

Friends of Japan



Mansour Diagne

Born in Senegal. Majored in agricultural economics and agribusiness at the University of Jordan. Since coming to Japan in 1992, he has improved his Japanese language skills through movies, literature, and manga, to achieve Level 1, the top certification level, in the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. Active in a wide range of fields including language teaching and business interpreting. Currently busy combining work with taking care of his children. He loves the Japanese comedy-drama movie series *Otoko wa Tsurai yo* (It's Tough Being a Man), which depicts the travels of a vagabond merchant among warm-hearted common people.

Bringing Lights to Africa

Mansour Diagne enjoyed watching Japanese anime and reading Japanese manga as a child. Japan had always been a country that he adored and longed to visit. His wish came true when he came to Japan while his uncle was posted to the Senegal Embassy in Tokyo. Diagne is fluent in French, Arabic, and English, and has taught at language schools as well as appearing on Japanese television as a TV personality. While doing various kinds of work in Japan, he fell more and more in love with the country and its people. “Japanese people have respect for others and consider how the other person feels. I feel that they are the most mature people in the world. As I followed their example, other non-Japanese said ‘You are a black samurai!’” Diagne said, laughing.

Working as an interpreter at a show about solar power generation held in Japan in 2013 opened a door for Diagne to become an employee at a subsidiary of Koyo Corporation, a company that handles solar power generation and various other kinds of renewable energy business. The company already had a desire to contribute something to the world through business, and when Diagne entered the company, it provided a chance to turn their attention to Africa. Thus began a project to improve electrical power infrastructure in an effort to deliver lighting to all areas of Africa, which still has an electrification rate of just 30% on average. Diagne is currently actively involved in this project. “As an African person, I think that to use the natural gas in various areas across Africa for local production and local consumption to supply electricity for the entire African continent is the most wonderful idea. Originally, this plan was made by our Chairman and CEO Norio Shoji, and I totally agreed with it,” he said. Diagne is making full use of his contacts and has taken on the major role of being a guide familiar with the local environment, as well as promoter, to make this project reach fruition.

Looking back on his life in Japan, Diagne observes with a warm expression, “I’ve had to work hard at everything, but so long as I hold firm, I can make a decent living. And I’ve never run into racial discrimination.” He hopes that Japan and Africa will enjoy closer relations in the future and has great expectations for the Japanese government’s African Business Education Initiative for Youth (ABE Initiative), which will provide opportunities for African youth to earn graduate degrees at Japanese universities and to engage in internships at Japanese companies. Koyo Corporation has accepted five interns from Burundi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Tanzania for the summer of 2016. Diagne stated, “There are many things in Japan for Africans to learn about. That includes not only the country’s advanced technologies but also its people’s management skills and habit of always being punctual. If Africans could acquire these qualities then each country in Africa would become much stronger and achieve major growth.” While dreaming of the day when each African country achieves major development, Diagne intends to spare no effort in his role as a guide to help make that dream come true.

About the ABE Initiative

The African Business Education Initiative for Youth (ABE Initiative), proposed by Prime Minister Abe at TICAD V in 2013, offers opportunities for 1,000 young African men and women to earn master’s degrees and undertake internships in Japan; 473 participants from 33 countries have come to Japan so far.

Participants in the ABE Initiative Master’s Degree and Internship Program at a welcome reception in 2014. (Photo: Shinichi Kuno/JICA)

