

# **A Vision on Japan's ODA toward the Maghreb**

**Kabouche Elhaouas**

University of Algiers 3, (Algeria), [kabouche.elhauoas@univ-alger3.dz](mailto:kabouche.elhauoas@univ-alger3.dz)

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## **Abstract:**

Japan has actively engaged in addressing development challenges in the Maghreb, as both a donor nation and an economic powerhouse, strategically utilizing its advantages to align with its international agenda. Assistance has been meticulously tailored towards areas of mutual benefit, encompassing financial aid, technical expertise, and capacity-building initiatives. This strategic alignment reflects broader themes, particularly the justifications for foreign aid, emphasized during the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). The momentum behind Japan's approach as a donor state competes with other donor powers, particularly China, the traditional rival. This competition over Africa's sphere of influence has strengthened the interconnectedness between the two Asian poles and recipient African countries, positioning them, at the center of shaping Africa's future. Japan and China introduce novel engagement strategies, integrating their historical experiences as aid recipients in their developmental cooperation with Africa. However, this dynamic also impacts the quality and efficiency of grants and assistance, as each party's aid possesses unique attributes distinct from those offered by Western donors, thus propelling the recipient countries towards internal development.

**Keywords:** Japan; the Maghreb; ODA; China; Development.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Japan has transcended from its post-war status as a recipient of aid to become a paradigmatic donor nation. Distinguished by its unique approach, the East Asian nation prioritizes the cultivation of relationships built on trust and respect with beneficiary countries. Its assistance strategy is marked by humility, diverging from the more ostentatious methods employed by Western counterparts, and is deeply informed by a comprehensive understanding of recipient nations' needs. This approach is rooted in the justifications for aid articulated in the Development Assistance Charter and the guiding principles established by the Japanese government in 1992, coinciding with its accession to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1960. Japan adheres to the core principles and regulations of the Development Assistance Committee, positioning itself as a "traditional" donor entity.

Japan's status as the largest provider of development aid has solidified over time; by 1989, it had surpassed the United States as the top donor, contributing 18% of the world's total development aid by 1992. Since the 1980s, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget has received preferential treatment within Japan's national budget.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, Japan's official development assistance totaled \$14.2 billion, ranking it fourth globally and the largest in Asia. This amounted to 0.28% of Japan's gross national income, positioning it as one of the leading contributors to United Nations funding.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond financial contributions, Japan leverages its expertise through the engagement of Japanese personnel within international organizations, enabling it to play an influential role in shaping decisions related to international security and peace.<sup>3</sup> This status empowers Japan to establish enduring partnerships founded on knowledge exchange and cooperative efforts.

The ODA serves as a tangible demonstration of Japan's influence on the global stage, contributing significantly to the development processes of recipient countries. Concurrently, Japan endeavors to promote stability and security by directing aid towards critical sectors. The momentum accompanying its approach to development assistance extends beyond mere economic benefits to encompass societal and security-related advancements in Maghreb and African countries, as will be explored further in subsequent sections of this article. These grants offer added value to citizens of the maghreb by facilitating the development of local communities and enhancing levels of security and social stability.

The problem at hand involves understanding the scope and dimensions of Japan's

Official Development Assistance (ODA) approach to the Maghreb countries.

### **2. Evolution of Japanese Development Support to the Maghreb Region: A Historical Perspective**

In contrast to East and Southeast Asia, which prioritize the flow of its economic aid, the Maghreb region did not appear on the map of countries receiving Japanese foreign aid until the oil shock of 1973-74. In response to this, the Japanese government swiftly moved to strengthen its ties with oil-producing countries, channeling its assistance towards various projects in these nations\*\*, and it continued to direct its aid to the Maghreb to support it in its internal development process.

The Maghreb delineates a geographical expanse spanning longitudinally from 25° east, demarcating the Libyan-Egyptian border, to 17° west, encompassing the Atlantic coastline of Mauritania. Its latitudinal range extends from 37° north, representing Bizerte, to 18° south, delineating the Algerian-Malian border. Encompassing the northern swath of the African continent, it is flanked by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, boasting a coastline of 4837 kilometers, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, with a coastline spanning 3146 kilometers. To the east, it shares borders with Egypt and Sudan, while to the south, it adjoins the Sahelian countries. Spanning an area of 6,062,941 km<sup>2</sup>, the region assumes a pivotal position between the European and African continents, serving as a multidirectional hub. Its orientation extends towards Europe in the north, the Middle East in the east, Sub-Saharan Africa in the south, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. This strategic positioning renders the region significant in the calculations of the great powers, who seek to leverage the distinctive attributes offered by this geographical region.

Japanese aid to the region materialized with the signing of an agreement with the Tunisian government in July 1974, outlining the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program. Additionally, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) played a pivotal role in completing a diverse range of projects and providing various services to Tunisia.<sup>4</sup> JICA executed over 38 projects, investing more than 245,157 million yen, deploying 422 experts and 1,191 staff in projects, and engaging 558 volunteers within Tunisia. Furthermore, cultural grants were allocated to constructing theaters and promoting sports.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1980s, official development assistance loans have been extended to Algeria in the fields of communications, restoring capacity after disasters, and implementing technical cooperation contributing to disaster prevention and industrial diversification.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, since the year 2000, the archipelago has consistently extended cultural and sports assistance and provided training grants within the framework of bilateral programs and agreements. Special grants have been designated for the education and training of the wives of terrorism victims, and the cumulative value of both direct and indirect cultural grants amounted to approximately \$200,000 by the year 2007. In

