

The Japan Times

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

A Nation at Work

Monday, August 8, 2016

Bilateral cooperation raises standards

Now in his second-term, President Ouattara is shifting things up a gear toward double-digit growth and a booming private sector

A West African powerhouse of 22 million inhabitants, with enviable trading deals, a booming economy and a wealth of precious natural resources, Côte d'Ivoire is being formally welcomed back onto the global stage following a difficult start to the 21st century.

After a decade of conflict, it seemed peace and democracy might have evaded the Francophone country that was the West African Economic and Monetary Union's greatest GDP contributor. However, since the re-election of President Alassane Ouattara with a landslide majority of 83.55 percent in October 2015, the proud country is continuing to claw back its position as the economic hub for the region.

"When we came to power in April 2011, we inherited a country in total chaos," the president told *Global Insight*. "It was therefore crucial for my government to re-establish peace and security, ensure that the end of the crisis would not be followed by a period of division and vengeance, and reignite economic growth, as well as bring about the rehabilitation of our national infrastructure.

"These steps were critical in order to afford confidence in the future of our country to all Ivoirians, as well as the international community.

"The Ivorian people responded very well to our development strategy. People got back to work and, collectively and peacefully, we have achieved one of the strongest economic growth rates in the world over the past four years."

Pundits firmly agree that the economic development of the country is remarkable and Côte d'Ivoire is a destination investors should seek out, as all

sectors are in growth mode. Increased public spending and public-private partnerships (PPP) in infrastructure projects combined with a government committed to aggressive reforms within the business environment have seen economic growth soar to the high single-digits since 2012. Investment is flooding in across all sectors as the country stabilizes, and Japan, one of the world's most advanced nations, is lending its unerring support.

Landmark visit

In January 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's capital, to attend the ECOWAS-Japan summit. It was the first time a Japanese head of state had visited French-speaking Africa, and as such, a momentous occasion. Abe's aim was to show his country's com-

"Collectively and peacefully, we have achieved one of the strongest growth rates in the world over the past four years."

President Alassane Ouattara

mitment to peace and stability, economic growth and business opportunities within the whole Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, where 15 countries with a combined population of 300 million are making rapid progress toward economic integration. The leader was accompanied by around 50 executives from Japanese businesses, with Abidjan the first stop of an Africa-wide tour.

After speaking to Côté d'Ivoire officials, Abe announced that Japan would assist in national reconciliation and invest in

infrastructure, industrial and human resource development, and investment promotion.

"Japan plans to support national development in Côte d'Ivoire by mobilizing the combined efforts of the public and private sectors," Abe told Ouattara at their meeting, adding that he hoped the assistance would encourage more Japanese companies to launch operations in Africa.

"I respect the fact that the country has restored peace and stability and is promoting national reconciliation," Abe said.

As part of the visit, a smiling Japanese prime minister also attended a judo tournament in the capital and presented the trophy, renamed the "Abe Cup" that day — normally it is known as the Japanese Ambassador Cup — to the winning team.

"I was impressed to know that Japan-originated judo is loved by all of you," he said, and donated 100 judo uniforms to the Côte d'Ivoire's judo federation.

Abe went on to hold an expanded summit meeting for delegations from the private sector and organizations responsible for promoting the advancement of Japanese companies doing business specifically in Côte d'Ivoire. Those who do come will be in good company: Mitsubishi Corp., Ajinomoto, CFAO/Toyota Tsusho, MODEC, Itochu Corp. and Marubeni

ties making a difference in this fast-growing nation.

Abe also discussed with West African leaders how Japan could help them realize their vision of making West Africa a more attractive region for investors.

He explained that Japanese companies expected to see improvements in infrastructure, human resource development and political stability, and announced Japan's intention to provide financial assistance of \$83.4 million to this effect, with a particular focus on the drought-hit Sahel region.

Having honed mutual trust among the ECOWAS leaders, Abe confirmed Japan's intention to work more closely with West Africa, both economically and socially.

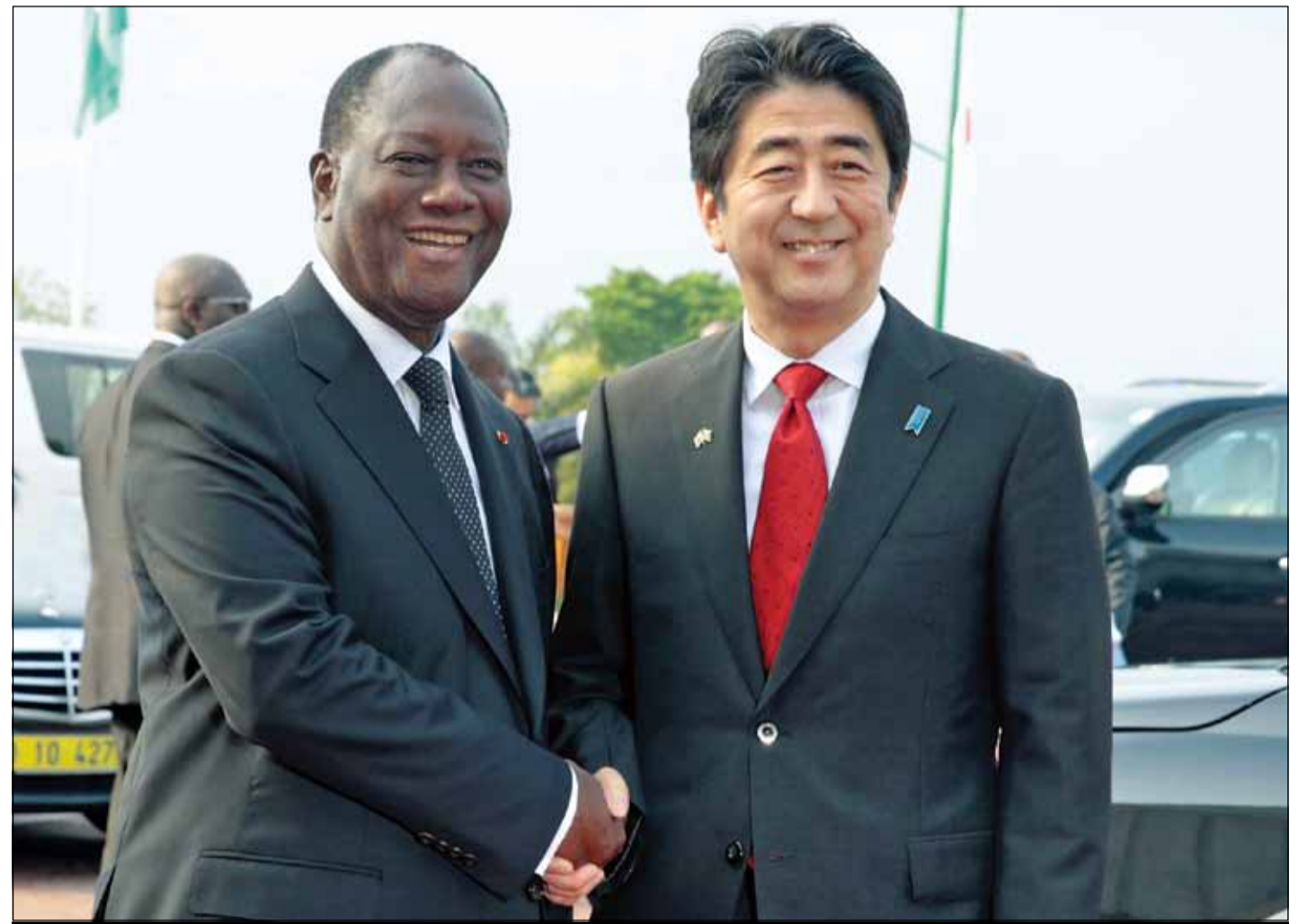
Emerging economy

In the light of the Japanese visit, and having won a second term, Ouattara is continuing with his mission to bring Côte d'Ivoire to 'emerging economy' status by 2020. It was a mission that he began in earnest four years ago.

"In April 2011, we had a nation to rebuild. We had to move from a crisis mentality, where corruption and poor management were the norm, to a mentality of economic growth associated with strong macroeconomic discipline. All this, in a post-conflict situation, was really a tremendous challenge," he said.

Now things are moving up a gear: the president has launched the second phase of his National Development Plan (2016-2020) as part of his development continuity agenda, and announced the main axes of the second term of his presidency.

It includes five key priorities: the strengthening of national institutions for peace; national social cohesion and good governance; the transformation of the economy; an improvement in living standards and the promotion of youth and gender equality.



President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sealed the deal in 2014 for increased Japanese support

"Our actions in this second term will strengthen our democracy, and foster good governance, while maintaining a strong macroeconomic management discipline," the president stated. "This approach will ensure that the dividends of economic growth are properly shared among the population.

"We are building a nation with strong institutions that will ensure each Ivorian can live in peace. It will be a united country, a country where each Ivorian can be properly remunerated for their work and have access to a fair judicial system, a good education and proper health-care.

"We want Côte d'Ivoire to stand out for the integrated diversity of its people, and make it a country that each Ivorian will be proud of."

