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Lessons from COVID-19: Human Solidarity a Third Pillar for TICAD

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Abstract

All through the past seven editions, starting in 1993, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) debates and agendas for action have been guided by two pillar principles, those of Ownership and Partnership. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has dramatically illustrated the importance of solidarity. Thus, Human Solidarity could well be adopted by TICAD 8 as a third pillar to complement and consolidate the current two pillars of Ownership and Partnership. This new pillar would link back to the concept of Human Security proposed to the UN in 1999 by Japan and made relevant anew by the COVID-19 pandemic. It would also link back to the UN Resolution 56/207 of the 57th UN GA of 2001 relative to the proposition of a World Solidarity Fund made by Tunisia in 2001.

Keywords: TICAD, Ownership, Partnership, Human Solidarity

1. Introduction: TICAD and COVID-19

The Government of Japan officially announced in July 2020, that the 8th edition of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8), will convene in Tunisia in 2022. TICAD, a pioneering Japan-Africa Summit, was launched by Japan in 1993, i.e. four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signaling the end of the Cold War. It put Africa back on the development agenda of development aid donors and all stakeholders of African development, running against a false belief in the end of history and a resulting sense of aid fatigue.

Today Africa is believed to be the twenty-first century frontier of development. Hopefully, by the time TICAD 8 convenes, the world will have put the COVID-19

pandemic behind it. Hence TICAD 8 can draw the lessons from this major crisis to pursue its mission thus made even more urgent and to update its agenda in the light of the ensuing new daunting challenges and opportunities.

2. Is COVID-19 just a bump in the road?

COVID-19 is not just yet another bump in the road. It promises to be a turning point, a watershed in social paradigms, in international relations and in human civilization. The concurrence of many trends, forces and events makes it difficult to give a clear-cut answer as to what the future will be like. What is certain however, is that the world has already witnessed a quantum, nay an explosive, increase in distance at-home learning, webinars, distance and at-home office work and, precipitated by the present pandemic, a profound change, even mutation, in the human way of life. Location and distance no longer matter! Human physical contact and touch is no longer a socially correct expression of emotions!

The world is also witnessing an eastward shift in the center of gravity of international relations and a profound mutation in forms of international exchange and cooperation.

3. Globalization

The present pandemic has illustrated in a concrete, although tragic way, the reality of globalization and interdependence. Today, globalization concerns not just trade, manufacturing and finance, but also the personal intimate lives and wellbeing of all people all over the world, regardless of social status, gender, profession, nationality or religion.

This has led some voices to call for reassessing or even reversing globalization. However, globalization is an irreversible movement of history, the result of technological trends in communication, transport, economic and geopolitical forces. The transition from nation-states to the Global Village is just the same as the transition in fifteenth-century Europe from the city-state paradigm to the nation-state paradigm. The COVID-19 pandemic does not represent therefore an opportunity to reverse this process. The current interruption of international

travel, transport and exchange cannot and will not last. Rather, it underlines the urgency of establishing different and better modes of global governance to better manage globalization.

TICAD can be designed and implemented so as to contribute to urgent thinking on the means and ways of these challenges and on African development as an imperative of a better global governance and better management of globalization.

4. Excellent and smart seamless infrastructure for national, transcontinental and global connectivity

Heureux est celui qui, comme une rivière, suit son cours dans son lit ! (Happy is he who, like a river, follows his course in his bed!). In one of the now proliferating zoom-webinars I attended, one participant teased another for ‘attending’ the webinar in pajamas. His remark reminded me of our former student years and the too-early morning classes after long, bohemian nights of cigarette-filled rooms of study, debates and playing Belote. We then used to find it difficult to get out of bed and so used to wish for what we thought then the impossible dream of being like rivers, following our courses in our beds! COVID-19 has made this impossible dream come true!

Indeed, the pandemic has revealed to some, overcome psychological barriers for others and imposed on all, ICT-based distance and at-home learning. Actually, technology has extended to unexpected areas and sectors, and to an unexpected degree, both professional and social, public and private. Zoom, for example, a video conferencing application geared to business usage, saw the peak of its daily meeting participants grow from 10 million in December 2019 to 300 million in April 2020. Such development will outlive COVID-19. It signals a lasting revolution in the way we work, teach and learn, deliver services, socialize and communicate on the personal, family, community, professional, national and international levels. Moreover, this revolution in the socio-economic paradigm opens up great opportunities, and poses daunting challenges.

4.1. Distance and location-free services

The new paradigm has far-reaching consequences for development strategies, educational strategies, industrial strategies, for transportation and climate change, international exchange, international affairs, and so forth. It opens up a new cycle of opportunities for ICT solutions and software development, such as Eduware, for distance teaching and learning and education, for distance engineering, distance design, and more generally for distance offering and delivery of private and public services. This in turn has far reaching corollaries for excellent smart infrastructure development. In particular, it leads to thinking in terms of smart homes, smart cities and smart rural and urban, national and international, infrastructure development and management. It also leads to thinking about the importance of seamless regional and global infrastructure and connectivity.

