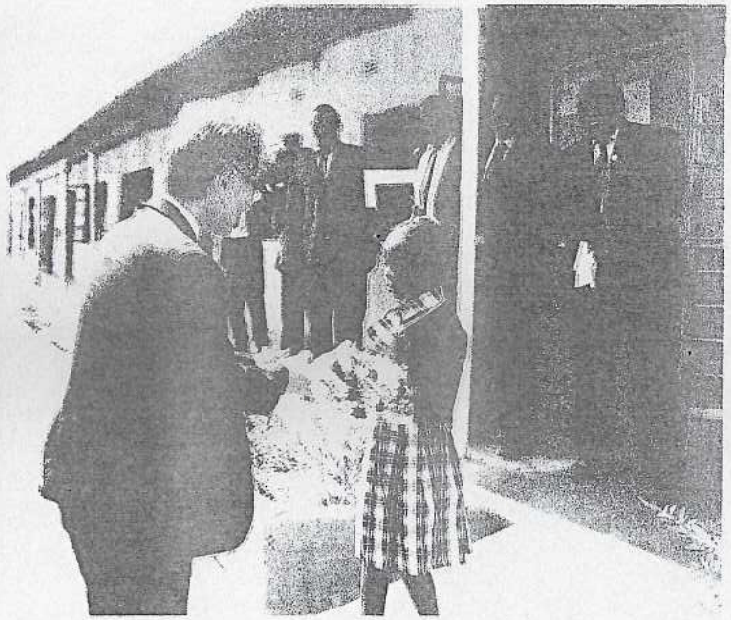
2019/9/17 (火)
Zambia Daily Mail 9面

JAPANESE Ambassador to Zambia Hidenobu Sobashima (left) listening to Kabwe Institute of Technology principal Rhodah Simwangala. Mr Sobashima was on a press tour of Japanese-supported projects in Central Province.

PICTURES: COURTESY OF JICA



AMBASSADOR Sobashima being welcomed by Sinikiwe Sitenge, a Grade One pupil at Chibombo Primary School, when he visited the school, which Japan supports through JICA under a Knowledge Co-Creation Programme (KCCP).

Japanese envoy bids farewell

Agriculture, manufacturing are key sectors Zambia needs to grow - Sobashima

FRANCIS LUNGU
Lusaka

HIDENOBU Sobashima's tour of duty as Japanese Ambassador to Zambia has come to an end. The outgoing ambassador urges that to achieve her Vision 2030 of becoming a prosperous middle-income country, Zambia needs to diversify her economy, stick to austerity economic measures in the current tough economic times, and observe fiscal discipline, particularly prudent budgetary management. He says agriculture and manufacturing are key sectors that Zambia needs to grow in its quest to broaden economic activities from predominantly mining.

Mr Sobashima hopes Japan-Zambia relations will further deepen during his successor's cooperation between Zambia and Japan through a number of Memorandums of Corporations (MoC).

In this column, Ambassador Sobashima shares views and experiences during his three years of stay in Zambia.

Q: How has been your three years of serving as Japanese Ambassador to Zambia?

A: Ever since I arrived in Zambia, almost three years ago, I have been repeatedly relations between Japan and Zambia, extending from political, economical to cultural.

This also extends to other areas of cooperation (such as) with Japanese experts, volunteers, NGOs (Non-governmental organisations) and companies to further advance our relations in such areas as ODA (Official Development Assistance), trade and investment, particularly by following the TICAD (Tokyo

> "I appreciate efforts of the Government of Zambia with current austerity measures that are being implemented. With these two measures of diversifying the economy and implementing sound budgetary

relations in various fields. The second message is; I cooperated particularly with Japanese experts, volunteers, NGOs and companies here in Zambia. I think I have achieved to a certain level.

Last month we had the 7th TICAD meeting in Yokohama in Japan. We have new sort of framework or initiatives also, but basically Japan's commitment remains almost the same; that is to assist Africa's ownership of its developmental agenda as an equal partner of cooperation. In that regard, I would like to assist Zambia to achieve the Vision 2030, to become a prosperous middle income country. I believe that diversifying the economy for Zambia, which is currently heavily dependent on the mining industry, and also health budgetary management, are important (for the country to achieve Vision 2030).

In the past three years, there

Zambia?

A: As you might have observed, we have a lot of projects we have already implemented and some are currently underway. I think currently the biggest project is the upgrading of health centers to first level hospitals in Lusaka district, in Chawama, Chipata, and Kanyama, costing a total of K400 million.