February 2003, Japan deployed a specialized training body in environmental management, pollution control, industrial waste affecting water, pharmaceutical, and chemical manufacturing sites, disaster prevention, and post-disaster reconstruction. Agricultural development training is also included, with Japan regularly hosting 20 to 30 Algerian trainees in these fields.<sup>7</sup>

Through its aid programs, Japan has actively worked to foster social and economic balance in Morocco. In pursuit of this objective, JICA has consistently assisted in Morocco's development since 1974, focusing on three pillars: Supporting sustainable development, Enhancing trilateral cooperation (Morocco-Japan-JICA), and Addressing regional and social imbalances. Over 30 years of mutual cooperation, Morocco has received loans totaling \$2.6 billion and financial assistance amounting to \$345 million from Japan. These funds have financed more than 34 projects. Additionally, since 1956, 1,000 Japanese volunteers have settled in Morocco, while 1,400 Moroccans have undergone training in Japan.<sup>8</sup>

As Asahiko Karashima, the Chief Representative of JICA's Morocco office, elucidated, "We enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Moroccan economy by supporting various projects in agriculture, fisheries, industrial infrastructure, and water resource security. We aim to reduce social and regional disparities through education, regional development, and promote 'South-South Cooperation' by encouraging Morocco to assist in the development of French-speaking African countries..."<sup>9</sup>

The impact of Japanese aid in Mauritania has been notably pronounced in comparison to other Maghreb countries. This can be attributed to the diversity of areas and levels of official assistance received since 1977, totaling \$468 million as grants and \$64 million as technical cooperation. This support has significantly contributed to the completion of 117 local projects. In terms of human exchange, Japan has hosted 779 Mauritanian trainees to benefit from Japanese expertise, thereby contributing to the development of the Mauritanian economy. Additionally, 25 Mauritanian students have been awarded scholarships to pursue higher education at Japanese universities.<sup>10</sup> From 1988 to 2001, Mauritania received \$57.5 million in aid, with the majority of funds allocated for financing and installing equipment for the National Mining and Industrial Company (SNIM).<sup>11</sup> Unlike other countries in the region that had benefited from the Japanese development assistance program since the 1970s, Libya was included in Japan's ODA list following the adjustment of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list in December 2005.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent to the events of 2011 in Libya, the Japanese government allocated assistance to the Libyan people. The aid increased from \$0.13 million in 2010 to \$8.18 million in 2011. Emergency grants were provided to assist those affected by the armed conflicts in the country since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. The total aid during the period 2011-2017 amounted to \$22.33 million.<sup>13</sup>

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**Table 01:** Japanese Official Development Assistance to the Maghreb Countries in 2020

(Unit: US\$ million)

	Grants			Loan Aid	Total
	Grant Aid		Technical cooperation		
		Grants provided through multilateral institutions			
LIBYA	-	9.47	0.02	-	9.49
TUNISIA	7.81	1.75	3.34	46.58	59.48
ALGERIA	0.05	1.46	0.15	-	1.66
MOROCCO	6.93	1.28	3.35	49.53	61.09
MAURITANIA	8.99	2.28	0.43	-	11.71
<b>Total</b>					<b>143.43</b>

**Source:** By the researcher based on data from White Paper on Development Cooperation 2021.

The level of Japanese cooperation varies among the five countries, reflecting the dynamics of the relationships that distinguish Japan's policy toward each unit. Morocco receives the largest share of ODA, considering it the second-largest trading partner for Nihon in Africa. Additionally, bilateral cooperation is coordinated between the two countries to direct aid to sub-Saharan African nations in the context of "South-South Cooperation." Tunisia is the second-largest recipient of Japanese assistance, capturing 20.2% of JICA's programs dedicated to the Middle East in 2018.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to Morocco, Tunisia benefits from various forms of Japanese cooperation. Tunisia has been identified as a priority country in Japanese cooperation programs within the Maghreb, aiming to create a zone that extends toward the Maghreb, the Middle East, and even Africa. In March 2013, a national aid program for Tunisia was adopted<sup>15</sup> to organize the aid received by the Tunisian government.

Given the internal situation in Mauritania, Japanese developmental aid is directed towards supporting local development programs and addressing the social challenges arising from domestic economic conditions. For Libya, the decrease in Japanese aid is attributed to the ongoing internal conflict, hindering cooperation by Japanese institutions and individuals. The security disturbances prompted Japan to suspend aid to Libya in 2015-2016.

The limited volume of Japan's ODA to Algeria can be attributed to the Algerian model, which relies on funding projects with revenue generated from energy resources. Additionally, Algeria has benefited from characteristics provided by Chinese aid programs. The financial abundance and surplus revenues that Algeria possesses, in contrast to other Maghreb countries, contribute to the lower level of Japanese aid.

### **3. Development Aid Dynamics: Shaping the Growth of Maghreb Countries\*\*\***

A shift has occurred in directing aid towards fields with common economic benefits. Consequently, several projects have been funded in alignment with the internal environmental characteristics of the recipient countries. This is in addition to overarching areas emphasized by the TICAD conference, responding to justifications for foreign aid.<sup>16</sup> Medium-term action plans endorsed by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs have prioritized key fields for aid. These fields include infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and capacity-building, with a specific focus on fostering sustainable economic growth and addressing the unique needs of each beneficiary nation.

