

Introduction

The Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7) held in Yokohama City in August 2019 concluded with the “Yokohama Declaration 2019” under the theme “Advancing Africa’s development through people, technology and innovation.” The declaration confirmed the importance of the following three pillars: i) Accelerating economic transformation and improving business environment through innovation and private sector engagement, ii) Deepening sustainable and resilient society, and iii) Strengthening peace and stability.

The “Yokohama Plan of Actions 2019,” which accompanies the declaration, lists “Promote vocational training and increase access to services and expanded opportunities for women and youth” as one of the actions for Japan to take under the second pillar of “Deepening sustainable and resilient society.” Under this action, implementation of training and exchange programs for officials and others from countries that are striving to combat gender-based violence (GBV) is listed as one of its initiatives.

The presidents and first ladies of the Republic of Namibia, the Republic of Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Madagascar, and the Republic of Mali took the podium as speakers or panelists to a side event of TICAD7 titled “Zero gender-based violence for African future: Together, we can!”¹ The Japanese Minister of State for Gender Equality also participated in the event.

In the context of growing global momentum, elimination of GBV is stated in Goal 5 of “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and discussed in various international forums and multilateral negotiations such as G7, G20, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

In Japan, the cabinet approved the “Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality” in December 2020. The basic plan states that violence against women is a grievous human rights violation as well as an illegal act. The basic plan takes various measures for the elimination of all acts of GBV through promotion of its prevention and recovery programs.

Against such backdrop, this program aims to contribute to human resource development and building capacity of GBV service providers, through interaction among participants from the Asia-Pacific region including Japan and Africa involved in addressing GBV issues and sharing experiences and knowledge of each country. Outcomes from this program are expected to be linked to TICAD8 to be held in 2022.

In 2020, a survey on the current situation of GBV in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa was conducted and program participants were selected in cooperation with the government and diplomatic missions of Japan. Online meetings to share and exchange information and opinions were also held² in order to ensure smooth operation of the future exchange program. Based on the needs and challenges identified from the survey and online meetings, the content of the exchange program to be held in Japanese fiscal year 2021 was discussed.³

The details of the program content, how and when to hold the forum of the “Asia-Pacific and African women’s exchange program – Elimination of gender-based violence” for 2021 will be considered based on the report of this year’s information sharing/opinion exchange meetings as well as the status of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Jointly organized by the Organization of African First Ladies for Development, African Union, and United Nations Population Fund.

² The meetings were held online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

³ The exchange program may be held online depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic.