

Gabon independence day

Three years on the road to emergence for Gabon

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This Aug. 17, the 52nd anniversary of the independence of Gabon, is a new opportunity, that perhaps has become a customary rendezvous in columns in The Japan Times, to review the political, economic and social works of our country on the equator with a surface area of 267,667 sq. km.



It is in this shared happiness that I reiterate, on behalf of the President of the Gabonese Republic H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba, the prime minister appointed from free, transparent and democratic elections H.E. Raymond Ndong Sima, the government and all Gabonese people, best wishes of peace, prosperity and good health to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, as well as to the whole Imperial family.

Our warmest regards are also extended to the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, to the members of various Japanese institutions and to the very friendly people of Japan.

As in other such moments, we pay attention to the small community of Gabonese fellows split between residents, students and interns in Japan, as well as to the friends of Gabon in our jurisdiction countries.

In celebrating the election of the third president of the Gabonese Republic on Oct. 16, 2009, which marked a significant break with the past in advocating the policy of "emergence," we will try here to assess its accomplishments after three years of presidency.

Widespread reforms

In 2010, under President Bongo who took power in the previous year, a whole range of reforms were undertaken and extended in many fields to improve the governance and economic climate for the business environment.

After legislative elections of December 2011, which gave a majority to the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), the government then accelerated the reform process to be completed with the appointment of new leaders in public administration, improvement of public governance, adoption of measures to attract foreign investors and especially implementation of necessary actions for the policy of "Emerging Gabon."

Thus, the strategic plan for 2011-2016 aims at:

- optimizing oil and mining sectors;
- adding value to agricultural, aquaculture and livestock resources;
- upgrading fishery resources;
- managing forest resources in a sustainable way;
- and strengthening human capital by capacity building, training for young Gabonese and improving working conditions of civil servants.

Regarding economic diversification, through its development policy, Gabon has heightened its economic performance that is appreciated by some rating agencies.

Indeed, the BB rating given to Gabon by the international rating agency Fitch indicates that the policy of emergence introduced by President Bongo has had positive results, especially in terms of major economic indicators.

Two factors work for the Gabonese economy: On the one hand, the higher crude oil

prices, whose increase — 39.4 percent in 2011 — amply offset the stagnation in production; and on the other hand, important investments that the public sector had carried out. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was \$10,500 in 2011, well over the figure of equivalent countries rated BB. Given the high oil prices and investment expenditures, estimated at 6.7 percent in 2011, the real growth should remain at a comparable level. Oil revenue accounted for 59.8 percent of the government's revenue and 87.3 percent of exports in 2011. The budget surplus hit bottom at 1.8 percent of GDP in 2010 in relation to significant increases of capital expenditure, before recovering to 3.4 percent of GDP in 2011 on the back of stronger oil revenues. Oil price increases should run closer to 6 percent of GDP.

Budget and trade surpluses enabled Gabon to reduce its debt while increasing investments in infrastructure. At 20.4 percent of GDP, Gabon's general government debt is much lower than those of same-size countries. The external debt stands at only 25 percent of external revenues in 2011, and in 2012, Gabon should become a creditor country.

The aim of the economic strategy is to reduce dependency on oil and to prepare the country for the post-oil age. Currently, the government accelerates the economic diversification to shift to manufacturing production in parallel to the establishment of industrial export-processing zones.

Also, as far as the timber industry is concerned, the growth has returned after two years of slowdown, with:

- its contribution to GDP equivalent to 8 percent;
- contraction of almost 50 percent in log production;
- increased number of processing units from 81 in 2009 to 114 in 2011, or a 40.7 percent increase;
- doubled volume of processed timber that went up to 828,000 cu. meters;
- installed capacity of finished lumber that is 1,625 cu. meters.

There is an increase of 83 percent in the number of related jobs, from 3,800 in 2009 to 7,000 at the end of 2011.

In addition, concerning economic diversification, Gabon has signed a contract with the company Olam Gabon on the rubber cultivation project in Woleu Ntem Province.

Olam Gabon plans to invest not less than \$180 million, equal to 91 billion Cooperation Financiere en Afrique Centrale francs (FCFA), into an industrial block with rubber plantations, a factory and various social arenas.

President Bongo often reminds the people that the Emerging Gabon development program, which relies on the Gabonese core values such as peace, development, sharing, has always included the dimension of sustainable development. As well, the Ministry of Economy integrates this principle of sustainability into public policies.

To that end, the government spells out necessary measures to:

- give to the population a



Industries: Gabon is the third largest producer of oil in Africa yet, mindful of the limited lifespan of this resource, is keen to pursue the proactive and sustainable development of other sources of natural wealth. Gabon is promoting local development of raw materials in factories (above right) while lumber (right) and manganese mining (far right) are the other major income generators.