Japan's decision to hold the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in Africa for the first time since its inception in 1993 — it is being held at Kenyatta International Convention Center in Nairobi Aug. 27 and 28 — shows the Asian nation's support for, and belief in, Africa's future.

Support for Africa

As political stability ensues and countries continue to prosper at a rapid pace, the conference is now being held every three years, instead of every five.

"The goal of TICAD is to support the development of African countries with the spirit of partnership and ownership," Hiroshi Kawamura, the Japanese Ambassador to Côte

d'Ivoire, told *Global Insight*.

"The emphasis is put on economic assistance and cooperation, particularly in developing human resources, and harnessing partnerships within Japanese and African business circles. Investment is very important to sustainable development. We have a philosophy whereby we cooperate with all of our African partners in order to understand their priorities. We ensure a partnership that works in both directions."

Côte d'Ivoire now needs to reach a level of sustainable economic development and also generate employment, especially for its young people. It is comforting that Japan has stepped up to strengthen its cooperation, support economic development and attract new

Japanese investors to the country. The president of the Republic has promised, and delivered, calm, peace and security; an aspect that is not only fundamental for investors but also for society at large.

Cocoa and coffee are by far the greatest revenue earners, and jointly responsible for 40 percent of gross domestic product, and there are also huge opportunities in other sectors. Representatives for public works, infrastructure and the environment, mining, energy and hydrocarbons, tourism and transport, industrial plants for palm oil, cashew nuts, rubber, cocoa, coffee, electronics, education, health care, agriculture and real estate are ready and willing to offer the Japanese a very warm welcome.

Your well-being is our priority

As the premium provider of staple foods — especially quality rice sourced from Japan — to Ivory's Coast's growing population, Carré d'Or is a vital cog in the wheel of the West African country's quality of life and socioeconomic development. With four decades of valuable experience, the ambitious Lebanese group is a major distributor of pasta, flour and milk powder, with revenues from these activities admirably plowed back into the economy through the construction of hospitals, clinics and schools. With an outstanding reputation and highly-successful business model, Carré d'Or is perfectly positioned to help Japanese companies make the most of future business and investment opportunities.

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Protecting the nation's interests with vigor

Clear choices, will, determination and hard work. Such is the mantra of the Côte d'Ivoire Customs Authority, which is adding to the national coffers with tax revenues

As one of West Africa's busiest sea and air gateways and a thoroughfare for imports and exports for the entire region, customs officials have a huge responsibility in the contribution it makes to the Ivorian economy national development in taxes and charges revenues.

With 46 percent of national fiscal revenues coming from customs duties, the Customs Authority plays a key role in providing funds for national development and under the new reforms, is working with Adama Kone, minister for economy and finance to be on top of revenues, as well as eliminating the threat of smuggling and fraud.

Today, the country has more than 100 customs offices, and six central departments, the two most important being the External Services Department and the Central Services Directorate.

Having recently undergone a far-reaching modernization program that includes digital technology investments to enhance efficiency, the Côte d'Ivoire Customs Authority is more robust than ever. New geolocation systems are in place that will not only track consignments and combat crime, but will also monitor goods coming into Abidjan that are destined for transit to neighboring countries.

The Customs Authority's Director General, Gen. Issa Coulibaly, is championing "expertise, professionalism, modernization and simplification" and is intent on achieving



Adama Kone
Minister for
Economy and Finance



Gen. Issa Coulibaly
Director General
National Customs Authority

best international standards in ethics, good governance and good practice, including bipartite appeals procedures, toll-free numbers to report any possible wrongdoing and clear and written codes of procedure and behavior.

"We have undertaken the computerization of all our procedures and automated customs clearance system."

Gen. Issa Coulibaly, Director General, National Customs Authority

As Coulibaly explained: "Our country went through 10 years of military and political crises that plunged all services into what can only be described as lethargy and customs has not escaped these problems.

"When we arrived, we had to restructure the organization to ensure that the whole country is covered by our services. Then it was necessary to marry

the vision of the president by developing a very clear strategy ourselves that would involve all agents and adopt the modernization process. Nowadays, we share expertise with our sister administrations in other countries in perfect cooperation, and

we provide coaching to Congo, Benin and Togo."

First impressions count

Coulibaly is mindful that his organization is, for an investor, an advertisement for how the country will operate.

"The way we behave as an entity will influence whether an investor decides to continue doing business in Côte d'Ivoire.

We are the shop window, the front door. If our behavior is not in line with the image the president wants to portray for the country — that it is an emerging economy that needs investors — if our administration is archaic and redundant, people will not come here.

"We are therefore actively engaged in the process of simplifying our procedures.

"We have begun to implement the computerization of all our procedures, which includes an automated customs clearance system. We also post information on our website so customs procedures are accessible from abroad. Through practicing good governance, we have created a brigade to fight against racketeering and have developed a charter of ethics and professional conduct, as well as strengthening the inspection aspect of our services."

The general expresses hope that the recently strengthened ties between the two countries, and the reforms taking place across the country will encourage Japan to increase trade with the West African country.

"Côte d'Ivoire wants to be seen as a friend to all," he said. "The only challenge we face is the pace of development, so we are reaching out to all the friends who want to help. I hope investment and trade between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire continues to grow as it will help us in our mission to become an 'emerging economy.' We must strengthen our cooperation."

Greater customs interconnection between the neighboring countries is also very important, particularly with Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana, Coulibaly explained.

"Japan has already helped us with the juxtaposed inspection offices. And Japan also contributed to the interconnection

studies with Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal.

"There are other projects that are planned for 2016 and 2017, particularly in terms of risk control. Japan also supports us in that endeavor, and has provided funding for a remote viewing room so we can see everything that is going on through CCTV.

"What interests us is that Japan can help us establish a dedicated customs school. At the moment, our senior managers are trained at the National Administration School in France. Our ambition is to have a similar school in Côte d'Ivoire, and I am confident that with the experience and expertise that Japan has, it can help us to achieve that."

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The future

The customs chief has high hopes and ambitious expectations for the future, and, like his government peers, it is heartening to hear the dynamism in his plans.

"I want our Customs Authority to be one of the most modern

in the world," he said. "In some countries, you don't see customers walking around the docks to get to an office because they can do everything from home.

"I dream of managing an administration like that. A customs authority where the procedures are simple and where everything is electronic and that breaks with the negative images it may have garnered for racketeering and corruption.

"After the talks at TICAD, I hope to see the Japanese back in Côte d'Ivoire trading and doing business."

Gen. Issa Coulibaly, Director General, National Customs Authority

"I see a Customs Authority where the customs agent is proud to be doing his job and listening to customers because he knows that all his actions have an influence on Côte d'Ivoire's economic competitiveness. He is measuring the impact of everything he does.

"The customs agent does not just aim to be a mere tax collector, but will be playing a pivotal role in the economy, and a culture of results; a new Ivorian, a new customs agent.

"My message to the people of the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) would be to tell them that the Ivorian Customs Authority is preparing to actively participate in this important event.

"We will be extremely keen to talk with our Japanese colleagues with a view to establishing cooperative relationships and benefit from their experience. We want them to help us

build capacity. I hope this will be an exchange meeting and there is listening on both sides. More than anything, I hope to see the Japanese back in Côte d'Ivoire, trading and doing business."

The next frontier

Japanese investors should indeed be more inclined to invest in Côte d'Ivoire, because it has the most buoyant economy in the West African region. These days,

it is a country under construction, a transforming country that is developing its economy, health infrastructure, education, energy and which has a strong will to succeed.

Japan should now seize the opportunity to participate significantly in the emergence of the West African country, Coulibaly explains:

"Japan has an economic model that Ivorian officials wish to emulate. It is a country that grew from scratch to achieve the highest level of development in the world. To have Japanese investors accompanying us on our great adventure would be a great honor for us.

"Africa is the next frontier in growth, and as far as growth opportunities go in Africa, Côte d'Ivoire is the bastion in the West African region. We want Côte d'Ivoire to find its rightful place in the world. It was a buoyant country in the 70s and 80s, but because of the political

and economic crisis, it has been misunderstood.

"Now though, we are regaining respect from other nations. They know Côte d'Ivoire is back."

