

FRS – Japan Program

Japan as a security purveyor in Western Africa: conceptual and geographical challenges

Interview with Mika Inoue-Hanzawa



Mika INOUE-HANZAWA is currently an Associate professor at the Toyo Gakuen University. She was previously an Associate professor at the Hiroshima Shudo University (2010-2017) and a Visiting fellow at the Hiroshima Peace Institute (2015). She also worked for the MOFA as a Research fellow at the International Peace Cooperation Division and the International Law Division in 2008. From July 2005 to January 2006, she was a Visiting scholar at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), Columbia University with a Fulbright scholarship. She received a MA from the Tsuda College in 2002 and completed her doctoral course at the institution in 2008. From April 2018, she has been a Ph.D. candidate of the Graduate Program on Human Security, University of Tokyo.

Her research interests cover both International Politics and International Security Studies. Much of her work is about UN Peacekeeping in Africa (particularly Somalia, South Sudan), as well as relations between the UN and regional organizations (AU, IGAD) regarding the question of peace and security. She also writes articles about Japan's international peace cooperation in Africa.

Question 1: How has the concept of human security evolved in 2020 under pressure from the pandemics?

The spread of Covid-19 has increased the human security crisis in Africa. Nobody can escape from the fear of infection. The inadequacy of public health has a strong, immediate impact on the most vulnerable people in society. The costs and risk of infection can lead to delays in development and cause confusion in social institutions. Radicalism can spread by taking advantage of the social unrest. Particularly in Africa, securitization of the

infection is underway. The pandemic of Covid-19 is a global issue that crosses national borders, and it is required that various actors deal with it in a multilateral and multi-layered manner through international cooperation.

The spread of Covid-19 also necessitates policymakers to show how useful human security is as a policy. International distribution of vaccines is one of the most important issues. While the promotion of the COVAX facility is required, "vaccine nationalism" and the inequality between developed and developing countries have become apparent. Coordinating health

policies among nations is necessary but can make it difficult to take a bottom-up approach that human security often requires.

There is also a danger that terrorism, already serious in East and West Africa, might spread further in vulnerable nations and conflicts areas under the spread of Covid-19 infection. While human security has not dealt directly with security in the narrow sense, the important thing is how we can break the negative link between the spread of the infection and terrorism. Furthermore, it will be necessary to clarify the respective roles of human security and the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). While the former is an approach, the latter is a set of goals set for the international community. The two ideas are close in concept and human security approaches will be useful in achieving the goal of “No one left behind” set forth in the SDGs.

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Question 2: The African continent has been facing multiple challenges aside from the Covid-19 pandemics. What role can Japan play in Africa in order to contribute to the global safety and security of the continent?

The best course of action for Africa’s security is to stop the pandemic of Covid-19 as soon as possible and at all cost. For in Africa, health crisis can easily be securitized. It is important, therefore, while trying to cope with the pandemic, not to stop the ongoing peacebuilding effort. In the process, supporting regional framework from outside is essential.

Africa has considerable experience in confronting infectious diseases such as Ebola, malaria, and HIV-AIDS. Some countries such as Nigeria have succeeded in implementing effective policies, especially during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemics. While making use of such African experience, Japan can play an important supplementary role.

Vaccines are in short supply in Africa. Japan needs to include African vaccine security in its goal of achieving Global Health Coverage (UHC). Information gathering and analysis capabilities are also needed. The African Union (AU) has its own Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDCs), but it is difficult to grasp the situation in vulnerable societies under conflict. Providing knowledge and know-how in such fields will strengthen the pandemic control in Africa.

As I have said, not stopping the peace-keeping and counter-terrorism activities is equally important. It is expected that many of the United Nations (UN) member states may attach so much importance to pandemic countermeasures in their own countries that the budget, personnel, and supplies for peace operations may well be reduced or insufficient. The AU has already developed its own missions in multiple regions and countries such as Somalia, and willing states in West Africa have contributed to the G5 Sahel. The expenses required for such missions are always insufficient, and these operations are heavily relying on the support of actors other than Africa, such as the UN and the European Union (EU). Even if it is difficult for Japan to offer bilateral and direct security support on the ground to the parties concerned, it should be possible for Japan to encourage Africa’s seamless security effort by financially supporting the AU and sub-regional institutions.