#### **- Fisheries and Aquaculture:**

The fisheries and aquaculture sector is considered a priority in Japanese aid policy for both Morocco and Mauritania, where fish trade and marine species significantly contribute to their national income, employing a large part of the local workforce. Japanese aid in these countries focuses on upgrading shipbuilding, developing port infrastructure, and providing expertise training.

Official Japanese-Moroccan cooperation in the fisheries sector commenced in 1985 in response to a Moroccan government request for assistance in nationalizing the workforce in this sector. This collaboration reduced Morocco's dependency on Europe and bolstered its negotiating power in fisheries agreements. The cooperation efforts included the establishment of the Higher School of Marine Research (EPM) in Agadir, financially and technically supported by JICA, to train captains and offer education and practical training for sailors. Another initiative involved the construction of the National Institute for Fisheries Research headquarters in Casablanca, with Japanese assistance totaling 63 million Moroccan dirhams. In 1996, the first fishing village (Village de Pêcheurs - VDP) was built on the Atlantic Ocean coast.<sup>17</sup> In June 2015, Morocco funded a project for constructing a pearl oyster farming technology research center with Japanese aid amounting to 12 million yen. Additionally, in 2017, a shipbuilding project in the field of marine sciences received 53.71 million yen.<sup>18</sup>

One distinctive feature of Japanese-Moroccan cooperation in the fisheries sector is Japan's access to Moroccan fishery and marine products. Simultaneously, Morocco acts as an intermediary for transferring technical knowledge from Japan to sub-Saharan countries, a practice known as "South-South" cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

Mauritania has also benefited from Japanese aid to develop the fisheries sector, which is considered a priority according to the Japanese aid policy document for the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in April 2018. The Japanese public sector collaborates with the private sector to enhance the utilization and development of fishery resources in the country. Since 2014, the Atlantic Mechanical Manufacturing Company

(COMECA) has built 15 fishing boats with technical support from the Japanese company YAMAHA (special collaboration). Technical cooperation continues through training sessions at the Maritime Academy.<sup>20</sup>

Japanese aid facilitated the expansion of the largest mine port in the Nouadhibou region, near the capital Nouakchott, as Japan allocated 1.117 billion yen on May 26, 2013, to support the project.<sup>21</sup> During the summit with Mauritanian Prime Minister Ismaïl Ould Bedde Ould Cheikh Sidiya on August 29, 2019, in Yokohama, Shinzo Abe affirmed Japan's commitment to providing aid to Mauritania and emphasized the importance of enhancing the fishing sector.<sup>22</sup>

In the cases of Algeria and Tunisia, although their economies are not predominantly reliant on fisheries and aquaculture, both nations have experienced the positive outcomes of collaborative initiatives with Japan aimed at advancing this sector. During the early 1990s, Japanese technical cooperation played a pivotal role in elevating training standards and upgrading facilities at the Higher Institute of Maritime Studies in Algeria.<sup>23</sup> Notably, in 2004, Nihon extended financial assistance to Algeria amounting to 594 million yen for initiatives related to fisheries, maintenance, and environmental endeavors.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Japan has been actively involved in supporting the sustainable management of fishery resources in various fishing villages situated in the Gulf of Gabes, Tunisia, since 2005. Responding to a formal request from the Tunisian government, Japan consented to the commencement of the Joint Management Project for Coastal Fisheries in the Gulf of Gabes in 2012.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, in the same year, Japan initiated a technical cooperation program in Algeria to enhance training standards at the National Higher School in Maritime Studies (ENSM).<sup>26</sup>

### **- The Agricultural sector:**

Japanese assistance has been specifically channeled towards the amelioration of the agricultural sector within the region, concentrating on two primary facets. Firstly, the aid is strategically aimed at augmenting agricultural techniques through comprehensive training programs encompassing the proficient operation of agricultural machinery and on-farm methodologies. Secondly, a concerted effort has been made to address water provisioning for crops, primarily focusing on irrigation systems.

In the case of Morocco, a comprehensive study and widespread installation of the traditional water distribution system known as "khattara" were undertaken with Japanese aid. As part of this commitment to local initiatives, 18 of these schemes and 10 small-scale irrigation facilities were established,<sup>27</sup> exemplified by the Irrigation System Improvement Project in the Abda Doukkala Mrovatia region spanning from 2011 to 2016. This initiative, spearheaded by Japan, exemplifies its technical cooperation endeavors in transferring technology pertinent to the operation and management of irrigation systems, thereby optimizing the efficient utilization of water resources.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Tunisia has been a beneficiary of Japan's technical cooperation and aid loans, specifically directed towards the development and effective management of water resources since the initiation of bilateral cooperation. Notably, approximately 22.5% of Japanese yen loan commitments, amounting to \$430.32 million, during the period 1996-2006, were earmarked to support diverse projects encompassing water supply, sanitation, irrigation, and transportation.<sup>29</sup>

Since May 2010, Japanese ODA and science and technology budgets have been seamlessly amalgamated into the overarching framework of the "Valorization of Living Resources in Semi-Arid and Arid Lands for Regional Development" project. This collaborative initiative, orchestrated by JICA and the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), involves the Tsukuba University Alliance for Research on North Africa (ARENA).<sup>30</sup> In collaboration with the Hassan II Institute of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine and Qadi Ayyad University, Morocco was included alongside Tunisia in this project in 2015.<sup>31</sup>

ARENA is dedicated to the meticulous analysis of plant characteristics, exploring the potential for the development of pharmaceuticals and food products, and investigating the preservation of plant genetic resources within the contexts of Tunisia and Morocco. The overarching research goals extend to the formulation of practical methods for the extraction and identification of functional plant components. Significantly, the anticipated outcomes of this research carry the potential to augment the income of producers and manufacturers, particularly if pharmaceuticals and health-focused food products, enriched with these characteristics, find applications in industry and development.

