

How we saw Japan! (ABE プログラム留学生が見た日本の発展とは?)

As students of African Business Education Initiative for Youth

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I. Introduction

To address development challenges and for advancing social and economic development in Africa, promotion of business activities as opposed to aid is one of the key factors. In this situation, Japanese government launched the “African Business Education Initiative for Youth (ABE Initiative¹)” at the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) in 2013. The program provides opportunities for young African men and women with excellent academic and work experience to study and obtain master’s degree at Japanese universities and to experience internships at Japanese enterprises in order to develop effective skills and knowledge in various fields for contributing to the development of industries in Africa. Furthermore, the program aims at developing industrial human resources in Africa and developing capacities as “link” who will support Japanese enterprises to expand business in Africa. Until JFY2018, more than 1,000 participants from all African countries have joined the program, and over 600 participants have completed the program and went back to their respective countries. This has resulted in establishing a wide range of human resource network of ABE Initiative participants. To date, many Japanese companies and ABE Initiative participants have collaborated and interacted in various ways to promote private and public sectors in Africa.

¹ 編者注 : ”African Business Education Initiative for Youth” program offers opportunities for young and eligible African men and women 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. At the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V), it is recognized that there is a need for human resource development in both private and public sectors of Africa in order to cultivate a strong human network between Japan and Africa.

(Source: <http://education-japan.org/africa/index.html#contents01>)

In this short article, I have shared how we saw Japan during ABE Initiative program which includes Japanese education system, Japanese companies and our life in Japan.

II. Why Japan and Why ABE-Initiative program

There are many scholarships around the globe with different objectives. However, they have always been biased towards academic activities. ABE initiative is a unique program that entails academic activities and a wide range of business elements obtained through the



Attending conference

industrial interactions. Globally, Japan is renowned for its advanced technology together with one of the best quality education systems. The quality of research epitomizes Japanese values and principles of “Kaizen”. This is evident from the high number of Nobel Prizes awarded to Japanese people (the highest in Asia, and second in the World since 2000), as per the OECD statistics. So far, Japan has constantly produced more than 10 universities among the top 200 in the world. Furthermore, Japan being a high-tech country meant that we would use and experience cutting edge research facilities and technologies. We felt that this was a unique opportunity for us to improve our technical skills and capacity for problem solving in Africa’s industrial sector while bridging Japanese and African Industries.

Additionally, ABE program had provision to finance both domestic and international conferences. This conference meetings provided a critical opportunity to present our exclusive research findings, network, and improve communication skills with experienced researchers and academicians. Our research results were published in various domestic and international journals. We also engaged in several projects available in our universities, thus gaining more knowledge and skills in projects and industrial activities.

III. Experience from Internship at Japanese Companies.

During summer vacation and after graduation, we had opportunities to undertake internship at Japanese companies and visit many other business partner companies. For example, personally, I took internship at three different companies; Asahi Glass Company (AGC), the largest glass manufacturer in the world, Japan Management Corporation, dealing with housing maintenance and management, and KOYO Corporation, dealing with renewable energy and energy serving technologies.



Internship at Toyota

I also visited several companies such as Toyota Corporation, Mitsubishi Electric Company and Subaru car manufacturing plant. This was the case for most of the ABE student all over Japan. We learned and experienced Japanese way of doing business, management methods and some technical skills related to HITOZUKURI, MONOZUKURI, and KAIZEN. We developed effective skills and knowledge for future contribution to industrial development in Africa.

IV. Simply: Life in Japan is GREAT

Studying in Japan was the best opportunity for us young people from Africa. From the friends we met to learning the language and exploring regions of Japan. The experience was



Enjoying Japanese summer festival

extremely worthwhile. We got to live with Japanese students and working professionals, experiencing their way of life, going to school with college students, and so much more. This is not something we would be able to experience if we had just come for a short period focusing on training only. Thanks to JICA for providing us with stipend which allowed us to live comfortably without the need for part time job.

The Japanese people are honestly, one of the most polite and kindest people we have ever met. Every single one of them. Well, there may be some exceptions, but really you could drop your wallet or umbrella on the ground and they would be running after you to give it back. No matter how fast or how far they will make sure to give it back to you or to the police. They are friendly and most welcoming people we have met. The Japanese society is known to be one of the safest in the world which was another reason to come to Japan. There are many considerations in deciding what country to study in and we believe safety ranks among the top ones. We are glad with this kind of society because we were able to explore many areas of Japan without worrying about our safety. We also learned Japanese culture through interaction with Japanese people in various events such as summer festival and snowboarding festival. To many of us, the experience during that period was great and met our expectations with no regrets on the decision to come and study in Japan.

V. Post ABE-Initiative program in Africa

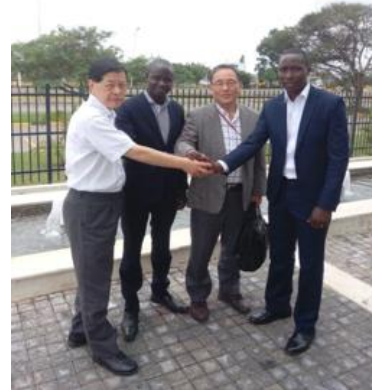
After completing ABE Initiative, we went back to Africa to contribute to industrial development in our respective countries as per the program's objective. In my case, with two other ABE initiative graduates from Kenya we formed Higashi Africa Investment Company, HAIC, (www.higashiafrica.com) a consulting and advisory firm with the objective to contribute to industrial development in Africa through promotion and support of foreign investments. HAIC head office is



Sightseeing in Tochigi Prefecture

in Nairobi, Kenya with a branch office in Tanzania, and a country representative in Uganda. Currently, it is planning to have representatives in all 54 African countries. While working at HAIC, we have been able to work together with some Japanese companies. One of such projects was to conduct feasibility studies for Japanese companies and at the same time connect them with important local partners in Kenya and Tanzania. Examples of such

projects conducted by HAIC include RICOH Company Limited, Yokohama (to conduct energy, health and agriculture market research in Kenya), Kanbe company limited, Osaka (to survey on effective delivery of bus rapid transit service in Tanzania through Mobile App), and Lami Corporation, Osaka (to conduct feasibility study for strengthening vocational training systems through extension of laminating machine in Kenya). We have many Japanese companies looking for collaboration and/or to work with us in the near future. Our huge network, technical expertise and experience of both Japanese business manner and local companies in Africa is our main competitive edge.



HAIC directors meeting with Lami Corp. in Kenya

VI. Summary

We think that the program was implemented successfully and expected to have a big impact on both Japanese and African companies. The challenges facing Japanese companies such as less partnership with African strong local companies, difficulties on product development for African market, communication barrier, and inadequate human resources are expected to be addressed through the ABE Initiative program. ABE scholars are going to act as a bridge not only between Japanese companies and the organization they belong to in their home countries but also strong link with African local companies. Moreover, we are going to be the ambassadors of Japanese products and services as well as to support Japanese companies to start and/or expand business in Africa. We really thank Japanese government through JICA and the Japanese people for making us who we are today.