The power of ECOWAS

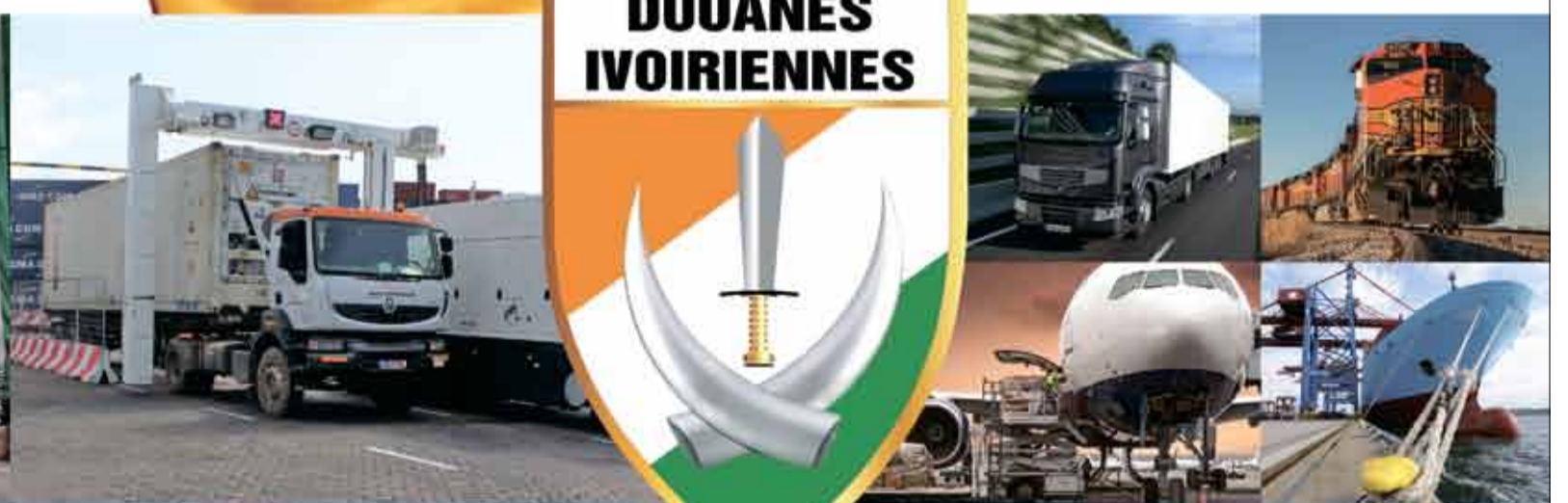
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) represents a huge market and therefore has huge potential. For this reason, Côte d'Ivoire and the Customs Authority are playing their parts in helping companies wishing to distribute their products in the region.

Harmonizing trade and customs procedures remains one of the ECOWAS' major economic objectives. With a unified currency and a single trade and customs union due to be rolled out for 2020, countries will be able to negotiate on a larger scale. An IMF study suggests any revenue losses from a common ECOWAS Customs Union will be minimal.

ECOWAS fact file

- 15 countries with a market of 305 million consumers
- Common currency Franc CFA pegged to the euro
- Composed of 100 million middle class consumers
- Common Duty Tax System from 0 to 20 percent
- Economic Partnership Agreements with the EU: an economic partnership agreement with exemption of most of the customs tariffs and export quotas on products imported from Côte d'Ivoire.
- African Growth and Opportunity Act with the U.S.
- A Stability and Growth Pact Agreement gives Côte d'Ivoire preferential access to markets such as Canada, Turkey, Japan and Switzerland.

An outstanding role model with cutting-edge administration



With more than a century of customs experience to our name, we play a pivotal part in protecting industries, fighting fraud and collecting taxes and duties for Côte d'Ivoire. Last year, with an 85 percent revenue increase, we achieved a record high!

Our vision has always been to work simply and efficiently using technology and new strategies to deliver an integrated service both within our own departments and with our neighbors. We thank Japan for its help to date, and look forward to collaborating on new projects in 2016 and beyond.

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Transport investment accelerates

With a vast agricultural market highly reliant on goods' speed to market, the transport sector is pivotal for the economy

With an expanding economy highly dependent on an agricultural industry that relies on speed to foreign markets to maximize the potential of its valuable perishable goods, Côte d'Ivoire has long boasted some of the best transport infrastructure in Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire's road network is widely regarded as one of the finest in sub-Saharan Africa, currently comprising around 10,000 kilometers of paved road, about 80,000 kilometers of dirt road and more than 150 kilometers of highway.

A further 4,000 kilometers of highway is scheduled for construction over the next 15 years, including a key section of the \$6 billion Abidjan-Lagos corridor that will connect many major cities in several countries. The 1,050-kilometer road will eventually serve up to 300 million consumers in the wider region, offering access to landlocked nations Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger Republic.

Foreign funding, skills, technology and experience are highly sought after for such projects as the ambitious republic strives to establish itself as an economic powerhouse through a comprehensive national development program that places the construction of transport infrastructure at its core.

The modern seaports of Abidjan and San Pedro feature world-class facilities and meet strict international standards, which, combined with Côte

d'Ivoire's strategic location, make them highly efficient gateways to vast consumer markets and vital transshipment hubs for millions of tons of imports and exports each year.

San Pedro is the main export point for national commodity cocoa, consisting of two docks each of 740 meters in length and a 15 meter-long south dock with associated storage area of 4,000 square meters.

Several hundred kilometers further east, the intermodal Autonomous Port of Abidjan (Port Autonome d'Abidjan) covers 770 hectares and is home to around two thirds of the country's industrial activities, as well as being Africa's first tuna port. The port features 33 berths spread along six kilometers of docks, with the capacity to handle 66 ships at any one

"We are very satisfied with the performance and growth of Air Côte d'Ivoire."

Minister of Transport Gaoussou Toure

time, a container terminal with four berths and three heavy containers.

The Ministry of Transport is spearheading the drive to secure international investment in new facilities for the movement of people, goods and animals. Officials are investing significant time, money and effort in modernizing transport systems across all sectors: road, rail, air

and maritime.



Gaoussou Toure
Minister of Transport

and maritime. Legislation has been adapted and streamlined to encourage fresh investment from domestic and foreign players and the partially state-owned airline, Air Côte d'Ivoire, is flying high since its formation in 2012 and is now one of the leaders in the continental field.

Minister of Transport, Gaoussou Toure, is delighted with the success of the airline

over the past four years: "We are very satisfied with the performance and growth of Air Côte d'Ivoire," he stated. "The airline accounts for 40 percent of air traffic and now has a fleet of nine aircraft. The fleet will continue to increase in the coming years."

Similar success has been recorded in the shipping industry, with substantial funds spent on the flagship port of Abidjan

and regional maritime logistics hub San Pedro, as the minister explained: "We have widened and deepened the Vridi channel to allow larger ships to arrive at the country's main port in Abidjan, constructed a second container terminal, modernized docks and the fishing port. In addition, we have built designated parking and goods areas to better serve the needs of customers."

"We are also building a railway line between San Pedro and Bamako, the capital of Mali," the minister continued. "This is an important project, since as part of a strategy to open up the country, the Malian authorities are trying to rehabilitate the Dakar-Bamako railway and they plan to build a new line to Conakry-Bamako. These railways will facilitate the exploitation of minerals such as iron, manganese and nickel that we have in different regions."

Turning his attention to Côte d'Ivoire's plans for the aviation industry, he added:

"We also have a large construction project of a new futuristic tourist town around Abidjan airport. It will require very significant investment from the private sector in hotels, shopping malls and exhibition centers. In addition, the site will feature universities for the training of air transport business so as to enable real and sustainable development of air transport."

As the major gateway to West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has three international airports: Abidjan, Yamoussoukro and Bouaké, as well as smaller airports in more than a dozen towns and cities, including Daloa, Korhogo, Man, Odienné and San Pedro.



A bustling metropolis with modern transport links and facilities, Abidjan enjoys great global connectivity for goods and people

Felix Houphouët-Boigny International Airport (also known as Port Bouët Airport) in Abidjan is the country's main entry and exit port for air passengers and logistics, and is well served by more than 20 airlines, including leading international operators from Europe and the Middle East.

Up to 2 million passengers use the modern airport each year, with airport operators reporting robust growth in freight and visitor numbers from a fast-growing route network to all regions of the world.

With abundant investment, business and commercial opportunities throughout the transport and logistics sectors, Toure is confident Japanese investors will build on the recent

impressive work between the two countries' governments and various agencies.

"Côte d'Ivoire is an open country that offers a wealth of safe investment opportunities that benefit all those who want to invest," he stated. "Indeed, for the government, the private sector will be the engine of growth. For us, it is about providing the assistance and support that local and foreign investors deserve."

"We invite Japanese operators in all sectors, not just transport, to come and invest in Côte d'Ivoire, where there are huge opportunities across the spectrum of the economy."

"We are already working with Japan on several projects, including the proposed construction of

large food storage equipment at Abidjan's principal port.

"In short, Japanese businesses are very welcome here as we know they are hard workers, intelligent and good investment partners."

This view is echoed by cabinet colleague Patrick Achi, minister of economic infrastructure, who said while bilateral relations with Japan's public bodies are strong, the ultimate goal is to attract major investment from the private sector and transfers of knowledge and technology to local workers.

"We have a number of private sector companies from Japan present in Côte d'Ivoire, but my ministry is in talks with companies such as Mitsubishi, Yamaha, Marubeni and Toyota,"

he revealed. "Such firms are interested in areas including drinking water, power, agro-industry and distribution."

"We are very eager to engage the private sector and large Japanese multinationals in all stages of major development projects in Côte d'Ivoire."

The minister concluded by highlighting how Ivorian companies are particularly keen to engage with Japanese firms that specialize in innovative technology and state-of-the-art equipment. "Agriculture and associated agribusiness is one of our most advanced sectors, but telecommunications and information communications technology is another area where partnerships are possible," he explained.