This collaborative project in the agricultural sector contributes substantively to the augmentation of production capacities for high-value-added agricultural products and the enhancement of technical capabilities within the private sector. Aligned with governmental policies targeting the food industry, the project lays the foundation for a cohesive value chain conducive to export-oriented production. Consequently, this initiative creates the groundwork for supplying and exporting high-value-added agricultural products, thereby fostering economic growth in both Tunisia and Morocco.<sup>32</sup>

#### **- Renewable Energy Sector:**

The discourse surrounding Japanese relations with the Maghreb countries in the energy sector predominantly revolves around investments, mirroring patterns observed with other industrial powers. However, the economic engagements between Japan and Algeria exhibit a distinctive facet, notably marked by the provision of loans by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) in 1976. These financial resources were directed towards supporting the National Company for Hydrocarbons (SONATRACH) for technical and industrial purposes, reflecting a nuanced dimension of economic collaboration.<sup>33</sup>



Nihon's collaboration with the five countries in the realm of renewable energy began to crystallize in the late 1990s. Notably, in 2005, the Borj Cedria Technopark in Tunisia materialized with substantial support from JICA. Functioning as a specialized facility, it attracts research institutions and industries dedicated to renewable energy, concurrently serving as a platform for studying the efficiency of renewable energy equipment in the distinctive desert conditions of North Africa.<sup>34</sup>

The East Asia nation's keen interest in renewable energies within the region found concrete expression in the Sahara Solar Breeder project, proposed by the Council of Science in Japan during the G8+5 Academies meeting in Rome in 2009. This ambitious initiative targets Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, envisioning the installation and manufacturing of photovoltaic panels across the vast Sahara Desert to harness solar electricity for global connectivity. In 2010, further underscoring this commitment, JICA entered into a financing and cooperation agreement with the Algerian government. This agreement specifically aimed at enhancing the efficiency of photovoltaic panels derived from desert sands. Importantly, JICA's commitment extends beyond financial support to encompass the promotion of research collaboration with Algerian universities, reflecting a comprehensive and collaborative approach to advancing renewable energy technologies.<sup>35</sup>

### **- Supporting Economic and Social Stability:**

Japan, leveraging its official aid programs, actively fosters economic growth in the five countries, concurrently contributing to the preservation of their social and political stability. A dedicated portion of Japan's assistance is strategically directed towards addressing local issues, thereby playing a role in enhancing stability within the Middle East and Africa. The commitment of Nihon to this cause is underscored in official aid documents issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explicitly outlining support for the developmental initiatives spearheaded by the governments of these countries.

This commitment manifested concretely through financial allocations, as evidenced by the provision of 2 million yen in support of the Mauritanian Economic and Social Development Program in 2016. Additionally, a parallel commitment was demonstrated with the allocation of 5 million yen to enhance the Economic and Social Development Program initiated by Morocco in both 2016 and 2017.<sup>36</sup>

The archipelago's core principle guiding its official aid to Algeria is rooted in the aspiration to significantly contribute to the establishment of foundational elements for economic development. This commitment transcends the confines of the energy sector, extending its scope to encompass the broader local industrial landscape. This strategic approach involves the meticulous training of human resources tailored for emerging industries.<sup>37</sup> Within this framework, Japan actively supports Tunisia's endeavors to establish a stable political system and achieve continuous economic development, capitalizing on Japanese technologies and knowledge. The primary objective is to foster enduring cooperation between Tunisia and Japan, thereby

creating a conducive business environment for Japanese enterprises established in Tunisia. These enterprises, in turn, participate in economic activities strategically targeting markets in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. This multi-faceted approach aligns with Japan's commitment to both regional stability and sustainable economic development in the region, extending across far northwest Africa.

Japan actively engaged in the "Quality and Productivity Improvement Project in Tunisia," launched in 2016, as a strategic initiative to bolster the Tunisian government's endeavors in advancing the local industry. The primary focus was on elevating the quality and productivity standards of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This goal was realized through the systematic training of human resources, specifically as "Kaizen" consultants, dedicated to promoting activities geared towards quality and productivity enhancement. Notably, Japanese experts played a pivotal role in training 23 Tunisians, equipping them as key Kaizen trainers. Subsequently, these trained individuals assumed roles as consultants within various technology centers under the purview of the Ministry of Industry and SMEs. Their contributions proved instrumental in augmenting competitiveness and fostering economic growth.<sup>38</sup>

In a parallel effort, Japan, in 2013, dispatched advisors to support the initiatives of the "Moroccan Agency for Investment Development (AMDI)." This strategic collaboration aimed at attracting Japanese companies to invest in Morocco. The advisors played a crucial role in building organizational capacities within the agency, ensuring the provision of adept consultations and pertinent information to Japanese companies contemplating investment plans or expanding their operations in Morocco. This initiative was an integral component of the broader Japanese assistance package announced during TICAD V.<sup>39</sup>