EMBASSY OF GABON



quality environment;

- reduce the environmental risk and social vulnerability so as to adapt the territory and Gabon's activities to the consequences of climatic change and optimize the country's economic efficiency;

- involve all stakeholders in the implementation of the strategy of sustainable development;
- make every ministerial section more accountable for the right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature;
- engage the private sector in Gabon's efforts toward social and economic progress through technological choices and more enhanced citizenship.

This means that ensuring the peace, social and economic development, is the means by which Gabon will rise out of poverty and guarantee the future of next generations.

Moreover, it should be noted that the political situation in Gabon, characterized by the stability of its institutions, its active diplomacy through a greater role that the president of the republic performs internationally, including bold decisions in economic matters, constituted factors prevailing in Gabon's choice to host The New York Forum Africa.

In hosting of this big conference took place from June 8 to 10 in Libreville, for the first time on the African continent. President Bongo developed his views and the ways he employs to materialize his strategy for an Emerging Gabon based on three pillars of diversified growth:

- Green Gabon,
- Industrial Gabon,
- Gabon of Services.

The New York Forum Africa further supported an advocacy for construction of the real future

for young Africans in a country where the peace, stability and national unity reign, a rule of law for harmonious human development within a framework safeguarding the biodiversity and exceptional ecosystem.

These commitments made in the strategic plan for Emerging Gabon stand as steps to be taken to achieve the competitiveness by consolidating the basic foundations, which is to say:

- human capital with training and research in a 10-year plan;
- framework for business to be built to reach international standards;
- access to markets and support to local private sector, generating added value.

Global-level emergence

Gabon keeps watchful eyes on what is taking place on the international front, on the geopolitical, economic, financial and social levels, starting with the subregion, exalting toward Africa and the rest of the world.

After the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) headquarters, Gabon looks forward to house the U.N. Regional Office for Central Africa whose mission is to prevent any potential conflict that may occur in the subregion in Africa.

From 2010 to 2011, Gabon was a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council, where its reputation as a peaceful country was helpful in uttering its voice internationally.

With its expanding regional and international role, Gabon moves ahead toward African regional integration, beginning with CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) becoming a true economic and monetary union

with one single market and the ECCAS.

Above and beyond, Gabon continues to be the driving force in African integration as it has always been in the African Union and in promotion of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development).

At the bilateral level, Gabon's relations with its traditional partners are maintained, while diversifying its cooperation, expected to be more inspired by experiences with emerging and developing countries.

Bilateral cooperation

Japan and Gabon have developed over the years mutually beneficial economic and training relationships. For Gabon, Japan is the fifth largest economic partner, importing crude oil, manganese, timber, fishery products, while exporting cars, machineries, heavy and electronic equipment toward Gabon. The names of Japan's biggest manufacturers for motor vehicles, heavy equipment or electronic goods are as known in Gabon as in the other countries.

Japan has proved its keen interest in Gabon's development by its assistance in different sectors such as education, agriculture and fishery. In recent years, two fishing facilities were established in Port-Gentil (2003) and in Lambarene (2005) with Japanese assistance. As for human assistance, JICA keeps sending young volunteers every year in many fields, i.e., health care, education, fishery, agriculture, environment, community development, etc. In the efforts to reduce the reliance on imported food, Japan also provides to us its skills and knowledge as the world's top rice producer,

through voluntary activities in rice farming in several locations.

Very recently, on July 13, through the Forest Conservation Program that consists of the inventory of forest resources with high-quality equipment, Japan gave Gabon funding of ¥700 million. For this program, Japan has already offered to Gabon vehicles, GPS devices, 100 computers and satellite images.

Japan is aware of the scale of the challenges that climate changes impose on African countries, their development and African people's security, and is working on a green development strategy for Africa.

For this purpose, Japan lends its expertise to Gabon's satellite images production in very high quality. Japan also provides training for local staff who will use this highly sensitive equipment.

It should be noted that since 2009, thanks to the scholarship that the Japanese government offers in forestry information management, sensing operations and REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation of the U.N.), seven Gabonese officials from the Ministry of Water and Forests have been trained.

In Gabon, Japan financially

supports five other projects in the forest sector, especially community development for 255 million FCFA and the project for improving the forestry statistical information managing system (STAFFOR) that will include an IT module for processed log and lumberyard management for 139 million FCFA, which will also serve to promote the forestry profession among the Gabonese people on the basis of partnership.

The sustainable management of African forests, including Minkebe Protected Area (north-east of Gabon), toward the protection of cross-border conservation corridors between Gabon, Cameroon and Congo, receives funding from Japan at almost 70 million FCFA, approved by the International Tropical Timber Council in its meeting of December 2011.

Finally, the reforms going on under the policy of emergence continue and the Gabon Emergent Strategic Plan (GESP) can only be achieved with help of international partners and friendly countries such as dear Japan. It is our sincere wish that our two countries will keep developing the cordial relations of more than half a century.



Vitalizing tourism: An official poster in Japanese showcases the diversity of Gabon's nature and wildlife. EMBASSY OF GABON

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to the People of the Gabonese Republic
on the Occasion of the 52nd Anniversary of
Their Independence Day

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