When I was posted to Tokyo as ambassador of Tunisia to Japan and Australia and in preparation for and promotion of the second round of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in 2005 in Tunisia, I visited several prefectures in Japan. I then reported to Tunisia that these prefectures were already thinking in terms of smart infrastructure, smart highways, smart train stations and smart country. Prime Minister Mori's initiative, announced in the year 2000 at the G8 Summit in Okinawa, concerning the digital economy, contributed to this early and pioneering development. Prime Minister Mori also announced on this occasion the allocation of US\$15 billion to bridge the digital divide between developed countries and developing countries.

4.2. Risks of close surveillance

The new social paradigm also poses daunting social and ethical challenges. Most countries resorted to drastic general confinement to manage the pandemic and protect citizens from the very contagious spread of the COVID-19 virus to which no vaccine has yet been developed. This resulted in an unprecedented negative impact on economic and social activities.

Some countries chose to aim at balancing this negative impact of the pandemic on citizens' health with the normal continuity of social, economic and professional activities. This arbitrage led to general testing. It also led to a close monitoring of

citizens who tested positive. In turn this led to the leveraging of information and communication technologies and of mobile telephony to make mandatory the monitoring of personal movements and behavior of citizens. This effort pushed the frontiers of surveillance to an unprecedented degree of intrusion into the personal and intimate life of citizens. This monitoring combines powerful technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data and Data Science. It carries the risk of an “under the skin surveillance”, as Yuval Noah Harari put it in one interview to the BBC (Tuesday, 28 April, 2020), i.e. the risk of a dangerous abusive surveillance of people’s thoughts, emotions, lives and freedoms.

4.3. The steady hand of the State

International monitoring of the situation revealed a striking difference between countries and regions with regard to the management and containment of the pandemic. In comparison to Europe, Brazil and the U.S.A., most East Asian countries demonstrated an impressive capacity to manage the situation and contain the pandemic. North European countries also managed the pandemic relatively well.

What these countries have in common are practices and values of social work, civic responsibility and discipline which proved to be helpful in fighting the pandemic. In Japan for example, people who catch influenza, of their own accord, wear masks both to protect themselves and as a mindful courtesy to others. What they have in common also are traditions and practices of hand-in-hand governance between the steady hand of the State, the agile hand of the private sector and the benevolent hand of civil society.

In particular, what the otherwise very different East Asian countries have in common are Confucian traditions of trust in hierarchy, and in the authority and benevolence of the state. There were no demonstrations against city or prefecture measures of confinement. In turn, by these same Confucian values, cities and states in these countries continuously strive to earn and deserve ‘their mandate of heaven’ alongside the more modern democratic ‘mandate of the people’. Government in these countries is neither the problem nor the enemy, as the late US president Ronald Reagan campaigned during the 1981 elections. In contrast

to the current US president's tweets, no political leaders in these countries engaged in efforts trying to drive a wedge between citizens and their prefectural and municipal authorities.

A Darwinian adaptation to the frequency and violence of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, volcanic eruptions and the extreme density of urban populations seems to have bred peculiar adaptive survival values, beliefs, reflexes, know-how and good practices which can inspire other countries when facing up to and managing natural disasters and crises.

The pandemic, thus, highlighted the urgent need for national solidarity, the need for the benevolent hand of citizens and civil society and the agile hand of the private sector to complement and support the efforts of the steady but limited hand of the state.

The coming TICAD summit can be an occasion to further explore the potential of these opportunities and challenges, as well as to continue the thinking and efforts undertaken by both TICAD and WSIS (World Summit on Information Society) since 2005.

5. Human Solidarity: A Third Pillar for TICAD

Together with the domestic limits of the state, the unexpected dynamics of the pandemic have also revealed the limits of any one country to fight the pandemic on its own without any coordination with, or help from, the international community or other countries.

The fast and intense rate of globalization makes the pillar principles of Ownership and Partnership in global value chains even more important. It also makes the reoccurrence of pandemics such COVID-19 highly likely. Disaster and pandemic-relevant values and competencies such as those developed in East Asia and other regions should be carefully analyzed, updated and systematically introduced in education at all levels in the form of citizenship development and community building training, actions and programs. These values and practices should be introduced at the international level also.

Solidarity in particular, has proved to be crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only at the national level, but also in international relations. Countries within and between regions in Africa, Asia, Europe and others, had to call on outside help and called on one another for such things as masks, PPE (personal protective equipment), testing equipment and supplies, know-how and good practices.