World-class port sets the standard

Boasting modern infrastructure and undertaking a \$1 billion expansion program, the Autonomous Port of Abidjan is thriving

Standing proudly and strategically at the junction of major shipping lines from Europe, Asia and America, the Autonomous Port of Abidjan is a modern logistical platform that serves as a major trading, fishing, transit and transshipment hub for the wider region.

Considered a continental benchmark, the world-class port is at the heart of the republic's commercial and industrial operations and plays a key role in the country's economic fortunes. The exceptional facility currently represents 90 percent of the external trade of Côte d'Ivoire, 70 percent of industrial activities and more than 85 percent of customs' revenues.

In 2015, the port handled a record 22 million tons of freight, more than double that of regional rival Dakar in Senegal. That figure will jump even further in the next few years as a \$1 billion expansion drive is well underway, funded by banks from countries, including Japan.

Improvement work includes new infrastructure and enhanced quaysides and will allow larger vessels to load and unload from 2018.

An award-winning intermodal operation that provides more than 40,000 direct or indirect jobs, the port is a hive of activity 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as teams of workers load and unload ships and move a wide range of goods from, and to, multiple terminals and warehouses.

These include state-of-the-art fruit terminal and a timber terminal as well as many warehouses that store and handle



Hien Yacouba Sie
Managing Director
Autonomous Port of Abidjan

major commodities. A fishing harbor area brings together all activities related to fishing and refrigeration warehouses, such as the processing and conservation of recently caught fish and marine products.

"Just like Côte d'Ivoire, the port is moving forward. We went through difficult phases, but are now performing very well."

Hien Yacouba Sie, Managing Director, Autonomous Port of Abidjan

Activities around the Vridi seawall area are centered on a warehouse for agricultural products, general goods and the Vridi Container Terminal. Other important activities include naval workshops and industrial operations focused on chemicals and petrochemicals, food processing and metallurgical functions. The port also has an area for housing and tourist trade.

Earlier this year, a delegation from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

visited the port to hold project talks with senior officials. Arranged as part of the financing agreement for a modern new grain terminal that will enable the facility to further increase its scope of operation and reduce congestion, the visit gave staff from the government agency an opportunity to see the port at firsthand.

Hien Yacouba Sie, managing director of the Autonomous Port of Abidjan, said: "Just like Côte d'Ivoire, the port is moving forward. We went through some difficult phases, but are now performing very well."

"We are pleased to see the Japanese and JICA are on our side in terms of training and human resources, providing us with infrastructure that allows us to be more modern and efficient."

"At the same time, we would welcome a stronger involvement of Japanese players in the Ivorian economy."

"All ports are working to be competitive, but there are many elements that come into play. We have to be able to accommodate large ships and have the relevant storage space, freight, customs facilities, flexibility and reasonable costs. All these impact performance, and while we have some gaps at present, we are moving forward strongly."

"At present, we cannot accommodate conventional vessels and container ships of more 250 meters in length. But when the work is finished in late 2017, we will be able to receive ships with 16-meter drafts (the largest ships that exist)."


"When we finish the work, it will be a new port. We will no longer have to close the channel entrance due to bad weather. We have great ambitions that are achievable, but building such infrastructure takes time."

The dynamic executive said the works will result in a "fluid logistic platform" that will be supported by a "one-stop shop" that will streamline various port processes and ensure an even more efficient and competitive operation.


"Once we achieve all this, in two to three years, and taking into account our location and the role of Côte d'Ivoire in the sub-region, there is no reason for us to not become the number one," he stated confidently. "Operators interested in coming to Côte d'Ivoire should know they will have efficient infrastructure, water, electricity, road facilities, and a port that can handle them properly. We are the entrance and the exit of the West African coast and one of the main gates on the Atlantic coast of Africa."



Sie is in no doubt that Japan's focus on human resources and career development is one of its strongest assets. "In recent years, we have had at least five Japanese fellowships and even hired an Ivorian beneficiary of a scholarship, who was educated at the University of Tokyo and speaks fluent Japanese," he says.



"They train the people with whom they work and we have much to gain by strengthening our ties with them across the board."



An International Reference




Performance - Expertise - Security

Website : www.portabidjan.ci • Email : info@paa.ci



Aviation industry soars to new heights

Flag carrier Air Côte d'Ivoire has enjoyed outstanding success since its launch four years ago and is continuing to invest in new aircraft and expand its route network

Côte d'Ivoire's economic success of the past few years is mirrored by the impressive growth of the national aviation industry that has seen several global airlines flock to this corner of West Africa and open new routes to many cities around the world.

High profile operators including Air France, KLM, Emirates and Turkish Airlines are among the operators to offer regular international flights to and from Abidjan, while fast-growing flag carrier Air Côte d'Ivoire serves five national destinations and around 20 major cities elsewhere on the continent.

In April 2015, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration granted permission for direct flights between Abidjan and American cities in a major breakthrough that has attracted interest from major airlines and is expected to see routes established by 2020.

The aviation industry is one of the sectors that has served as a conduit for foreign direct invest-

ment as it has brought everyone from foreign leaders and government officials to investment chiefs, banking executives, businesspeople and tourists to the country's shores.

Working hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Transport, the National Authority for Civil Aviation (A.N.A.C.) is responsible for the sustainable development and monitoring of the rapidly-expanding industry.

A public body with technical and managerial autonomy, A.N.A.C. was created in 2005 and has gone from strength to strength over the past decade. The entity is headed by Managing Director, Sinaly Silué, who highlighted how transport is a key element for the economic development of his country.

Sinaly Silué, Managing Director, A.N.A.C.

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Working hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Transport, the National Authority for Civil Aviation (A.N.A.C.) is responsible for the sustainable development and monitoring of the rapidly-expanding industry.

A public body with technical and managerial autonomy, A.N.A.C. was created in 2005 and has gone from strength to strength over the past decade. The entity is headed by Managing Director, Sinaly Silué, who highlighted how transport is a key element for the economic development of his country.

"For a country like Côte d'Ivoire that wants to open to the outside world, the port and the airport are key elements," he said. "Important decisions were taken in order to allow safe transport development in Côte d'Ivoire. The first important decision was the open sky policy (designed to liberalize the rules for international aviation and minimize government intervention) that is applied to all airlines that want to serve Côte d'Ivoire."

"With respect to the U.S. open sky policy, we need regulation and local infrastructure to follow. Airfreight cargo is important for our airport, so the authorities have decided to build in Côte d'Ivoire one of the largest freight terminals in the sub-region."

Outstanding growth

Silué reveals how passenger numbers at Felix Houphouët-Boigny International Airport are expected to reach 1.8 million in 2016 — an increase of more than 10 percent year-on-year and three times the number of people who arrived just five years ago.

"All measures taken to manage this traffic growth have succeeded," he said. "If you visit our terminal, you will see how well it functions."

"Extending such a building takes time to ensure the project is properly studied, so you need to show resourcefulness in order to have certain fluidity in an instant. This is what airport management company Aéria tackles every day with great

success." The senior executive is particularly proud of the role A.N.A.C. has played in the outstanding growth of fledgling flag carrier Air Côte d'Ivoire, describing its performance and expansion over the past four years as "extraordinary."

"This is a company that was born from the will of President Alassane Ouattara," he said. "He wanted a company and he chose the right people to create it. The market in 2012 was not easy to conquer as there was another African airline that dominated the market."

"Today, Air Côte d'Ivoire has managed to reduce the presence of that rival and is highly valued for its punctuality, quality on board and for its strategic choice of direct flights. Air Côte d'Ivoire has become the number one airline based in Abidjan, which makes the country's capital a true hub."

The head of A.N.A.C. still sees several challenges on the sector's flight path, but believes they



A.N.A.C. - ensuring civil aviation security in Côte d'Ivoire

www.anac.ci

perform direct flights every day.

"Thirdly, level of services. We had to have new planes and conform to the latest standards, as well as provide a very good quality service on board. It is the only way to be different from all the existing airlines. It is our business model. We were confident it was going to work well, but we did not think that it would succeed so rapidly in just three years."

"We are looking for investors to invest in new planes to counter this image of 'Africa: old, obsolete planes and poor quality.' There is something to do and if we do it now, it is going to last a long time. So that is what we expect from those who want to invest and to accompany us on the journey."

While the airline's rapid rise to regional prominence is welcomed by all the parties associated with Air Côte d'Ivoire, there are a few human resources challenges on the horizon that foreign players from Japan and elsewhere are invited to offer assistance so they can be overcome. "The average age of pilots and technicians is 55-60 years and with the retirement age fixed at 60 years, we are investing heavily in the next

generation of core staff," said the senior executive. We launched and financed pilot training and selected candidates who will be ready in two years' time. For the technicians, it is more complicated and takes a minimum of four and half years' training.

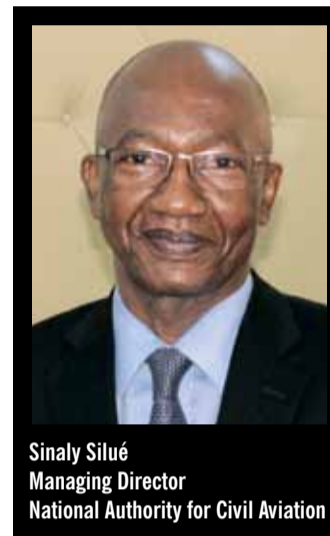
"We are going to need many more technicians in the near future. We have an educational role and work hand in hand with A.N.A.C. to ensure the training is carried out effectively."