The Japanese government has consistently dedicated a part of its aid to Mauritania to enhance the economic and social infrastructure within the country. Commencing in 2013, Japan has disbursed \$43.9 million in funding for diverse development projects. This includes substantial support for the expansion of Nouadhibou Port, the enhancement of the traditional fishing port in Nouadhibou, and the establishment of laboratories for health monitoring under the purview of the Mauritanian Office of Health Inspection (MOHI). In parallel, assistance has been extended for the execution of 117 local projects.<sup>40</sup>

A noteworthy facet of Japan's official aid policy towards the Maghreb lies in its intentional alignment with the national development programs adopted by the respective governments. This strategic approach involves directing a significant portion of the aid towards supporting local project programs and aligning with the Mauritanian government's overarching strategy to fight poverty and malnutrition. Since the establishment of its embassy in Mauritania in 2009, Japan has additionally contributed funds towards the completion of 23 small-scale local projects. These initiatives play a pivotal role in reinforcing human security and lending support to the

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economic policy initiatives launched by the Moroccan National Initiative for Human Development (MNIHD) in 2005.<sup>41</sup>

JICA strategically directs its efforts towards diminishing regional and social disparities, aiming to facilitate sustainable economic growth within the interior regions of the country. This comprehensive approach underscores Japan's commitment to fostering inclusive development and addressing significant socio-economic challenges in the Maghreb.

At a broader level, state-sponsored aid programs consistently adhere to the fundamental principles of official Japanese development assistance and align with the nation's foreign policy objectives. This alignment is explicitly articulated in key documents, such as the "Japanese Cooperation Policy for the Kingdom of Morocco,"<sup>42</sup> released by MOFA in May 2012, and the "Guidelines for Assistance by Country for the Republic of Tunisia."<sup>43</sup> Both documents delineate priority areas for assistance, emphasizing the expansion of cooperation through a tripartite approach, inclusive of the broader African context.

Japan identifies both Morocco and Tunisia as pivotal bridges for fostering effective diplomacy towards Africa through economic assistance. This strategic vision is reaffirmed by the "Summary Country Assistance Evaluation of Tunisia," a document issued by MOFA. The summary underscores the imperative of judiciously using aid extended to the Tunisian government and underscores the role of aid in shaping Japan's diplomatic stance towards the Maghreb. This strategic alignment serves to discern the optimal utilization of Japanese ODA within the broader framework of diplomatic objectives.<sup>44</sup>

### **- Security and Social Stability:**

Demonstrating its commitment to addressing the refugee crisis in the Sahel region, the archipelago actively collaborates with international organizations. In 2015, Japan's efforts resulted in providing humanitarian aid amounting to \$11.8 million, specifically directed towards the welfare of Malian refugees in Mauritania. This initiative highlights Japan's dedication to alleviating the challenges posed by regional displacement.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, Japan maintains a collaborative partnership with the International Organization for Migration to enhance conditions in the border areas between Mauritania and Mali, contributing to regional stability and well-being.

Beyond addressing immediate humanitarian needs, the East Asia Nation has undertaken multifaceted projects to improve living conditions in Mauritania's remote areas. Substantial funding has been earmarked for initiatives focused on enhancing healthcare services and ensuring access to safe drinking water. Additionally, a financial allocation of \$1 million has been directed to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aiming to fortify counter-terrorism efforts and prevent cross-border crime in Mauritania. Complementarily, around \$3 million has been allocated to support security and justice initiatives for the Mauritanian

government, forming an integral part of broader counter-terrorism measures in the Sahel region.<sup>46</sup> These collaborative endeavors underscore Japan's holistic approach to addressing humanitarian and security challenges in this African territory.

Moreover, in 2013, Japan provided support through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) by allocating 58 million yen to strengthen security legislation against terrorism.<sup>47</sup> Concurrently, in the same year, a significant allocation of 254 million yen was directed through the UNDP to enhance the development of a crisis management system in Tunisia. In 2015, an additional 687 million yen was earmarked to improve security equipment, with Morocco receiving 3.88 million yen in the same year for a project dedicated to enhancing security apparatus.<sup>48</sup>

Consistent with Japan's overarching international cooperation policy, it is evident that aid serves as a strategic tool to advance its external interests and strengthen positions in its relationships with recipient countries. Since the 1970s, ODA has consistently emerged as a pivotal instrument in achieving Japan's foreign policy objectives. Concerning the Maghreb, the various forms of cooperation facilitated by the Japanese government through its specialized agencies has achieved substantial benefits.

The impact of these aid initiatives transcends specific domains. Economically, Japan's cooperation policy is evident in the support of infrastructure projects and crucial economic sectors. Socially, it contributes to providing employment opportunities, addressing regional imbalances, and reducing unemployment rates, thereby fostering social stability. Additionally, a portion of the assistance is strategically directed at enhancing social conditions through initiatives such as school construction programs and hospital renovations. Politically and in terms of security, Japan's aid efforts play a vital role in contributing to political reform processes, especially since 2011, and providing support to Maghreb governments in their efforts to combat terrorism and violent groups. This is particularly evident in the aftermath of the 2013 terrorist attack at the In Amenas gas production facility in Algeria.

#### **4. A Crossroads of Assistance: Examining Japanese and Chinese Aid Strategies in Africa**

In the scrutiny of donor countries' strategies for providing development assistance, Japan and China emerge as longstanding competitors on the global stage. This competition for influence is particularly pronounced in the African continent, a traditional sphere where China has solidified its economic presence across various regions. Fueled by China's remarkable economic ascent, positioning itself as the second-largest global economic power since the second decade of the twenty-first century, a shift in global rankings has displaced Japan from its prior position.

