



During MISIA's 2019 trip to Zambia, she visited an orphanage where former street children live and an elementary school in a refugee camp. GENERAL INCORPORATED FOUNDATION MUDEF

TOWARD TICAD VIII: RAISING AWARENESS OF THE AFRICA-JAPAN LINK

For many years, the singer MISIA has been involved in aid work for Africa. Since 1993, she has twice served as Honorary Ambassador at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which is gaining significance as an international conference spearheaded by the Government of Japan to address Africa's development issues. What has been inspiring MISIA to visit Africa and provide support all this time?

“What a wonderful place!”

That was the first impression Japanese singer MISIA had when she visited Kenya for the first time, in 2007. It has a pleasant climate and plenty of nature, culture, tradition, and music. As soon as she exited the airport, she was captivated by the vast adjacent national park, dotted with giraffes strutting around. On the other hand, the city was

so developed that her simplistic image of Africa as a place of widespread hunger and disease was immediately erased.

From a young age, MISIA had known of Africa's poverty-related problems through music. Moreover, because the roots of the soul music that influenced her lay in Africa, she developed a natural interest in the continent. After she joined the White Band Project—a global

poverty-eradication campaign—she took the advice of U2 singer Bono, who was already actively involved in aid for Africa, to visit the continent for herself and see what it had to show to her. Encouraged by Bono, she decided to set off, with Kenya as a first port of call.

In Kenya, she had contact with many people through her visit to an elementary school in



Left: TICAD VII in Yokohama, Japan in August 2019. There were over 10,000 participants, including 42 heads of state from 53 African countries, those from 52 development partner countries, 108 international and regional institutions, and the private sector, and other members of civil society such as those working at NGOs. Discussions centered on promoting business. AFP/AFLO
Right: MISIA was an honorary ambassador at TICAD VII. The photo shows her inauguration speech.



Kibera, which is said to be one of Africa's largest slums, and places such as Maasai village. She was surprised to see so many facets to a single country, and she wanted to show the world this real Africa, including its wonderful attractions.

So, while first learning about Africa herself, she started to introduce the continent to the people of Japan through her music. Simultaneously, she began providing educational support to the children there. Since 2010, she has been working with the general incorporated association “mudef,” whose various support includes funds for operating schools, scholarships, textbooks and other school supplies, sanitary goods for schoolgirls, school meals, and the funds necessary to participate in music competitions. She also created a picture book, “Leona with the Heart Mark,” which tells the story of Leona, a lioness with a heart symbol on her forehead. The profits from this picture book, which captures the people whom MISIA met in Africa and the lessons she learned there, are also used to support the education of

African children.

Due to such activities over the years, MISIA has twice served as an Honorary Ambassador at TICAD, which is organized by the Government of Japan. In addition to African countries, TICAD participants include international organizations involved with development, partner countries, Asian countries, and private companies. The conference serves as a platform to discuss how to move forward on Africa-led development. TICAD VIII will be held in Tunisia this August. MISIA says, “I believe that learning about each other and taking action together fosters peace in our hearts. I hope that joining forces at TICAD to work on Africa's development will also lead to world peace.”

She continues, “Japan and Africa's support of each other exists in many different forms, such as food and resources. Even if you don't go to Africa for yourself, you can get a lot of information through the Internet. When I give talks at Japanese universities, I sense that there is an increasing number of students now who are interested

in Africa compared with when I first became involved in aid work. By sharing my knowledge and experience, I want these students to feel the connection between Japan, Africa, and the rest of the world more deeply than ever before. I want people to make their daily choices knowing that we live in support of each other. The fastest way to do this would be to become friends. I dream of a wonderful future where everyone has one or more friend or acquaintance from the more than 50 countries of the African continent. I wish to serve as a bridge, using the power of music to connect people to each other.” ●

MISIA sang the national anthem of Japan at the Opening Ceremony for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, which were held in 2021. She pursues her career in music based on the saying she learned in Africa, “where there is music, there is no fighting.” THE MAINICHI NEWSPAPERS/AFLO