Despite such hurdles, Decurey forecasts an extremely bright future for the airline and civil aviation in general in his country. "Air Côte d'Ivoire can only survive if we offer quality and have something others are unable to offer," he commented.

"Everyone who is willing to help us to improve and raise standards is welcome. Japan is known for such skills and for the high quality of its performance."

Additional fleet

In a clear statement of intent for its growth strategy, Air Côte d'Ivoire recently confirmed an order for two A320neo and two A320 aircraft with Airbus, making the company the first African airline to order the A320neo.



Sinaly Silué
Managing Director
National Authority for Civil Aviation



Air Côte d'Ivoire - making Abidjan a regional hub

www.aircotedivoire.com



René Decurey
Managing Director
Air Côte d'Ivoire

"With these new aircraft, Air Côte d'Ivoire will position itself as a flagship airline in the region by offering its passengers the best on-board services, improved punctuality and reliability thanks to these new generation Airbus aircraft," Gen. Abdoulaye Coulibaly, chairman of Air Côte d'Ivoire said after signing the deal in April.

John Leahy, Airbus chief operating officer, customers, added. "We are very pleased to welcome Air Côte d'Ivoire as our first customer in Africa to buy the A320neo. These aircraft will offer Air Côte d'Ivoire the lowest operational costs, the highest

seat comfort and the widest cabins for its passengers."

As the Ouattara administration and private companies strive to attract international investors to all corners of the country, the contribution of Air Côte d'Ivoire's to this economic development strategy cannot be underestimated, as Decurey is quick to point out.

"The northern city of Korhogo, is an eight or nine hour drive from Abidjan," he stated. "If you want investors to create jobs there, such as at a new factory, you would have to take them there by road, show them around the site, and take another nine

hour to drive back to the capital. "Investors need to be able to visit such places and return the same day and Air Côte d'Ivoire's network enables this."

Managing the skies

Established nearly two decades ago, Société d'Exploitation et de Développement Aéroportuaire, Aéronautique et Météorologique (Sodexam) is responsible for the management, operation and development of airports, meteorology and aeronautical activities across the country.

Its primary activities focus on air navigation, airports, security and airport facilitation, aeronautics and airport medicine, weather and meteorological

many areas. The impact of air transport is important. In 2015 alone, we catered for 1.5 million passengers. This shows the importance of air transport.

"We manage a dozen airports in Côte d'Ivoire. For the past two years, Ivorians have really been on the move. The impact of our industry is undeniable. It is a multifaceted activity and a system that must function well."

"Building human capacity is our priority. It must be dynamic and up to date, since the rules and standards are international. In addition, a project to build a new international airport at San Pedro is in progress."

"There is a huge potential here and we must increase the rate of

"From the very start, we knew we had to create an airline with a difference, and we have done it."

René Decurey, Managing Director, Air Côte d'Ivoire

matters, monitoring and control of airport concessions.

"Côte d'Ivoire is a country that is open to the world," stated Georges Philippe Ezale, Sodexam managing director.

"We have a leading role in the sub-region and we are a hub in

partnerships and exchanges between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire to help achieve it.

"We are open to everyone, so the Japanese should seize the opportunities available in sectors such as finance and tourism."

Modern logistics hub boasts global connectivity

Freight companies are taking advantage of the myriad of business opportunities provided by heavy investment in air, sea, rail and road

While Air Côte d'Ivoire is the face of the national aviation industry, there are many government organizations and departments working around the clock behind the scenes to ensure the sector continues to thrive and achieve all its strategic targets.

Moving freight

Offering a professional and tailored approach to its growing portfolio of customers, Ivorian Forwarding Express Company (IFEC) provides a full-service cargo clearance process, logistics and multimodal transport service.

Utilizing extensive maritime, air, rail and road links, the company uses state-of-the-art equipment and technology, as well as staff expertise to get

an insight on local weather conditions and administrative processes to reduce the risk of delays and ensure goods are delivered on time.

Combining talent, dedication, rigor and, above all, professionalism, IFEC is fully focused on delivering a personalized freight service for businesses and individuals as quickly, efficiently and safely as possible.

This challenging goal is achieved through substantial investment in human resources and a modern transport fleet that includes trucks of various sizes.

Global reach at its fingertips

Official IFEC representatives are located in many countries on different continents,

including the U.K., India, China, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Tanzania, Zambia, Burkina Faso and Mozambique.

"The conditions created by the Côte d'Ivoire government are excellent and have facilitated our growth and success," said IFEC Managing Director, Germain Assiemien.

"IFEC aims to have the premier logistics structure in Côte d'Ivoire and is part of the World Freight Network (WFN). We operate around the world and we just joined the World Cargo Alliance (WCA), the world largest logistics network."

"We want to break into the Asian market, in general, as they participate in the development of Côte d'Ivoire, because Asian companies



Germain Assiemien
Managing Director
IFEC

satisfaction.

"Our turnover and our growth has been considerable during the past few years. In 2012, we started with three people. We are now a team of 20 and we have other representatives in various countries."

"Through the WFN, we deliver across all of West Africa. We are interested in major import projects and want to develop long-term contracts with customers around the world, including Japan."

The self-made entrepreneur is extremely excited about the rapid economic growth his country is enjoying and the myriad of opportunities it creates for ambitious firms like IFEC.

He is also determined his success acts as an inspiration to young Ivorians looking to launch their own businesses.

"Young people should believe in what they are doing and have a lot of imagination.

Today, we have everything at our fingertips. I encourage young people to invest in the private sector. Côte d'Ivoire is a country of progress and development in all sectors. Here, everything you undertake succeeds.

"Our objective is to become number one in Côte d'Ivoire in this vast field by 2020. Today, we have the assets and knowledge to get there. We have boosted IFEC to a very good position and are performing very strongly on the world stage."

Assiemien is eager for IFEC to move up another gear with the help of foreign partners, while at the same time, remain concentrated on tailored service solutions and customer satisfaction so clients return again and again.

"We are a country that aspires to economic emergence and real growth," he added.

Airports and Meteorology
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Cocoa and cash crops generate tasty profits

Côte d'Ivoire has established itself as one of the largest and most successful agricultural producers in Africa and the world

Agriculture forms the solid backbone of the Ivorian economy and the country is rightly proud of its enviable reputation as the world's leading producer and exporter of cocoa beans.

Blessed with fertile soil and a tropical climate, the nation enjoys similar success with many other cash crops, including bananas, cashew, pineapples and mangoes.

The figures speak for themselves: Côte d'Ivoire is the clear No. 1 grower of cocoa at around 1.75 million tons/year with a 45 percent share of the global market, the world's second largest producer of cashew nuts at 700,000 tons/year and the global leader of cola nut production at 400,000 tons.

In addition, the resource-rich republic is the continent's leading supplier of bananas, palm oil and rubber at 260,000 tons, 420,000 tons and 255,000 tons, respectively. Other major cash crops include cotton and coffee, while the country is also home to Africa's largest tuna port.

The agricultural industry employs hundreds of thousands of people directly and indirectly and generates more than a quarter of GDP through an extensive footprint that stretches across the entire country.

The sector utilizes the road and rail networks daily for local distribution, and the airports and seaports for prompt deliveries to lucrative international markets.

In June President Alassane Ouattara announced that Côte d'Ivoire had set a target to achieve local processing of all its cashew nut production by 2020, explaining that cashews represented an important sector which the government wanted to use to promote harmonized development within its regions.

The Ministry of Agriculture has administrative representations across the country and its activities are mainly performed by three main entities:

The National Center for Agricultural Research that carries out research to meet the needs of producers; the National Agency for Rural Development that develops the legal framework directly with farmers; and the Interprofessional Fund for Agricultural Research and Advisory Services that researches financing structure.

"Ever since our independence, we have made the wise choice to base our economic development on agriculture," stated Minister Sangafowa Coulibaly.

"Government reforms have improved the governance of products and, in recent years, have been complemented by the National Agricultural Investment Program (NAIP). This initiative has allowed us to attract substantial private investment and streamline public investment. The program has cost around \$4 billion since its launch in 2012 and it will finish in 2017.



Mamadou Sangafowa Coulibaly
Minister of Agriculture

"We have already mobilized nearly 62 percent of these resources. Investments made on the basis of this program have seen us climb from 4 million tons/year of agricultural production to 6 million tons/year.

"In terms of food production, we were at 12 million tons/year, and today we are at 17 tons/year. This makes Côte d'Ivoire a very strong international agricultural power."

Overtaking rival producers

Describing the results of the NAIP as "spectacular," the minister reveals how the comprehensive blueprint has contributed to the fall in poverty in rural areas and helped cut national poverty rates from 75 percent to 56 percent.

"We have strengthened our position and become the world's largest cocoa producer with a 45 percent share," the minister continued, "but the objective is to control half of the global supply in the next two years.