Returning to our analysis of the strategic orientation of development assistance in alignment with national interests, both Asian powers have strategically deepened their connections with recipient countries, aligning themselves with the local

development agendas of African nations. Actors from Japan and China now play increasingly central roles in shaping Africa's future, contributing significantly through financing and constructing infrastructure projects across the continent, facilitating the training of thousands of African students and officials annually, and introducing innovative forms of engagement, notably exemplified by China's Belt and Road Initiative. This evolving landscape underscores the influential role of Japan and China in shaping the trajectory of development and cooperation in Africa.

Amidst a global landscape where the United States withdraws from multilateralism and the United Kingdom contends with internal disruptions following Brexit, both economically influential Japan and China wield considerable impact, seeking to influence international standards.<sup>49</sup> Leveraging historical experiences as aid recipients, Japan utilizes its extensive knowledge in advanced technologies and management techniques. Meanwhile, China, emerging as an economic powerhouse in Asia, brings formidable financial resources and historical intellectual ties with numerous African countries.<sup>50</sup>

In the era of globalization, reshaping traditional patterns of political and economic exchange, both Japan and China are pioneering innovative approaches in their engagements with Africa, challenging conventional methods of development assistance. This distinctive positioning provides valuable insights into addressing development challenges on the continent. The emphasis on partnership and mutual benefit in this evolving approach seeks to empower African leaders with greater influence in determining their developmental priorities. At the same time, the competition between the two powers extends into the realm of African development cooperation, marking a significant shift in the landscape of international relations.<sup>51</sup>

Both countries have established diplomatic connections with Africa through specialized governmental initiatives involving African leaders. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), initiated by the Japanese government in 1993, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), officially founded after the inaugural ministerial conference between China and African countries in Beijing from October 10 to 12, 2000, serve as prominent examples of these diplomatic engagements.

While FOCAC and TICAD exhibit certain similarities, significant differences exist in their structures and approaches. The Japanese model embraces a more pluralistic framework, involving active participation from civil society, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations such as the UNDP and the African Development Bank (AFD). In contrast, the Chinese model, exemplified by FOCAC, primarily emphasizes direct cooperation between the Chinese state and the ruling parties of African nations.<sup>52</sup> This fundamental distinction underscores diverse strategies in engagement and collaboration between the two frameworks.

The motivations driving Japan's ODA have transformed over the years, transitioning from predominantly economic-oriented goals to more strategic objectives. Prior to the 1990s, Japan's ODA prominently emphasized domestic economic objectives, following a tripartite model of aid, trade, and investment. However, the post-Cold War prompted Japan to recognize the strategic significance of ODA as a potent tool to elevate its international political standing. In the new century, amidst changing local and global dynamics, Japanese assistance progressively honed in on the objectives outlined in the Revised Official Development Assistance Charter of 2003, with a notable shift towards prioritizing peace and development.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, China's motivations for foreign aid have evolved from primarily political objectives to a more targeted focus on economic goals. From the establishment of the People's Republic of China until the late 1970s, Chinese foreign aid was predominantly influenced by ideological and political factors, such as resisting imperialism and colonialism and supporting national liberation movements in other developing countries. Post the 1980s, Chinese diplomacy gradually distanced itself from "Leftist" ideologies, particularly after the reform of the foreign aid system in 1995. Consequently, the foundations of Chinese aid became more akin to Japan's approach before the 1990s, with national interests at the forefront, serving as a linchpin for foreign policies.<sup>54</sup>

In a pivotal development in 1994, Ms. Wu Yi, former Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC), introduced the "Major Economic and Trade Strategy," seamlessly integrating foreign trade, investment, and international economic cooperation. This integration set the stage for China's "going out" strategy launched in 1999, where foreign aid emerged as a crucial tool to bolster exports, facilitate investments, ensure resource supplies, and create additional opportunities for local companies. This strategic shift underscores China's adept alignment of foreign aid with its broader economic and diplomatic objectives.<sup>55</sup>

**- Dimensions and Criteria of Foreign Aid Allocation:**

It is imperative to highlight that Japanese development cooperation with Africa, while influenced to some extent by its membership in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), has developed its distinctive system. Japan's approach strategically aims to advance its economic interests and capitalize on the economic opportunities arising from Africa's integration into the global market. The continent is comprehensively situated within the framework of Japan's diplomatic strategy, which adopts a global perspective.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast, China, not a member of the DAC in the economic field, has carved a unique path by building on its ideological alignment with African countries, particularly within the context of the post-independence movement of the Third World. This has enabled China to establish a nuanced relationship with African and Maghrebi leaders. Unlike Japan, China formulates its relationship with Africa in terms

of cooperation among South-South countries, employing the discourse of solidarity and partnership. Beijing consistently emphasizes commonalities between Africa and China, particularly the notion that Western development experiences offer limited lessons for both parties.<sup>57</sup>

### **- Aid's Essence and Objectives:**

Many analysts frequently concentrate on the pragmatic motives of the two Asian powers, primarily oriented toward securing strategic resources. However, the relationship surpasses the conventional exploitation of resources, as both countries adopt a novel approach to development cooperation, recognizing the growing significance of Africa in the global economy. The current leaders of both nations prioritize economic and political engagement with the continent. For example, President Xi Jinping made his first overseas trip as the head of state to six African countries, underscoring the region's importance. Similarly, to establish new partnerships for Japanese companies, Shinzo Abe visited three African countries in early 2014, marking the first visit by a Japanese prime minister to Africa since Junichiro Koizumi's visit in 2006. This strategic affirmation reflects a commitment to advancing Japanese interests on the continent.<sup>58</sup>

