

## **Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development**

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From August 20–22, 2025, leaders from Africa, Japan, and the wider international community gathered in Yokohama, Japan, for the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9). Held every three years, this year’s summit was convened under the theme “*Co-create Innovative Solutions with Africa.*” Co-organised by the Government of Japan, the African Union Commission, the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank, TICAD has become a vital platform for shaping the framework of Japan–Africa development cooperation.

The conference took place at a pivotal moment. While Africa’s economies are projected to grow faster than the global average in 2025–26, the continent remains highly vulnerable. Dependence on volatile commodity prices, rising debt burdens, and shrinking fiscal space continue to limit investment in critical sectors. At the same time, food insecurity, high unemployment, and the challenges of a youthful and rapidly expanding population demand urgent solutions. Against this backdrop, TICAD 9 offered a timely opportunity for renewed Japan–Africa collective action.

Reflecting Africa’s development priorities, the forum reaffirmed agriculture as a cornerstone of socio-economic transformation. Despite its vast potential, the sector is constrained by climate change, low productivity, and limited agro-processing capacity. Leaders pledged to scale up climate-smart agriculture, expand modern irrigation, and strengthen agro-processing industries to boost productivity, enhance intra-African trade, and end hunger.

The summit also recognised digital transformation as a powerful driver of inclusive growth. While initiatives such as the Smart Africa Initiative and the AU’s Digital Transformation Roadmap are advancing, challenges remain in infrastructure, digital skills, and equitable access. New proposals—including AI Centers of Excellence, regional innovation hubs, and expanded digital infrastructure—aim to nurture startups, build capacity, and accelerate Africa’s digital future.

Another strong theme was the empowerment of youth and women, seen as central to Africa’s transformation. Given the continent’s predominantly youthful population, initiatives such as the African Business Education (ABE) Initiative and the Africa Youth Program 2025 will expand opportunities in entrepreneurship, education, and leadership, positioning young people and women at the forefront of innovation and economic change.

Unlike earlier TICAD meetings, large-scale financial pledges were absent. Instead, the focus shifted toward improving access to affordable finance and leveraging private sector-led investment. This shift reflects both the decline in official development assistance and the recognition that aid-heavy models are unsustainable. By prioritising investment and innovation, TICAD 9 emphasised Africa's potential to drive its own development.

Japan and African countries share a long history of engagement dating back to the 1950s, though major cooperation initiatives can be traced to 1993 with the creation of TICAD. While the initial focus was on industrial and infrastructure development, the partnership has since expanded to cover a wide range of priorities. The outcomes of TICAD 9 reaffirm the commitment to this long-term partnership and alignment with Africa's development priorities.