"We have overtaken India as the largest producer of cashew nuts and passed Cameroon in



Côte d'Ivoire is a leading grower and exporter of valuable agricultural goods such as cocoa

2013 as Africa's leading grower of bananas. On a continental scale, we are the most significant producer of rubber and kola nuts and the leading exporter of palm oil.

"The ongoing transformation of the agricultural economy should not be based solely on the export of raw materials; we need to convert our raw materials in Côte d'Ivoire so as to generate added value," minister Coulibaly stated.

"This will aid the diversification of our economy. Other sectors will also emerge and it will mean we will be less vulnerable to a possible downturn in demand and falling prices of raw materials. If we achieve this transformation, we will introduce processed products on the

"We have strengthened our position and become the world's largest cocoa producer with a 45 percent share."

Mamadou Sangafowa Coulibaly, Minister of Agriculture

market and that will also give us more control over pricing."

The minister is eager for his country to take advantage of Japan's rich experience of utilizing its natural resources through the development of human resources and greater utilization of equipment and technology.

"On very little land, Japan manages to produce for its people in more arid conditions than ours and also exports products; is a major advantage. In Côte d'Ivoire, two-thirds of the active population are involved in

agricultural activities. In Japan, only one-tenth of the population produces for the country.

"Japan improved productivity through the mechanization of agriculture and also added value to the produce before it left the country. This is exactly what we want to replicate in Côte d'Ivoire.

"We need more partnerships with Japan, with whom we have a tradition of cooperation, particularly for rice. They support us through funding and we have plans to improve other ways of cooperation."

With Japan a major importer of timber and wood products and Côte d'Ivoire comprised of vast rainforests and wooded areas, the potential for a mutually-beneficial partnership is extremely high, with the pair already working closely on forestry preservation projects.

At present, the permanent forest tissue of Côte d'Ivoire constitutes 19 percent of the territory and comprise around 230 classified forests with a total surface of about 4.2 million hectares.

These areas include eight national parks and six reserves covering a total of nearly 2.1 million hectares.

Sustainable forestry

Despite the best efforts of the government and conservation groups, forests have shrunk due to illegal logging, although 30,000 to 40,000 jobs depend on the legal timber industry and wooden goods are shipped around the world.

"The Japanese government cooperates with us by supporting a program for the preservation of Ivorian forests and management of natural catastrophes caused by climate change," revealed Louis-André Dacoury-Tabley, minister of water and forestry.

"The initiative aims to improve technical and logistics capabilities of the structures through the provision of the right equipment and training. To work toward forestry conservation, we have introduced measures such as intense surveillance of forests, direct management of classified forests, fight against fires and prohibition of traditional sawing without authorization."

Tropical Bois is the result of

over a century in woodworking experience that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century. Established in the 1980s, the company is committed to reforestation and produces lumber, sliced and rotary veneer and is widely recognized as one of the best manufacturing companies in Africa.

The premises extend over approximately 45,000 square meters and includes two veneer slicers, two rotary veneer lathes and cutting lines, two veneer jointing lines, three band-saw lines for lumber production, one sliced veneer dryer, three rotary veneer dryers and ten kilns for lumber that encompass a capacity of over a 1,000 cubic meters.

"We cut down less than half of what we could cut down," said Tropical Bois Chief Executive Officer Riccardo Tropini. "Wood industrialists have a lot to do regarding ecology and we have reforested 6,000 hectares, which means we have planted around 3.5 million trees."

In late 2015, international development partner the World Bank published an upbeat report in which the leading financial institution's economists recommended boosting productivity in the agricultural sector so the country can maximize its wealth of natural resources.

"Agricultural employment can be boosted by promoting the marketing of products; facilitating the emergence of economies of scale for small farmers; facilitating community networking and partnerships along the value chain; promoting access to, and the use of, new technologies by farmers to help lower their production and transaction costs," the report stated.

Sweet smell of success

As guardian of the two highly lucrative cash crops, the Coffee-Cocoa Council is the figurehead for the multibillion dollar industry

If agriculture is the backbone of the economy and the transport networks the veins, then cocoa is undoubtedly the skeleton as it is far and away the most important industry given Côte d'Ivoire's production and exports play a huge role in determining the global price of the commodity.

Around 800,000 farms of various sizes across the country have the capacity to produce a combined 1.75 million tons of the delicious fruit per annum and the sector has been afforded priority status by the government and its various departments and agencies. Leading this drive, which is focused on quality and quantity, is the Coffee-Cocoa Council (CCC), which was created in 2012 and manages all activities related to the two crops — on which eight million workers and their families depend.

The Council's responsibilities include quality control, project development, accreditation of growers and assisting the government in negotiating deals on international marketing and ensuring their implementation.

The CCC has 13 regional offices located in the coffee-cocoa producing areas and the entity is at the helm of the Coffee



Lambert Kouassi Konan
Chairman of the Board
Coffee-Cocoa Council



Massandjé Toure-Litse
CEO
Coffee-Cocoa Council

"The Japanese are very strict in terms of certification, quality and packaging and we are open to raising our norms to their standards."

Massandjé Toure-Litse, CEO, Coffee-Cocoa Council

Relaunch Program that aims to boost output to at least 200,000 tons by 2020.

"We currently transform 25 percent of our cocoa, but aim to double that figure by 2020," revealed Massandjé Toure-Litse, CCC chief executive officer.

"We are exploring ways of facilitating the supply of beans from these processing plants.

"At the government level, we commissioned a study that had to review the competitiveness of grinding companies in Côte d'Ivoire. The result of this study is that a working group was put in place to make relevant recommendations to ministers.

"We made this study public and there is a strong will from both sides to increase the grind-

ing capacity in Côte d'Ivoire.

"One of our central priorities is promoting our own products inside the country. Our challenge is to make Ivorians understand and appreciate the qualities, as well as virtues of coffee and cocoa for their health.

"Naturally, the Coffee-Cocoa Council wants more Japanese to be linked to us, for example, by installing a processing plant here or through exports. Japan imports more Ghanaian cocoa than the Ivorian cocoa. Measures have been taken by the minister of agriculture so that we can be very rigorous in terms of the standards and quality required by the Japanese. This is because the Japanese are very strict in terms of certification, quality

and packaging and we are open to raising our norms to their standards."

The executive is eager for Côte d'Ivoire to follow in the footsteps of the Japanese when it comes to is the dynamic of transformation of agricultural business and supply chains with the help of industrialization, knowledge and skills.

"We have to go a step further and benefit from the Japanese experience," she explained. "We must learn to process raw materials locally and turn them into finished products. We need to put more value on addressing the issue of youth employment, women and all vulnerable populations who need to economically regain their dignity. Thus, we would like to draw inspiration from the fine example set by Japan."

Colleague and CCC Chairman Lambert Kouassi Konan is eager to expand on this last point and the 2015 launch of a groundbreaking five-year youth training program.

"There is an aging population of cocoa farmers so this initiative encourages young people to return to the fields. We ensure they have at least one hectare of land and provide a lot of support. We are targeting 1,000 people and 250 are already participating," he said.

"We participate in fairs and exhibitions, where we organize tasting sessions, for example. In the medium term, we will install kiosks in cities so people involved in both products can consume what they produce."

"The Japanese need to know that Côte d'Ivoire is a very hospitable country. The business climate has improved considerably, they will be listened to attentively, and arrangements will be taken to facilitate their investments on Ivorian soil."



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Commercial interests that aid people of Côte d'Ivoire

The business landscape is changing for the better, with reduced red tape and a more formal economy. Conscientious investors have leapt in to raise the quality of life for Ivoirians

With increased Japanese investments now pouring in, no one is happier than Minister of Commerce Jean-Louis Billon. He welcomes the introduction of CFAO Toyota to the automotive landscape and the construction of a new Heineken plant, as both increase competition and choice for the domestic consumer.

"We are also happy with the drafting of the National Export Strategy to boost exports from Côte d'Ivoire to the rest of the world," he said. "It is a long process that will be ongoing, and we will see the effects in the coming months and years that follow. I am satisfied, however, that it is a good start."

The simplification of import and export procedures will bring greater responsiveness and competitiveness, something the commercial sector has found challenging. There has been way too much red tape where this sector was concerned, and, as Billon eloquently puts it, "We have in effect, had to prune a forest to see a clear horizon."

Overall, however, he notes that the ministry is winning the battle: the business environment has improved significantly in the last three years, and the fact that Côte d'Ivoire has made it into the top 100 countries in the ranking of competitiveness as measured by the World Economic Forum is an excellent achievement.

"We have also improved in the World Bank's Doing Business Index," he said, adding:

"I know the Japanese investor will look at these as positive indicators. They are looking closely at the business environment



Jean-Louis Billon
Minister of Commerce



Zouheir Ezzeddine
General Manager
Carré d'Or

since an investor is someone who essentially works in the formal sector. An environment of transparency, availability of information and easy business facilitation is more attractive for the Japanese, and that is what we are now looking at."

Billon discusses in more detail the "new Ivorian" concept and how a change of mindset needs to be nurtured in the population at large.