China's involvement in Africa encompasses various dimensions, beyond the common focus on resource acquisition. While criticisms have been directed at practices such as continued reliance on non-local labor, lax environmental records, and technology transfer issues, it is essential to recognize that the substantial injection of Chinese financial resources into the continent played a pivotal role in shielding Africa from the catastrophic effects of the 2008 financial crisis. China's resource diplomacy not only secures essential resources but also provides Africa with an alternative economic partner devoid of political conditions, highlighting the multifaceted nature of China's engagement with the continent.<sup>59</sup>

The interaction between China and Africa manifests a comprehensive sectoral focus, illustrating a strategic approach to resource acquisition. This entails leveraging the financial resources of state-owned companies to outpace competitors and linking substantial development aid to oil contracts. Despite facing criticism for the expansive pursuit of economic interests, the foreign partner, particularly China, has concurrently facilitated vital investments in Africa's natural resources. Particularly noteworthy is China's commitment to principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal political processes, which has been positively received on the African continent.

Beyond the acquisition of natural resources, the inflow of Chinese capital into Africa significantly contributes to generating employment opportunities for Chinese service contractors, particularly in the construction sector. According to Chinese analysts, Africa ranks as the second-largest source of service contracts for China. They assert that "when we provide aid to Africa worth one billion Chinese yuan, we will obtain service contracts worth one billion US dollars (equivalent to 6 billion Chinese yuan) from Africa." Diverging from typical Chinese financial aid structures to Africa,

Beijing specifies that infrastructure construction contracts and other service agreements should predominantly benefit Chinese service providers, with 70% allocated to "certified" Chinese companies, a majority of which are state-owned, and the remaining part is open to Chinese local companies. Many of these ventures also take the form of joint ventures with Chinese groups. Consequently, the financing extended by China to Africa, encompassing aid, serves the dual purpose of creating business opportunities for Chinese companies and generating job opportunities for Chinese workers—an integral element of Beijing's exit strategy.<sup>60</sup>

The Japanese approach in the post-reactive era towards Africa challenges the traditional perception of Japanese foreign policy\*\*\*\*, characterized as reactive and lacking sustainability and innovation. Under Prime Minister Abe, a novel and multifaceted approach emerged, introducing strategic engagement with Africa. This approach encompasses a comprehensive framework for developing infrastructure on the continent, placing a strong emphasis on private sector involvement through public-private partnerships. Unlike his predecessors, Prime Minister Abe injected a sense of urgency and importance into the African agenda.<sup>61</sup>

The proliferation of minerals for infrastructure deals, coupled with its non-interventionist policies, has garnered the Middle Kingdom significant popularity among African dictatorships. As anticipated, Nihon and other nations leverage these aspects of Sino-African relations as a political or moral tool to critique China. Criticisms directed at the PRC include accusations of colonial-style resource exploitation, marked by the cost-effective acquisition of natural resources, a lack of transparency in projects, and the reliance on Chinese human capital instead of employing local African workers. An illustrative instance of such criticism transpired in early 2014 when a spokesperson for the Japanese government denounced China's collusion with corrupt leaders, stating that "countries like Japan... cannot provide beautiful homes or beautiful ministerial buildings to African leaders." Prime Minister Abe also appeared to articulate pointed criticisms of China, pledging that Japan would "not explore and extract resources just to bring them to Japan." This underscores the distinctiveness of the archipelago's approach and its strategic deviation from certain elements of the PRC's engagement in Africa.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, Chinese leaders depict Japanese aid to Africa as part of Tokyo's strategy to secure support for obtaining a seat in the UN Security Council. According to Paul Nantulya, a research associate at the Washington-based Africa Center for Strategic Affairs, "African countries are the largest voting bloc in the UN. Tokyo is concerned that African nations could side with China— as many already did on Ukraine — and against its interests in areas such as the Western Pacific, where the two are in a dispute over the ownership of the Senkaku Islands." Nantulya adds that Japan is uneasy about African countries aligning with China on various issues. This apprehension underscores the central focus of the current Tokyo conference on diplomatically re-engaging African countries.<sup>63</sup> In this context, China's approach in



Africa is perceived as an endeavor to mobilize support for its "One China" policy, promote its agenda in multilateral forums, and position itself as a "responsible stakeholder." China's aid to Africa is seen as a comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategy challenging simplistic classifications.<sup>64</sup>

It is noteworthy that political motivations likely underpin most aid donations, explaining why certain countries provide assistance to specific nations, even amid weaker economic conditions that necessitate more substantial aid.

The divergent development aid strategies pursued by these donors in Africa are distinctly evident. Japan's methodology involves allocating a segment of its aid portfolio to infrastructure development, affording recipient nations the autonomy to determine projects without imposition. The archipelago underscores its commitment to training Africans for infrastructure construction, deliberately avoiding the deployment of Japanese workers. This deliberate distinction from China's customary practices, characterized by stringent control over projects and reliance on Chinese labor, signifies Nihon's explicit effort to counter Chinese influence by addressing perceived vulnerabilities in Africa. An illustrative example is Japan's initiative to invite qualified Africans for training within Japanese companies, a departure from the PRC's approach of offering university scholarships. This underscores Japan's active role in fostering employment opportunities for Africans.<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, empirical data indicates a decline in Japan's trade volumes with Africa, juxtaposed against China's trade dominance, which surged to a record \$254 billion in 2021. In the arena of aid, the archipelago faces a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the middle kingdom, owing to its substantial national debt and contracting economy, constraining its ability to match China's financial contributions. Moreover, Japan confronts challenges in extending assistance to nations accused of widespread corruption and human rights violations, in contrast to China's loans that lack such restrictions, rendering them more appealing to certain African nations.<sup>66</sup> These intricacies contribute to the nuanced competition between both donors in their respective engagements with Africa.