The AU has just held the 34th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly (February 6-7, 2021), and there has been a reassignment of personnel of the AU commission. Various institutional reforms are planned in the next four years. Japan should be fully aware of and adjust to these recent changes to become an indirect purveyor of security in Africa.

Concerning peacebuilding and conflict prevention to promote human security, Japan has focused its action on sustainable support at the local level. As international resources tend to go to pandemic countermeasures, it is essential to support steady efforts for sustaining peace in Africa in a long-term perspective. At TICAD 8 in Tunisia in 2022, it will be useful to evaluate policies and identify issues in view of the current pandemic and its impact on security.

Question 3: What cooperation could be put in place with the EU and/or EU member states to implement the concept of human security in Africa?

Japan and the EU share essential values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights and basic freedoms. The two sides have signed the Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) at the 25th EU-Japan Summit in 2018 and have been cooperating in a wide range of fields well before the Covid-19 pandemic occurred. In the pursuit of human security in Africa, we share the view that destabilization due to a combination of local factors in Africa poses a threat to global security. It is a global responsibility for Japan and the EU to continue cooperation in Africa, such as institution-building at national and local levels, ensuring transparency and accountability, focusing on the nexus of humanitarian development and security in peacebuilding.

It is true that there are differences between Japan and the EU in their motives, objectives and methods of pursuing human security in Africa. For example, while West Africa and Libya have strong historical ties with Europe and provide direct threats to Europe, Japan has difficulty in providing military support to, for instance, the G5 Sahel. However, a broad and long-term non-military approach is by no means secondary for building sustainable peace in West Africa. Japan should be able to act as a coordinator of the global, regional, national, and local actors in cooperation with the EU. The European Union has supported security sector reform in Africa (for example in Somalia), while strengthening the socio-economic resilience of local governments and society. Providing vaccines to refugees and internally displaced persons is an issue often neglected by the international community, but it is important for the idea of “no one left behind” in human security. In addition, Japan’s training of peacekeeping personnel in East Africa as well as in Asia will lead to the global sharing of knowledge and experience.

Question 4: From the Indo-Pacific strategy to the Indo-Pacific Initiative, is the concept still important for Japan in relation with West Africa?

The Japanese government defines the Indo-Pacific region as “public goods”. Maintaining and developing international public communication in the region on the basis of a stable international order, the rule of law, freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and promotion of free trade is, while not limited to the region, of central importance to Japan.

So far, the Japanese government, in promoting the Indo-Pacific Initiative, has

mainly committed in the Gulf of Aden and the coast of East Africa. West Africa, however, faces various difficult issues such as conflicts, terrorism deriving from radical fundamentalism, and the question of border control. The pandemic of Covid-19 has made the situation more complicated. West African problems are not only a regional matter, they are a global issue. Japan's involvement in that region should be highly relevant to the Indo-Pacific Initiative.

Multilateral cooperation in global and regional frameworks should be emphasized in addressing the acute issues in West Africa. Japan's knowledge and experience of anti-piracy activities implemented in the Gulf of Aden in the past decade will be utilized in response to the piracy cases that have recently been increasing in West Africa.

Regarding counter-terrorism, as the pandemic of Covid-19 affects vulnerable societies, Al-Shabaab is expanding from Somalia to other parts of East Africa. In addition to the growing insecurity of the port of Mombasa, it has been pointed out that extremists in Mozambique are in contact with IS. By supporting the AU and sub-regional organizations that have experience in responding to such cases in a regional framework, stabilization in West Africa can be promoted. In this regard, steady implementation of the Sahel Partnership Action Plan adopted at the 2019 G7 is essential. For both Japan and the EU (particularly France), it is highly important to secure more involvement of the international community in the security of West Africa.

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