"The president is sending a message of unity: everyone working together for a more prosperous future," he said. "The new Ivorian is more hard-working, and more focused on performance and the future. It's a strategy that will help us get out of the crisis in order to maintain a country under construction, building growth and competitiveness to make Côte d'Ivoire a successful, emerging and newly industrialized country."

"It is of course a more serious mentality; there will be more stress and sacrifice. However, I

think it's a reflex we need to have in this culture instead of the culture of informality and fraud that prevailed during the crisis."

The Japanese business ethic

The minister also tells Global Insight how much he enjoys working with the Japanese. He admires the studies and detailed analyses they make before investing.

"When a Japanese delegation is received, I always find it very informative," he said. "All the questions they ask, the comparisons they make with other host countries of foreign direct investors; this all allows us to improve our positioning."

"Clearly, they are rediscovering Côte d'Ivoire," he said. "Although they have been present here since the 1970s, they are traditionally more oriented toward English-speaking African countries."

"Now we can say that Côte d'Ivoire is the showcase of Japanese investment in the West

Africa area."

The Carré d'Or group is one of the most active investors in the country, with subsidiaries prominent in several areas such as industry, distribution, and handling transit. What started as a small distribution company in 1975 is now the fifth-largest group in the country, with more than 8,200 direct employees.

Responsible for distribution, pasta production, water products, and a wheat-flour mill, the company is also the largest importer of rice in the country.

Smart investor

The group has evolved to become the huge conglomerate it is today by responding to the different needs within the country.

"We have set up factories for packing rice, and in 2010 we also purchased another cardboard factory that recycles," said General Manager Zouheir Ezzeddine.

"In 2013, we installed a production unit of plastic films, for our own needs and for sale to various customers. The group uses 40 percent of what is produced, and the rest is sold. In 2014, we bought Afribache, a company that produces tarpaulins, as well as cardboard producer SNIM. We were able to merge three cardboard factories into one company without reducing the number of employees."

Last year, the group moved into real-estate, making luxury houses for employees of the group. This year, it set up a tomato-processing plant that will be ready for production at the end of 2017.

"We also own Handling and Global Transit, a company that port handling and air and sea transit and a travel and tourism agency. It is for our own use, but we also have customers like the first two transit companies. We are second in turnover of customs."

Championing Côte d'Ivoire

Almost 80 percent of the Carré d'Or capacity is invested in this country. The rest is in the sub-region.

"The peace and stability that has been established in the country since 2011 has helped greatly to its development. It is the former investors who were in the country for a long time that make great investments in Côte d'Ivoire," Ezzeddine noted.

"The only challenges we face now is electricity and its price fluctuation and issue of industrial land. Despite these uncertainties, we continue to invest. We have been linked to agriculture projects such as the construction of a cocoa factory in San Pedro or another project in the cashew sector."

The group has had a very clear on the society at large. "If our group had not been the leading distributor of rice, Ivoirians would be paying 40 percent



Côte d'Ivoire forests contain the highest biodiversity in West Africa

more today. We fought against an increase in rice prices because it is an important staple. It must be said that the group has been very successful in managing this area and today the price of rice remains stable thanks to the will of the group.

"The margin that we put on rice is small. We provide a stock of four months for the price of rice will soar because of inflation risks. Our vision in the field of rice is sometimes more humanitarian than economic. Rice is the essential element that enables the mass of people to live, even when the margins are non-existent. We always think of the customer, the consumer of

rice, who has always supported us and, somehow, allowed the growth of the group."

Social projects

The Carré d'Or chief goes on to explain how Japan is a rice donor to Côte d'Ivoire and the ultimate effect that donation has on the people.

"The government made a tender whereby everyone interested in buying can participate. The one with the best price wins the bid and we win almost every year. With this money, the Ivorian state invests in social projects," he said.

"With regards to our corporate social responsibility endeavors,

we try to work on the areas of the population that the state cannot help, or where there are health needs, for example. We even have a school program with 48 schools that 9,000 students now benefit from this initiative.

"It is our strategy to get our products (as we already do with rice) out to the other countries of the region. We are particularly interested in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and also Nigeria.

"Côte d'Ivoire has so many resources: cocoa, coffee, cashews, rubber, iron, gold, oil and even gas. It also has engineers. Now it has the best potential in the region, thanks to a strong administration."

Reaching the summit

Local businessman Antoine Dossou Vidjanagni is a perfect example of the entrepreneurial men of vision President Ouattara is fostering

Another local company making an impact on Côte d'Ivoire's future is civil construction firm, Entreprise Dossou. Having begun in the 1980s, with a mandate to build schools, universities and public centers, the company is now embarking on its first project as a developer, with a major office building in Plateau, Abidjan.

CEO Antoine Dossou Vidjanagni explains the rise of the company, and his own journey as a self-made success.

"Initially, I came to Côte d'Ivoire as an adventurer in 1973. I studied here, then started teaching accounting.

"I started to make deliveries of office supplies and these customers asked me to deliver construction materials too. I was then led to the construction sector. I was not a building technician, so I hired an architect who helped me enter the sector of building professionals, and that was 25 years ago.

"Our company dates back to 1985 and the team was formed gradually. We currently have 60 direct employees and we contract with local teams.

"Originally, we delivered building materials. In 1995, the government wanted to launch emergency projects in schools, so they selected a number of companies, including ours, which was equipped with some references; we were in possession of a new material that people wanted to test; "geo-con-



Antoine Dossou Vidjanagni
CEO
Entreprise Dossou

crete." We built five schools in particular with this material (in Yopougon, Abobo and Cocody), but also 20 primary schools (in Aboisso, Divo and Tiapou) then rehabilitated the University of Cocody.

"After the crisis, we went back to complete the projects that were under way. We imposed a restriction; we had a lot of debts to the state. We had to have visibility on the collection of our claims before launching new projects. Our cash flow was weakened. We had to cut back, but generally everything is now in order. This year we have two current calls for tender on high school projects."

Flagship project

The Entreprise Dossou chief is delighted his flagship project is now under construction: two buildings in Plateau, close to

Abidjan that will span a total of 3,600 sq. meters. We have the land and we want to build a shopping center. We are currently doing feasibility studies, and we will start work at the end of this year. The project will take 18 months to complete.

"This is the first time we do this kind of project. A firm is responsible for the environmental impact and another one for the project's profitability; this is ongoing. The quest for donors is also under way."

Dossou is also interested in building homes. "We want to build 300 housing units per year. We hope that following this project we will obtain other land reserves in order to keep the momentum going," he says.

"Currently, we are trying to get into public works, and to build roads. It is not clear, how this will work out, but we are working hard to achieve it."

Research and organization

Although Dossou concedes there is an awful lot of opportunity in the infrastructure area, it takes some organization to win tenders, he said.

"This is an area where each body has its specificity, and we surround ourselves with building engineers and architects. Financial specialists will explore the feasibility study of the project, the architect will coordinate and a consulting engineer will supervise. There is room for everyone, certainly, but

space is organized for professionals. Good technicians are worth their weight in gold, and we attach great importance to their expertise. We focus on quality, and this is why we are listed."

Dossou embraces the idea of competition. "We do not have many local competitors and we do not fear them," he says.

"Our strengths comprise the pre-financing and the quality of our work. We have many opportunities in the market. Many companies do not have our credentials, but some of them are torch-bearers of big international companies.

"The French, Moroccans and Turkish come here, do the work and leave. They subcontract to local companies, but they always lack control of the environment if they do not have reliable local partners. There are many sites that are not completed due to a lack of funding or poor ratings.

In our case, we have no concerns about the life of our company, nor on competition, because ultimately, the customers always come back to us.

"Everything happens by tender and we are ready for every potentiality. We are open to competition, but we are focused on the domestic shopping center project dear to our heart.

"My ambition is to make a company that will be sustainable. I hope that in 100 years, Entreprise Dossou is a big player in Côte d'Ivoire. My goal is to create a strong company that can compete and that has an adequate financial support to fund other projects, while still having a satisfactory return on investment."

Retail giant CDCI welcomes new investors with appetite for success

The largest and most successful food distribution company in Côte d'Ivoire with a rapidly-growing network of more than 130 stores, Compagnie de Distribution de Côte d'Ivoire (CDCI) is a vastly-experienced market operator eager to form fruitful partnerships with foreign investors.

Since opening its first retail outlet more than 20 years ago, CDCI has gone from strength to strength and was the driving force behind the first shopping mall in West Africa, which opened its doors in the bustling capital, Abidjan, exactly two decades ago. Perfectly positioned to take advantage of the country's expanding middle-class' higher disposable income and increasing appetite for high-quality food, CDCI's strong portfolio of brands is testament to the hard work of Ivorian entrepreneur Yasser Ezzeddine.

Under his expert guidance, the group has become a household name and its valuable and extensive experience in Côte d'Ivoire's tough retail environment makes them the partner of choice for foreign businesses seeking a



Yasser Ezzeddine
Chairman of CDCI

foothold in the very promising sector.

Casting his mind back to the early days, Ezzeddine recalls his pioneering approach to breaking the West African retail mold. "Years ago, there were no shopping centers. I was the first to establish a shopping mall in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa.

