

This month, I visited the Kasubi Tombs, a UNESCO World Heritage site (cultural heritage) in Uganda. The Kasubi Tombs are, I believe, the very embodiment of Buganda's history, culture, and religion. They preserve and transmit knowledge about the traditions, customs, and enduring power of the Buganda royal family, the largest kingdom in Uganda. In 2001, UNESCO inscribed the tombs as a World Heritage site in Uganda.

Also known as the "Royal Tombs of Buganda," Kasubi Tombs are the burial grounds of four of the most revered Kabakas (kings) of the Buganda Kingdom. Established in 1882, the tombs are recognized as one of the most valuable cultural and historical sites in Uganda. Currently, they are the only cultural heritage site registered in Uganda. Uganda has two other UNESCO World Heritage sites, both natural heritage sites: Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Rwenzori Mountains National Park, both registered in 1994.

The Kasubi Tombs are the resting place of the following Kabakas:

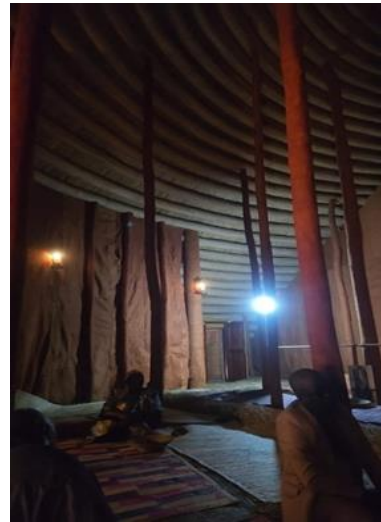
1. Muteesa I Kabaka (1856-1884). He was the first Kabaka of the Buganda Kingdom.
2. Mwanga II Kabaka (1884-1888 and 1889-1897). He reigned during the introduction of Islam and Christianity to Uganda. He is known for ordering the martyrdom of the Uganda Martyrs.
3. Daudi Chwa II Kabaka. He was one of the longest-reigning monarchs. He ascended to the throne at the age of four and ruled until 1939.
4. Edward Muteesa II Kabaka (1939-1966). The first President of the Republic of Uganda, who received power from the British government at independence.

The tombs consist of large circular structures made of natural materials such as reeds and thatch, symbolizing eternity and continuity in Buganda culture. Sacred symbols, including the Buganda coat of arms and early Buganda totem symbols like ancestral spirits, are found within the tombs. There are also ritual grounds for ceremonies (such as the coronation of a new Kabaka) and offering tributes. Even now, it functions as a cultural preservation center for the Buganda Kingdom, attracting tourists and serving as a place for Ugandans to learn about their history.

In March 2010, the tombs suffered a devastating fire of unknown origin, destroying the main mausoleum and many royal regalia. The Ugandan government and organizations such as UNESCO, with support from the Japanese government, undertook restoration efforts. After years of restoration work, the tombs reopened to the public in 2023.



Panoramic view of Kasubi Tombs



Interior of Kasubi Tombs



With descendants of the Buganda Kabaka (second from the right)
and officials from relevant ministries

A visit to the Kasubi Tombs begins with a spacious courtyard. The royal tombs are large, conical thatched buildings. The bright and spacious exterior gives way to a solemn atmosphere inside, separate from everyday life. The interior is decorated with fabrics, wood, and mats made from Ugandan natural materials. While simple, the exhibits evoke the achievements of past kings.

A characteristic of this UNESCO heritage site is that people related to it still live in the surrounding area. I was told it's a "living relic," a relic existing alongside daily life, and that's exactly what it is. On the day of my visit, many Ugandan students and children were visiting for educational purposes.

As mentioned earlier, the Japanese government supported the restoration of this heritage site, which was destroyed by fire, through UNESCO. The tombs have now overcome their crisis heritage status and are protected by disaster prevention facilities.



