyrics often celebrate the rich “texture” of the local community or its natural beauty. I am told that the fact that every school in Japan has one without exception has surprised many of our colleagues from Africa and elsewhere.

Learning lasts much longer when it is nourished by the surrounding community. This has been considered a fundamental awareness deeply rooted in Japanese society, and certainly, I believe there is something to be said for the truth found in this way of thinking.

The second point I would like to touch on is the importance of schooling at the levels beyond basic education.

In order for a country to become self-reliant and achieve growth, it is vitally important for a wide range of human resources to be cultivated, from doctors to lawyers to engineers fixing cars. I think that the need to foster such human resources even as we expand and enhance basic education is self-evident.

That is to say, education at a variety of levels, including technical education and vocational training and also secondary and higher education, is something that is necessary *now*.

This is a philosophy that Japanese people firmly believe in and it has been an underlying principle for Japan’s development assistance.

Among the schools that Japan has supported over the years on the basis of this

approach, some have already risen to greatness, such as the Electronics Engineering Polytechnic Institute of Surabaya in Indonesia that won an international robotics contest.

To introduce an example in Africa, the Senegal-Japan Vocational Training Center was built by Japan in Senegal in the 1980s. Trainees from neighboring countries also come to enroll in this school. More than 75% of the young graduates of the center's programs have moved on to jobs in which they can utilize their specialized skills, and they are now in a position to contribute to local industries.

Concrete Proposals

In the time remaining, I would like to introduce my concrete proposals in this area.

Let us ask ourselves what the international community must do to attain Education for All, and by extension, education leading to self-reliance and growth in each country.

As my answer to that, I am advocating four key points based on the thoughts I have shared with you thus far. These are, first, that basic education be further expanded and enhanced in both quantity and quality; second, that support be strengthened for a variety of levels of education beyond basic education; third, that synergies be developed between education and other development sectors; and fourth, that we aim to create partnerships that incorporate all members of society, both domestically and internationally. In addition, we expect similar efforts to be invested by individual countries. I'll examine each of these now in greater detail to introduce Japan's forthcoming actions.

First of all, looking at basic education, it is necessary first and foremost to ensure that there are sufficient places for large numbers of children to learn. For that reason, **over the next five years Japan will be constructing in Africa, where the number of classrooms is especially inadequate, approximately 1,000 schools containing roughly 5,500 classrooms, thereby providing enough schoolrooms for some 400,000 children to learn.**

Once the schools are in place, the next thing to be done is to let the children discover the joy of learning. That means getting them to feel that study really makes a difference. Japan's experiences in Central America and in African countries such as Kenya have shown us that enhancing teachers' classroom abilities in math and science plays a decisive role in achieving precisely that.

Over the next five years, Japan will be assisting in the enhancement of teachers' abilities in the classroom, focusing mainly on improving teaching methods in math and science. We will be training approximately 300,000 teachers around the globe, including about 100,000 in Africa.

In what is known as the “School for All” model, the local community participates in school management. We will be spreading this approach further within Niger, where this model had its start, and also to surrounding countries. **During the next five years, we aim to improve the management of 10,000 schools, and thereby provide a better learning environment for over one million students.**

At the same time, in consideration of the depth of difficulties found in some countries' national circumstances, it is sometimes necessary to reinforce basic education through strong and concerted efforts. Afghanistan is one such example. **Japan has begun to improve the literacy of approximately 300,000 Afghans, working in partnership with UNESCO.**

In pursuing these goals, we intend to use a full range of methods and approaches to expand and enhance basic education. We will also be exploring the possibility of partnerships with the World Bank and other multilateral development banks as we work towards our goal of enhancing both the quantity and the quality of the assistance we provide.

The second point I mentioned was one I believe you all agree with, namely, that it is critical to support education comprehensively, including technical education and vocational training and also secondary and higher education.

Let me share with you the example of Tunisia as an excellent illustration of this point. Japan provided assistance for the creation of a science and technology park—that is, a research and development center—in Tunisia. Since last year, this technopark has matched up with a study in Japan, and now Tunisian engineering students are studying at Japanese universities as post-graduate students.

Through these types of approaches, Japan will focus its efforts on the fostering of human resources in developing nations, making use of a wide variety of means, such as joint research, training programs, and opportunities to study in Japan, in partnership with recipient countries and other countries in the region.

The third proposal I mentioned involves developing synergies between education and other development sectors. By this, I mean that schools have the potential to help the

local people in a variety of ways, and we need to tap into that potential to the greatest extent possible.

For example, schools can introduce school meals and develop toilets and wells for drawing water. Lunches provided by the school are of course beneficial in that they improve the nutrition that the children receive. But if we take that one step further and also allow the students to take home some food, you can imagine that the food from school would be set out on the dinner table, to the delight of the children's parents. That would make them more inclined to send their children to school the next day.

As for toilets, the fact is that girls stop coming to school if there are no toilet facilities available. This is more than simply a hygiene issue; toilets are also critical in empowering women. Therefore, the systems and facilities in place at schools can—and should—be used to reinforce the local community's ability to thrive and to foster the future generation.

Schools play a central role within the community when we look at ways to advance our efforts in AIDS prevention, awareness raising for disaster prevention, including preparations for droughts and floods, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Education is an area in which a little innovation can bring about a variety of synergistic effects.

Finally, my fourth proposal is that we aim to create partnerships in which all people participate, both domestically and internationally. In looking at who exactly would be engaged in these cooperative efforts, we would be looking to create something as multilayered and broad-based as possible, in keeping with the very nature of education. We know that relying only on responses from donor countries and organizations and from the governments of developing countries will be inadequate. Instead, we must promote cooperation that is participatory, with local communities, academia, the private sector, and NGOs, among others in the developing countries.

Regarding this point, Japan's public and private sectors and NGOs have been engaged in educational support in the countries of Southeast Asia, which I believe could provide us with a good model for our future endeavors.

One successful approach has Japanese NGOs and businesses joining hands to promote education on environmental conservation and public health. Another involves Japanese businesses providing scholarships and Japanese NGOs managing them. These are a few examples of the ongoing combined efforts of various stakeholders. In order to make these kinds of partnerships even more dynamic in the future, the Japanese

government would like to create an “all Japan” framework—and by that I mean, one that involves key Japanese stakeholders in this area from various organizations.

Conclusion

At the beginning of my speech today I highlighted the fact that the number of children not attending school has begun to decrease, and I stated that we can achieve our goal if we set our minds to it.

It has been extremely encouraging for me to see this enterprising, “can-do” spirit that is taking root in sub-Saharan Africa and in other developing countries. The theme of TICAD IV to be held in Yokohama next month is “Vibrant Africa.” In my view, this slogan demonstrates precisely the forward-looking spirit that is now becoming so manifest all around Africa.

I believe that we are at this moment presented with an ideal opportunity for the entire international community to engage in efforts on support for education. I would like to close my remarks with my commitment to seize this opportunity and make further efforts in providing such support.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.