UGANDA, JAPAN EXCHANGE CO-OPERATION OPPORTUNITIES

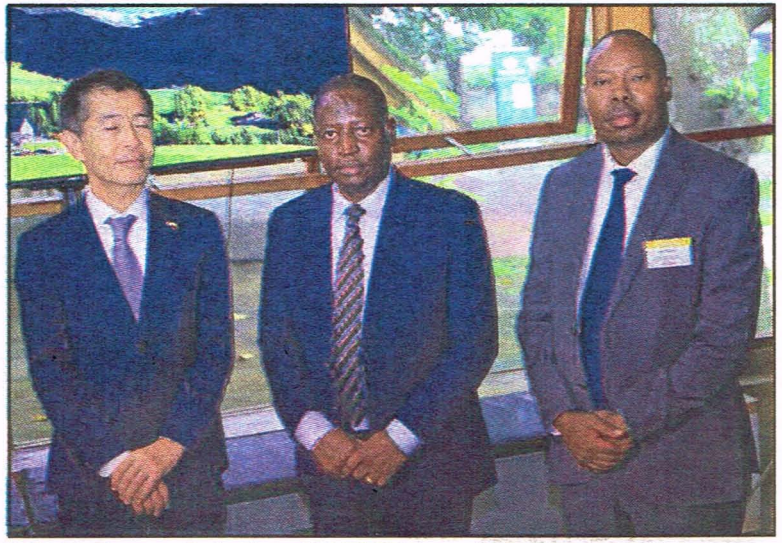
By Ivan Tibenkana

Uganda and Japan are pushing for deeper economic co-operation having gratified the joint development efforts across major sectors like education, health, agriculture and infrastructure; thus expressing a commitment to further opportunities including joint ventures following the Expo and Networking Jumbo event in Kampala, which targets improved business opportunities for both countries.

The convention, jointly organised by the Embassy of Japan and Uganda Free Zones and Export Promotions Authority (UFZEPA), attracted the involvement of Uganda's trade ministry, the head of Japanese mission in Uganda, and the private sector.

TRADE DATA

Deepening co-operation between Japan and Uganda is set to attract improved trade play albeit deficits. The Observatory for Economic Complexity (OEC) shows that last year, Uganda exported goods worth 89.7 million Japanese Yen (about sh2.11b), while the imports amounted to 5.22 billion Japanese Yen (about sh123.3b). However, between 2024-2025, exports decreased by 75%. According to the trade ministry, Uganda's exports to Japan were valued at $14m (about sh52.58b) in 2024, consisting mainly of coffee, flowers, vanilla, fish and cocoa beans, among others. In contrast, Uganda imported goods worth $425m (sh1.5 trillion) from Japan, including vehicles, industrial machinery, equipment and technology.



L-R: Norimasa, Bahati and UFZEPA boss Hez Kimoomi Alinda during the Japan-Uganda Expo and Networking Convention at Yamasen Japanese Restaurant in Kampala, on Wednesday

A WIN-WIN SITUATION

As Japan looks set to leverage its expertise in innovative technological solutions, Uganda intends to siphon all possible trade opportunities with the Asian country in order to improve the wobbly trade volumes. Focus has been set on value-added exports and industrial output.

"Japan's experience in technology, quality management and innovation can greatly benefit Uganda's industries. At the same time, Uganda's rich natural resources, youthful population and strategic location in East Africa offer unique opportunities for Japanese Businesses," Yoshida Norimasa, the deputy head of mission at the Japanese Embassy in Uganda, said.

The Expo and Networking Jumbo enlisted a swarm of businesses run by both Japanese and Ugandans across sectors, such as, energy, natural resources, water, technology, logistics, agro-industry, mobility and infrastructure, among others. Essentially, pathways are being forged to optimise value chain opportunities.

Tomoaki Aoki, the project manager, green infrastructure at Corporation For Africa and Overseas (CFAO) Infrastructure, one of the four domains of the CFAO Group, whose 174-year presence in Africa is symbolic of investment, notes that the exhibition has facilitated key networks, such as major government representatives, local and Japanese investors, thus establishing a negotiations table and support for business growth.

For the subsidiary, much of its clientele has been government's renewable energy projects involving Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Limited, Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited and the energy ministry, powered by market incentives.

TOURISM HIGHLIGHTED

Part of Uganda's private sector target co-operation exports involves tourism. Samuel Mugisha, the managing director of Bic Tours, said international expos, for example, in Japan, are fertile grounds to tap into Japan's tourism interest in mountain gorillas, River Nile and agro-tourism where coffee is a high value commodity.

As such, Uganda needs to vigorously profile and promote its tourism.

UFZEPA INITIATIVES

To reciprocate the meagre trade volume, UFZEPA, whose mandate targets export-oriented industrialisation across different economic zones, is set to bank on earlier initiatives like Uganda's participation in the Osaka 2025 Expo, which promoted the country as a destination for investment in agriculture, manufacturing, communications technology, natural resources, tourism and trade.

Following the Uganda-Japan investment forum last year and the subsequent memorandum of understanding between UFZEPA and the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, extra trade promotion, investment linkages and business partnerships between the two countries are expected.

The trade ministry notes that UFZEPA has developed investment and export information packages to provide firms with the practical data they need on products, sectors, incentives, export procedures and market access to transform initial interest into concrete projects. As such, networking serves to plug into such efforts.

"The networking platform we are witnessing complements these efforts by creating direct interaction between Japanese and Ugandan companies, which is essential for turning opportunities into real business partnerships," David Bahati, the State Minister for Trade, Industry and Co-operatives said. This was during the Japan-Uganda Expo and Networking Convention last Wednesday.

Bahati commended joint ventures as a tool for strengthening Uganda's industrial capabilities, leveraging technology transfer, supply chain linkages and skills development.