Solidarity is important both for domestic governance and governance of international affairs, not just in pandemics or disasters. In Japan solidarity is an important value and practice. It is reflected in community-neighborhood building (街づくり *machi-zukuri*), team building and team work in festivities (祭り *matsuri*), leadership development (先輩 *senpai*), and in social and financial responsibility (五人組 *gonin-gumi*). *Gonin-gumi* is a concept of joint responsibility and solidarity in society introduced in Japan by the Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo period to optimize social behavior. It consists in organizing households, both in rural villages and in cities, into groups of five held jointly responsible and accountable for the social behavior of each one of their respective members. The concept of *gonin-gumi* has proved relevant to modern society. It was successfully adopted and used by the pioneering Grameen Bank for joint responsibility and solidarity in debt borrowing and loan repayment to optimize microcredit. Solidarity was also used in the nineteenth century in China to optimize international trade. It consisted in appointing a solidarity group, the Thirteen Hongs of Canton, made up of senior merchants as responsible in solidarity for conducting trade in Guangzhou with the ‘oceanic barbarians’ from Europe and the USA. The Hong concept inspired the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in the U.S.A (Pomfret 2016: 23). More recently, after an intense polemic, the EU recognized the imperative necessity of adopting the rule of solidarity in guaranteeing individual country financing in order to manage the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Solidarity is often mentioned as an important value in international relations. Yet the term ‘solidarity’ does not appear in the UN Charter, although many articles in the Charter make reference to international cooperation (Morjane 2002: 92). Cooperation, however, is discretionary and does not carry the sense of moral obligation and mutual assistance between countries.

Solidarity is nonetheless necessary for the fulfillment of the mission and work on the ground of many UN bodies in dealing with refugees, emigration, climate

change, terrorism, conflict resolution, etc. In 1920, the International Committee of the Red Cross submitted a request to the League of Nations to examine the question of Russian refugees. It underlined in the request that any action undertaken by the international organization would have to be founded on international solidarity (Morjane 2002: 87).

Hence, solidarity appears as a fundamental concept and principle in international relations for UN missions and activities, on a par with the concept and principles of progress, prosperity, harmony and peace. Solidarity, therefore, should be explicitly included in the deontology of the UN mission and incorporated in the UN Charter. Efforts were made in this sense. On December 21st, 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 56/207 commending the proposal by Tunisia to create a World Solidarity Fund.

TICAD can pick up the torch. All along the seventeen years since it was launched, TICAD has developed the basic two pillar principles of Ownership and Partnership to guide its debates and agendas. As with the UN mission and agendas, Human Solidarity will be important for TICAD. Human Solidarity can thus be adopted by TICAD 8 as a third pillar principle to complement the other two.

6. Conclusion

TICAD 8 can provide an opportunity to reflect on the challenges which the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward and up front, and on the new brave world and realities the pandemic has revealed in national and international relations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated in a dramatic, and sometimes tragic, way the reality and the irreversibility of globalization and interdependence, not just for transport, communication, trade, investment, manufacturing, etc., but also for peoples' health, intimate lives and wellbeing.

The pandemic has highlighted, accelerated and generalized the mode of distance and at-home work, teaching and learning. It has also highlighted the importance of excellent smart ICT infrastructure in homes, offices, commercial and industrial buildings, in cities, and even in national land, and international development and management. These trends and imperatives converge with past TICAD debates and

agendas concerning smart cities (TICAD-VI, 2016, Nairobi, Kenya) and excellent smart infrastructure and connectivity in a ‘seamless’ fashion throughout the African Continent with GAN, the Global Area Network of information and communication.

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has put forward and up front the importance of Human Solidarity in international relations among societies and nations both for global governance and for the capacity to face up to pandemics and global challenges.

The fast and intense rate of globalization of communication, transport and value chains, together with the likely reoccurrence of global disasters and pandemics such as Covid-19, make Human Solidarity an important value in human relations and international affairs.

Human Solidarity could therefore be the third pillar principle, along with Ownership and Partnership, to inspire and guide the debates and agenda for action of the upcoming TICAD 8 Summit in 2022 in Tunisia.

Appendix

Agenda for action in view of the COVID-19 pandemic for consideration by TICAD 8:

- 1.Promotion of seamless smart wide-band ICT infrastructure.
- 2.Promotion of joint projects and programs of applications for distance and at-home learning.
- 3.Promotion of better global governance.
- 4.Review and update relevance of: COVID-19 for future pandemics; conclusions and recommendations of the committee on Human Security (funded by Japan) established by the UN (proposed by the late Keizo Obuchi, Prime Minister of Japan in 2000 and co-chaired by Sadako Ogata).
- 5.Adopt Human Solidarity as a third pillar to complement and reinforce the two current pillars of Ownership and Partnership which have guided the debates and agendas of TICAD since 1993.
- 6.Set up and fund a committee to reflect and make operational recommendations on the meaning, importance and operationalization of the concept of Human Solidarity.
- 7.Link back the recommendation to the UN General Assembly Resolution 56/207 on the creation of a World Solidarity Fund, proposed by Tunisia and debated by the 57th UNGA on December 21st, 2001.

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