

[Opening Session]

Opening Remarks by Katsuki Oda

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1. Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the organizers of this program, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Japan Education Forum (JEF) VI.

The JEF was inaugurated to provide a platform for a frank and open exchange of views on international cooperation in order to support efforts to improve education in developing countries. We are pleased to hold the sixth forum today, inviting practitioners and researchers, both from Japan and abroad, who are leaders working on the front lines in the field of education.

2. Japan's International Cooperation in Education

As last year marked the halfway point to 2015, the target year for achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many meetings on development were held to accelerate the efforts of the international community, including the United Nations High-Level Meeting on the MDGs and the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development.

In that significant year, Japan assumed the important roles of the G8 presidency to lead discussions on wide-ranging issues faced by the international community. In the field of education, Japan served as a co-chair of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a global partnership to ensure accelerated progress toward universal primary education. Japan also hosted the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) on the largest scale since the conference was launched at Japan's initiative in 1993. Thus the year was extremely important for Japan.

Development starts and ends with people, and education is nothing but empowering people. In other words, education is not only essential to realize "human security" so that people can enhance their fulfillment and live with dignity by cultivating their potential and capabilities but also indispensable for developing countries to achieve self-sustaining development by overcoming various problems.

From this viewpoint, Japan regards education as one of the priority areas, and engaged in a series of activities in preparation for the TICAD IV and the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit to maintain and strengthen the momentum of the international community to achieve the EFA goals and the MDGs.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, in his policy speech at the FTI's Technical Meeting held in last April, reaffirmed the importance of education in development, emphasizing the need to further expand and enhance basic education both qualitatively and quantitatively. He also stressed the importance of improving various levels of education beyond basic education in a balanced manner, which will lead to the self-reliance and growth of each country. He further noted that synergies need to be developed between education and other sectors and that partnerships must be created to incorporate all members of the society.

On various occasions leading up to the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit, Japan has laid out its direction which it puts extra focus on. Through these efforts, the Leaders Declaration of the Summit reaffirmed the global commitment toward universal primary education and the need to strike a good balance between primary and post-primary education.

It is highly significant that this policy was reflected to the Yokohama Action Plan of the TICAD IV with many supports from many African nations and was endorsed at the meeting of the high-level group on Education for All in

Oslo in December 2008.

Japan was also deeply involved in the management of the FTI as a co-chair and led the discussion to further improve FTI's effectiveness and efficiency, while introducing our ideas on international cooperation in education to the discussion of the FTI.

3. The Importance of Enhancing the Educational Quality and Governance

Recent reports illustrate rapid improvement has been made in enrollment rates for primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southwest Asia. We all welcome the steady progress of the world toward achieving EFA and MDGs. It is essential that this progress leads to a smooth expansion of opportunities for post-basic education.

However, the rapid expansion of access to education encompasses a risk of declining quality. Promoting quality education is imperative to achieve EFA in a sustainable and truly meaningful manner. This is a major challenge shared by all nations and regions. We must endeavor to assure the quality of education by focusing on the learning outcomes of students needs to be strengthened in addition to improving teaching contents, educational services and higher education for pre-service teacher training. Quality of education, however, is not always easy to measure. Academic achievement can be objectively assessed, but such elements as values, creativity and social skills are difficult to measure as each country and society requires different skills. Therefore each country must fully recognize its own situation and the needs and promote quality education through a multi-faceted and holistic approach. It is also important to support the learning process.

In order to achieve EFA with quality, educational service must be appropriately delivered throughout the entire society. This is not possible without good governance. Today, although many developing countries are experiencing rapid decentralization, the situation cannot be improved unless funds allocated to regions and schools are properly used. Therefore, in addition to strengthening the national financial basis that supports education, various measures must be taken at the same time, including measures for developing skills of educational administrators and managers at national, regional and local levels, and promoting community empowerment.

"School for All" project in Niger and the neighboring countries is a good practice for promoting community participation in school management and educational development. The project not only contributed to an improvement in school enrollment but also enhanced the ability of communities to monitor the entire school system including teachers, educational content and school management. This in turn resulted in better quality education. We believe that inviting the active participation of local people in school education in their own communities is effective in improving governance so as to ensure high-quality educational service delivered at the community level.

4. In closing

This year Italy has assumed the G8 presidency and co-chairmanship of the FTI, but Japan will continue to work closely with the international community to promote international cooperation in education with a strong determination that the international community must maintain the efforts to achieve the goals of EFA and the MDGs despite the current global financial crisis. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will steadily implement the specific plans spelled out in the last year's Foreign Minister's policy speech, in the TICAD IV and on other occasions. We will also follow up the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit by compiling reports on the measures agreed by the leaders. In addition to these activities, Japan will continue to endeavor to make its international cooperation more effective and relevant to the diverse needs of developing countries by exchanging views with experts of international cooperation in education on various occasions such as today's forum.

Finally, I sincerely hope that lively discussions on the quality of education and governance will take place during today's forum and that the participants will deepen their understanding and have productive discussions on future cooperation in education.

Thank you.

(Tentative English Translation by CICE)