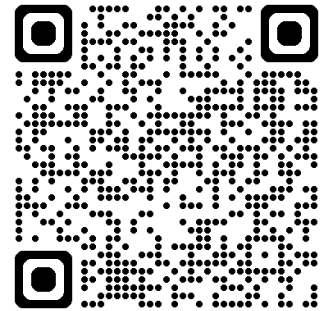


# JICA scraps 'Africa Hometown' program



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20250929160718676/>

The Japan International Cooperation Agency or JICA has decided to cancel its initiative to designate 4 Japanese cities as hometowns for African nations. It's only about a month after the program was announced but a wave of backlash due to misinformation spurred it to retreat.

The JICA Africa hometown initiative designated 4 cities as hometowns for African countries. The program aimed to promote exchanges and foster people to serve as bridges between Japan and Africa. It was announced in August at Tokyo International Conference on African Development, TICAD. But speculation spread through social media and other channels that the initiative aimed to settle immigrants in Japan. Several African media reports fueled the confusion. The Nigerian government also posted that special visas would be issued for participants in special circumstances. Despite denials by JICA and the Japanese government and a Nigerian government correction, the flood of misinformation went on. The impact effected designated municipalities like Imabari city in Ehime Prefecture who had been partnered with Mozambique. Officials said they received nearly 6000 phone calls and emails up to Wednesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>. On Thursday, JICA held a press conference.

There has been growing backlash from misinformation based on things like mistaken foreign media reports. Confusion about this is still going on and is affecting daily government business in the designated areas.

Tanaka said the decision was not a concession to the mistaken information. JICA added that it will carefully review the components of the initiative and hopes to continue providing support for international exchanges.

And now we turn to Kobayashi Yu who was NHK Johannesburg bureau chief until July. So, Yu, the hometown initiative was announced with great fanfare, but it was withdrawn within just one month. How are people in Africa reacting to this?

I believe they are deeply disappointed. I discussed this with a Nigerian friend a few days ago. He said there were problems with the Nigerian government announcement of course, but Japan's reputation has also suffered. That's especially true now. African nations hit hard by the Trump administration's sudden drastic aid cuts had high expectations of Japan. So, the decision to retreat risks concern that Japan might abandon international cooperation as well. The credibility of TICAD itself may have been damaged. This is regrettable because TICAD was launched after the Cold War at a time when world powers lost interest in aiding Africa. And for three decades since, it has been crucial to Japanese diplomacy in Africa. JICA should have provided more careful explanations both to Japan and to the relevant African countries. And in this age of social media, we must also think about how we engage with information. One-sided opinions based on misinformation could potentially damage a nation's credibility and friendly relations with other countries.

Absolutely, and though the hometown initiative was about international exchanges, the issue of accepting foreign workers is a major topic now in Japan. And this case highlights how difficult it is to find answers.

It is understandable that many people feel anxiety or fear about a sudden rise in foreigners in their communities, but Japan also faces an aging population and declining birthrates. It is increasingly reliant on foreign workers in industries like car manufacturing, agriculture, and nursing. The number of foreign workers in Japan exceeds 2.3 million. Securing skilled talent from Asia, the primary source until now, is already becoming difficult. Meanwhile, Africa's population continues to grow. By mid-century one in four people worldwide is projected to be African and many of them are young.

So, could Africa be a good source of labor for Japan?

Yes. In Africa, many youths struggle to find good jobs even after graduating from university or graduate school. Efforts are already underway both publicly and privately to bring such talent to Japan. For example, several people from the island nation of Madagascar have already come to Japan and initiatives to send well educated agricultural workers temporarily with help from JICA. Japan's labor shortages, particularly in rural areas are severe. The trend of securing talent from Africa is likely to grow. In the near future, Africans may become neighbors we interact with daily more and more. I believe it is crucial to seize this kind of opportunity to truly discuss what society we will build with non-Japanese people.

Source : (NHK World News)

**Now discuss the questions with a partner.**

1. Do you agree or disagree with the cancelation of this program? Why?
2. Do you think it is a positive or negative thing that people have the ability to influence nations through social media?
3. Do you feel comfortable with Japan using Africa as a future source of labor? Why or why not?
4. If you lived in one of the cities chosen for this program, how would you feel?
5. How do you think Japan can smoothly acquire foreign workers?