We have a lot of small projects as well. Actually on Saturday [September 14, 2019] I am participating in the launch of a health project on the Copperbelt being implemented by a Japanese NGO called Japanese Organisation for

there was a platform for African leaders to interact with Japanese business leaders and Prime Minister Abe mentioned the Japanese Government's determination to further promote business with Africa. He mentioned that in the past three years, US$20billion of Japanese investment was made in Africa. But the Prime Minister hopes the same can be achieved or possibly more investment to come from the Japanese business sector.

Returning to His Excellency President Lungu's December [2018] visit to Japan, we issued a joint statement and the two leaders announced that the

Japan to receive His Excellency but in December [2018]. I was able to receive and welcome His Excellency President Lungu in Japan. And I believe His Excellency's understanding of Japan was deepened and I think friendship between the two countries at the highest level of leaders has developed. That is my biggest memory.

But in addition, I have many different good memories. I have met many senior officials, including ministers, and I have colleagues in the diplomatic corp. Playing golf is my hobby. I play golf every weekend if I do not have any engagement. By so doing, I enjoyed the beauty of Zambia. And there is a justification for playing golf at my age; it is good for my health. I play golf sometimes on both Saturdays and Sundays, and walking for three hours two times a week is very good for my health too.

2019/9/17 (火)
Zambia Daily Mail 9面

Zambia relations will further deepen during his successor's tenure of office. The Japanese envoy says he is leaving the country a happy man, knowing that during his tenure, he facilitated two of President Edgar Lungu's visits to Japan, the latest being for the just-ended 7th TICAD.

Mr Sobashima presented his letters of credence to President Lungu at State House in Lusaka on October 31, 2016 and his tenure of office comes to an end next Tuesday, September 24, 2019.

He describes his three-year tour of duty as good, particularly in terms of deepening development

> implementing sound budgetary management, Zambia would be helped to achieve the vision of becoming a prosperous middle income country by 2030."

saying same things on various occasions. Even at the occasion of presenting my credentials, I said to His Excellency the President, that as Ambassador of Japan to Zambia, I am determined to do my best, building upon the long-standing friendly and cooperative

International Conference on Africa's Development) initiative. So this is what I said on the occasion of presenting my credentials to His Excellency and I have been repeating it on various occasions. So my message is two-fold - my intention is to further develop

achieve Vision 2030."

In the past three years, there have been exchanges of visits between the two countries. Japan state ministers came here and what I was most happy about was His Excellency the President's (Edgar Lungu) visit to Japan in December last year [2018], it was a bilateral visit. August this year, the President participated in the 7th TICAD, and of course on that occasion, there was a summit meeting between His Excellency the President (Lungu) and [Japanese] Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Q: In terms of developmental cooperation, how is Japan assisting

AMBASSADOR Sobashima (left) inspecting a Japan-supported rice farming project in Samfya district, Luapula Province, in 2018.

International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP).

There are a number of Japanese NGOs active in Zambia. On the occasion of the courtesy call to Central Province Minister Sydney Mushanga [on September 11, 2019], I mentioned that the Japanese company Mulberry Group of Companies is setting up a textile factory in Kabwe and Toyota motors is also considering setting up a service station in Kabwe.

Although Mulberry Group of Companies' investment has not yet materialised, I am hopeful that it will. And I hope that in the near future, more Japanese investments will come to Zambia.

The 7th TICAD theme was "Advancing Africa's development through people, technology and innovation". TICAD had three pillars; economic, social, peace and stability. The first pillar is accelerating economic transformation and promoting business environment through innovation and private sector engagement. The second pillar is deepening sustainable and resilient society. Here we have measures for health including promoting universal health coverage. The third pillar is strengthening peace and stability.

Q: What are the specific benefits of the 7th TICAD to Africa?

A: The 7th TICAD emphasised the importance of economic relations of Africa and Japan. In one of the summits during the TICAD, relationship between Zambia and Japan would enter a new phase of economic cooperation. I attach great importance to this message.

The two leaders expressed their determination of raising the stage to catapult a new phase of cooperation. Of course, President Lungu invited Prime Minister Abe to Zambia. I hope that can be realised in the near future but that would be the assignment of my successor. In any event, because the two leaders agreed on the new phase of cooperation, us the ambassadors and officials of the embassy should work to put substance in this framework of a new phase of cooperation. I hope my successor will accomplish that.

Q: What were your most important diplomatic moments during your three years of stay as Japanese Ambassador to Zambia?