While Japan encounters challenges in matching China's financial contributions quantitatively, it distinguishes itself by offering high-quality projects characterized by transparency and collaborative partnerships with African countries. These projects adhere to international standards in infrastructure financing, emphasizing a commitment to excellence in development assistance.

Both Japan and China have consistently prioritized infrastructure and production sectors in their official development assistance efforts. The 2003 ODA Charter outlined two essential principles: "Supporting the self-help efforts of developing countries" and "Benefiting from Japan's experiences and expertise."<sup>67</sup> With a track record of over 30 years of robust economic growth and notable achievements in poverty reduction, Japan possesses invaluable experience in economic development. Similarly, China, having undergone significant economic growth and poverty reduction, also brings rich experience to the table. A key aspect of China's foreign aid

policy is to "assist recipient countries in building their capacity for self-development." Like Japan, China emphasizes that a country's primary reliance for development should be on its self-efforts. Consequently, China strives to build infrastructure and enhance individual and technical capabilities in recipient countries through foreign aid, laying the groundwork for future development, promoting self-reliance, and fostering independent growth.<sup>68</sup>

The shared focus on aiding and supporting economic infrastructure in recipient countries, and improving transportation, logistics services, and communications, underscores the commitment of both Japan and China to capacity building for the self-development of the recipient country.

The two donors strategically underscore the cultivation of soft power through the development of human resources, the export of practices, and the promotion of cultural skills to bolster trade exchanges. China, facing criticism for deploying its labor force in African projects, has responded by promoting Chinese culture and the Mandarin language through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes. In contrast, Japan prioritizes cultivating "excellent human capabilities in business" as it explores new avenues for investments, projects, and markets on the continent. Japan actively advocates the Kaizen management philosophy in Africa, emphasizing the importance of human development. The Japanese approach to business in Africa places a robust emphasis on training local human resources, manifesting a commitment to fostering indigenous talent.<sup>69</sup>

- **Exploring Political Criteria: Challenges and Constraints of 'Western Democracy'**

For the PRC, the success of its model in non-democratic African countries serves as an affirmation of its belief in the non-universality of Western-style democracy. This underscores a significant distinction in the criteria applied to democratic governance in the relationships between the two neighbors: China does not prioritize these criteria, while Japan feels more comfortable incorporating them into the context of development cooperation. The Japanese stance, emphasizing democratic standards and human rights in aid provision, presents a paradox. Tokyo's position on regional issues and transformations is not solely driven by political principles but is intricately linked to safeguarding its economic and political interests derived from the continuity of its presence in the region. This is evident in Japan's swift recognition of the Sisi Regime in 2013.

The nuanced interplay between political principles and pragmatic considerations characterizes Japan's engagement with democratic governance issues in Africa. As emerging players in development cooperation, both Japan and China recognize the immense potential of Africa and employ diplomatic conferences to establish a framework for managing their relationships based on historical and ideological principles. Japan, in particular, seeks to redefine and reframe existing standards of development cooperation. This relationship underscores the deep

strategic considerations that both countries harbor for their engagement on the continent. Consequently, African countries must approach this matter critically, evaluating the commitment of Japan and China to standards that prioritize African development requirements. The meaningful implementation of development cooperation standards, beyond mere inclusions in diplomatic documents, should manifest in actual projects, demonstrating a departure from the approaches of other donor countries in their dealings with Africa. As the two Asian powers intensify their economic activities on the continent, Africa's relations with traditional actors are steadily waning. There is a pervasive sense of pessimism regarding the prospects of development cooperation for Africa, marked by fatigue from aid provision. The evolving dynamics of these relationships demand a nuanced assessment of their implications for Africa's development trajectory.<sup>70</sup>

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Concurrently with other nations, Japan strategically employs development cooperation to safeguard its national interests, emphasizing "proactive contribution to peace" through international cooperation. The targeted Official Development Assistance (ODA) addresses both development and human rights concerns, all the while facilitating the expansion of Japanese companies. Serving as a prominent diplomatic tool, development cooperation plays a pivotal role in Japan's pursuit of global peace, stability, and prosperity. The international community has acknowledged Nihon's efforts, underscoring the significance of its ODA program in fostering a world characterized by peace and stability, particularly in its neighborhood and resource-rich areas such as the Maghreb. Maghreb nations have experienced tangible benefits across various sectors, aligning with Japanese interests in fisheries, political stability, and international standing.

For a comprehensive understanding of international development assistance and its role in promoting African development, a comparative study with the methodologies of other donor countries is imperative. Such an approach can yield pragmatic insights, informing local development policies and plans to optimize the effective utilization of aid. A critical examination of the socio-economic impacts of aid in the African context, particularly in the Maghreb, holds the potential to enhance our comprehension of this policy and guide its effective implementation for the improvement of social conditions in the region. Further research in this direction can deepen our insights into the complexities of international development aid and its implications for African development.

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