Fire extinguishing equipment
provided by Japan



Fire pump provided by Japan

2. Moroto District: Visit to Save the Children Japan's Project

This month, I visited the project site of the Japan National NGO Save the Children Japan (hereinafter referred to as Save the Children) in Moroto District, in northern Uganda near the border with Kenya.

Moroto District is located in the Karamoja region. Unlike the lush southwestern Uganda, it is an arid region where pastoralism is prevalent. Unlike other parts of Uganda, it only has one rainy season a year. While not a desert, it has a harsh climate. Data shows that the Karamoja region (consisting of nine districts, including Moroto) has a population of approximately 1.5 million, but according to Ugandan government statistics, 61% of the residents face poverty. More than 80% of the population suffers from chronic food shortages. Because of this, the Karamoja region is one of the most challenging areas to live in Africa.

Save the Children is implementing a project to improve agricultural production and nutrition through maternal and child nutrition guidance in Moroto District and three target sub-counties. This project, which began in March 2023, is a three-year initiative.

For NGOs, including Save the Children, close collaboration with local partner organizations is essential. This project has achieved results through collaboration with many stakeholders, including the community development office, agricultural research institutions, health offices, and regional central hospitals and their staff. The project aims to create small-scale irrigation facilities and model farms, transferring skills to residents in a community-based manner to ensure sustainable functionality.

As a sign of participation in the local community, my embassy colleagues and I greeted people wearing the cloth they use daily. We were also presented with hats signifying dignity.

Yume Nomoto, a Japanese staff member, is also working hard with the local staff.



Traditional village: Livestock farming
in the village center



Irrigation facility



Consultation office opening ceremony



Nomoto staff member holding
an infant weighing scale

3. Visit to Construction Equipment Operator Training Facility

As I have mentioned several times in this column, Uganda is currently experiencing economic growth. Infrastructure development is essential for economic development in the country and the East African region. To meet the seemingly limitless demand for infrastructure, it is necessary to develop both construction machinery and the personnel to operate it simultaneously.

In 2019, the Japanese government decided to provide assistance for the development of training facilities for human resource development (grant aid in cooperation with the United Nations

Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)). The facility was completed in March of last year and handed over to the Ugandan government in Luwero District, north of the capital, Kampala. As I had just arrived, I was unable to attend the handover ceremony, but I was able to visit the facility this time.

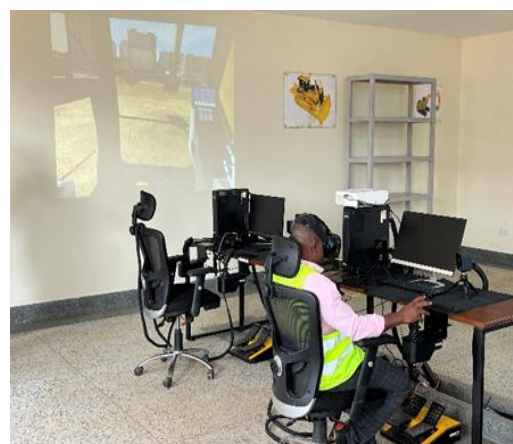
More than 1,000 Japanese construction machines, also supported by JBIC, are active throughout Uganda. This facility trains personnel to maintain and continuously use these machines. The training curriculum was provided by Komatsu, a global construction machinery manufacturer. In cooperation with UNIDO, the operation of the training facilities is on track. Komatsu has established the "Dubai Training & Demonstration Center" on the premises of its Komatsu Middle East headquarters. Many of the training instructors working at the facility I visited received training in Japan and at Komatsu's Dubai center. I believe this is a wonderful example of cooperation between Japanese ODA and private companies.

Accurate operation techniques and proper maintenance are crucial for construction machinery. In recent years, advances in IT technology have led to the development of advanced automated driving and individual construction machine management technologies. At the training facility, many young people were diligently undergoing training. I felt that they have the potential to become human resources needed not only in Uganda and Africa, but also throughout the world.

Locally, the facility is affectionately called METRAC (Mechanical Engineering Training and Advisory Center).



Training construction machinery



Training simulator



With Trainers

(End)