A: I am very happy that during my tenure, His Excellency [President Lungu] visited Japan two times; in December last year and this year in August for the TICAD conference. President Lungu missed the last TICAD held in Nairobi [Kenya] in 2016; he was not able to participate because of the elections in Zambia that year. Zambia was only represented at permanent secretary level. I was very grateful that the President participated in this year's TICAD and Japan had a privilege and honour of receiving His Excellency President Lungu.

Q: What is your next destination?

A: From here, I am going to the Federated States of Micronesia. It is a country in the Pacific. I am going there in the same capacity as ambassador. I am only going back to Japan for some preparation before going to Micronesia.

Q: Would you like to visit Zambia in future? What cherished memories are you going with?

A: Certainly I would like to come and visit Zambia. On my cherished memories; in August this year, I was not able to go to

times a week is very good for my health too.

Q: How has been your work relationship with the media in Zambia?

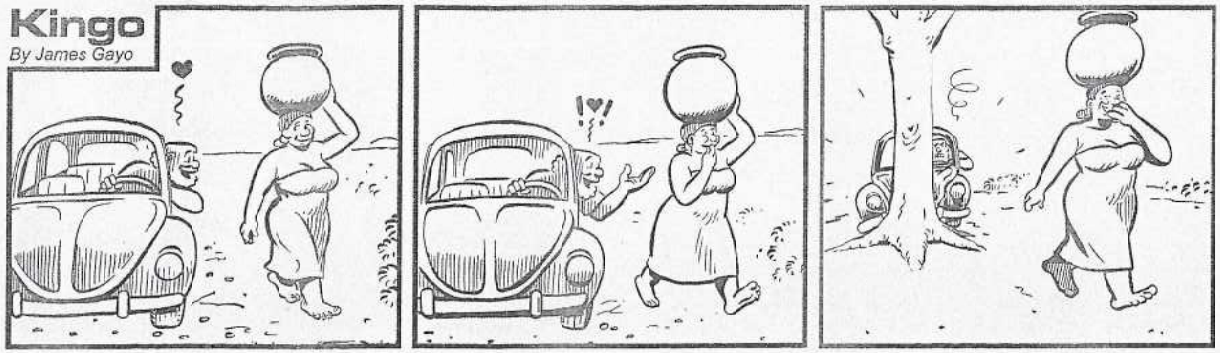
A: I should have done better. Back home in Japan, I worked with the media. I had [media] experience working as a spokesperson for the Prime Minister and for the Foreign Minister as a deputy press secretary. Of course, we have the press secretary, but if the press secretary is not there, it is the deputy press secretary accompanying the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister. I would express the views of the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister (to the media), so I am accustomed to talking to the media.

I remember accompanying the former Prime Minister (of Japan) to the Republic of Korea as spokesperson. But with Foreign ministers, I worked as a spokesperson for many times. So I know how to interact with the media, that is why I am saying I should have done better by having more occasions of interacting with the media.

Immediately after the TICAD conference, I had a media briefing to explain to the media what TICAD was all about.

Q: Finally, what would you hope to see Zambia become in terms of development after you have left?

A: It is the ambassador's role to further develop the cooperation between the countries and I hope my successor will continue doing so. Zambia wants to become a prosperous middle income country by the year 2030. It is good for cooperating partners to help Zambia to achieve this goal. My personal observation and opinion for Zambia is that diversifying the economy is key. And through JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), we should continue cooperating to promote agriculture and manufacturing (sectors) perhaps through Kaizen Institute. The other thing is sound budgetary management. I appreciate efforts of the Government of Zambia with current austerity measures that are being implemented. With these two measures of diversifying the economy and implementing sound budgetary management, Zambia would be helped to achieve the vision of becoming a prosperous middle income country by 2030



JAPANESE Ambassador to Zambia Hidenobu Sobashima (left) listening to Kabwe Institute of Technology principal Rhodah Simwangala. Mr Sobashima was on a press tour of Japanese-supported projects in Central Province.

PICTURES: COURTESY OF JICA

AMBASSADOR Sobashima being welcomed by Sinikiwe Sitenge, a Grade One pupil at Chibombo Primary School, when he visited the school, which Japan supports through JICA under a Knowledge Co-Creation Programme (KCCP).

2019/9/17 (火)
Zambia Daily Mail 9面

AMBASSADOR Sobashima (left) inspecting a Japan-supported rice farming project in Samfya district, Luapula Province, in 2018.

2019/9/17 (火)
Zambia Daily Mail 9面