"Many did not believe in the project; they thought that consumers would not adopt such purchasing behavior, but it was completely the opposite. The mall became a promenade for

the population, which was our goal. We worked on the image of a hypermarket that is open to everyone, it required a lot of action in this regard. We had to challenge the common image of a supermarket reserved for the wealthy. We had to make it accessible to all, and we did."

According to the industry veteran, the trend of consumers heading to the supermarket for groceries and general retail purchases will continue for many years and he is quick to highlight one of CDCI's main competitive advantages: customer proximity.

"You have to be approachable and get closer to customers as we do at CDCI. I bought this company when it only had 14 stores, today we have more than 130," he explained in his current role as chairman. We have witnessed a change in mentality, customers touch and feel the products, they have several choices now.

Consumer habits are changing and this is what develops distribution. We need to offer a new product to a consumer so they can discover them and change their habits.

"Our strategy is to continue to maintain growth by investing in new shops. In 2015, we injected money into the company, so have strengthened the development fund, resources were made available. In 2014 we opened 15 stores, we are always opening new ones."

Turning to the vast array of investment opportunities that exist in Côte d'Ivoire and the wider region, Ezzeddine says his group will repeat its domestic success in foreign markets such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea and Liberia.

"There is a huge potential still to be exploited in the market for modern retail and a lot of potential in several sectors," he stated. "The Ivorian government has implemented many incentives for investment."

His final message: "You must take risks, this is key. I invite Japanese investors to develop their ideas with us. We have partnerships in many different areas: agriculture, construction, real estate development, mining and cocoa. In short, opportunities are present in all the sectors in which we operate."

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Digital drive energizes the economy

By embracing the latest information and communications technology, ministries are enhancing the services they provide

Not surprisingly for Africa's second-largest economy and one of the continent's most outstanding performers, Côte d'Ivoire has an advanced information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure that plays a vital role in daily life for countless companies and individuals.

Seen as one of the engines of growth and a high-potential area, the ICT industry generates just below 10 percent of GDP, or around \$800 billion, and employs around 200,000 workers directly and indirectly, according to official figures.

With an estimated mobile penetration rate of 90 percent, businesses have been quick to take advantage of the commercial opportunities generated by such a wide consumer base, a theme the government is eager to replicate.

To facilitate this goal, the government established new regulatory entities and generated a wide range of initiatives to foster the ICT sector. Measures included the formation of the Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI), which was established in 2012 through the merger of



Bruno Nabagné Koné
Minister of Post and ICT

the Telecommunications Council of Côte d'Ivoire and the Telecommunications Agency of Côte d'Ivoire to develop the digital economy and expand the reach of ICT.

Meanwhile, the Société Nationale de Développement Informatique is a government entity dedicated to supporting and providing assistance to organizations, communities, and private companies in all ICT related areas.

"E-governance is key to Côte d'Ivoire achieving its goal of becoming an emerging market by 2020," said Bruno Nabagné

Koné, minister of post and ICT. "The state should serve as a model. Digital is the future for people: for the transformation of their lives, jobs, wealth creation and so on.

"We have to ensure the state, in all its actions, decisions, daily operation and relationships with the public, can use as many digital services as possible. To achieve this, we set ourselves three objectives that are ambitious, but if implemented, will bring this wealth creation aspect. "The first is creating a unique identifier for all our citizens that will simplify many operations in areas such as civil status, safety, education and health. This will enable the state to process a large amount of information a lot more quickly.

"The second is moving to a zero paper system: there are significant and ecologically friendly reasons of course, but our focus is on further improving efficiency. This will allow us to better serve individuals. It is important that we create the most direct link with people."

The minister continued: "The third is simplifying the services the state offers to better serve the people. This will bring the

state to its citizens and facilitate contact. This electronic governance will mean significant budgetary savings and improve the relationship with a more efficient state. In addition, there will be less corruption, more traceability and rigor in the functioning of the state."

Building trust

As part of a multipronged program to ensure the switch to digital services goes without a hitch, officials are overhauling the regulatory environment to ensure it continues to attract sig-

"E-governance is key to Côte d'Ivoire achieving its goal of becoming an emerging market by 2020."

Bruno Nabagné Koné, Minister of Post and ICT

nificant private investment and are reassuring users that they can trust digital services.

"We are also facilitating access: allowing every Ivorian, wherever they live, to have access to computer equipment, individually or through our communities-based cyber-centers project," Koné said.

"We are also promoting local content by showing the Ivorian culture and selling it outside of the country. Such content includes music, documentaries,

movies, crafts and so on.

"We are also training people in all economic sectors to build and maintain networks, provide user support for the fight against cybercrime and training people to work in call centers, electronic commerce and for the government. We realized that the state was very poorly equipped for a successful digital transformation, because there was not enough trained personnel. Digital training is now a priority."

Given Japan's enviable experience and reputation as a leading manufacturer of hi-tech hard-

ware and software solutions, Koné is adamant Japan is perfectly positioned to maximize the wealth of opportunities generated by this comprehensive digital drive.

"There is excellent cooperation between Japan and Côte d'Ivoire in a number of areas, but I regret this cooperation is poorly developed in the digital sector, where Japan is at the global forefront.

"Japan has already supported us in e-governance, but given the significant capabilities of this great country, I wish to see a stronger collaboration and I hope Japanese companies and the government will recognize the need to develop more cooperation in the digital domain.

"We are ready to receive any delegation from this sector that is interested in coming to Côte d'Ivoire."

The minister continued: "Côte d'Ivoire has an ambition that is highly complementary to that of Japan. It aims to be technologically advanced, relying on technology to develop its economy. Côte d'Ivoire has a strong 'traditional' economy upon which it wants to establish the digital economy as another activator to its progress and growth.

Managing the Frequencies

Created to enable effective and efficient use of radio frequencies, the Ivorian Agency of Radio Frequencies Management



AIGF - Connecting Côte d'Ivoire to the world www.aigf.ci

(AIGF) is committed to ensuring that the Ivorian people benefit from this wealth as freedom and fulfillment.

Ensuring the planning, allocation and control of radio frequencies is all in a day's work for the government body which is helping to narrow the digital divide by improving the availability and security of communication services and frequency bands.

"In terms of frequency management, we have always been the leaders," said Siaka Koné, AIGF managing director. "I have been in the industry for almost 30 years, so often people refer to

us for creating their frequency management entities.

"I have helped a lot of countries put the necessary structures in place. Côte d'Ivoire has been a pioneer in creating a communications agency to manage the liberalization of the sector. Frequencies are life and our mission is to make life easier."

Koné sees plenty of overlap and potential for partnerships.

"Japan is the world leader in ICT and radio frequencies and its companies also have the financial means to develop. We are looking for the financial means to develop properly and thus reach our maximum potential."

Japanese technology firms urged to plug into profits

With Japanese firms the global benchmark for modern technology, abundant openings exist throughout the Ivorian economy

Tasked with responsibilities that include the issuing of operating licenses for telecommunications services and consumer protection, professional government regulator Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Ivory Coast (ARTCI) is an efficient independent administrative authority with financial autonomy.

Dedicated to impartiality and transparency, the authority regulates all aspects of the ICT sector in Côte d'Ivoire. As such, it is an important guardian of the postal, telephony and internet spheres and ensures strict compliance with data protection laws and electronic transaction legislation for individuals and companies.

ARTCI helps connect consumers and enterprises across the country, and while a great deal of progress has been made, officials are eager to partner with world class technology partners from countries like Japan to optimize the sector's true potential.



Bilé Diéméléou
Managing Director
ARTCI

"The push toward the digital economy is due to our excellent statutory environment that allows investors to arrive, settle and invest in complete safety," said ARTCI Managing Director, Bilé Diéméléou.

"Other countries see us as a role model. The digital economy is a sector that acts as a catalyst for economic growth by allowing



Nongolougo Soro
Managing Director
SNDI

all the municipalities and the businesses of Côte d'Ivoire to move forward.

"Our president wishes Côte d'Ivoire to become an emerging country from 2020, but the emergence has already begun. We are displaying our abilities and capacities and are ready to share this experience with other countries."

According to Diéméléou, the arrival of Japanese technology, experience and knowledge would help the country achieve its goal even sooner and he sees a lot of scope for potential partnerships between the public and private sectors, and mutually-beneficial relationships.

"Japan is a highly developed, industrial country that has excellent infrastructure and a digital economy. We think Japan's support would therefore be hugely beneficial to our own digital development.

"As an emerging country, Côte d'Ivoire needs Japanese support because equipment is expensive. For instance, we need a data center, but cannot afford it at present, so through such international cooperation we could benefit from these kind of hi-tech tools."

Supervising ICT development

As one might expect from a government committed to the sustainable development of a modern ICT sector, the Côte d'Ivoire administration has established several organizations to manage and supervise

industry developments.

The National Society for Information Development (SNDI) is a forward-thinking state corporation that operates as a private entity and was created more than a decade ago to support the modernization of the Ivorian administration through the proper use of information technologies and telecommunications.

The authority takes care of the development of business applications and software oriented toward the public sector, as well as the design and deployment of a nationwide network to support the exploitations of such applications and Ivorian embassies in other countries.

The Embassy of Côte d'Ivoire in Tokyo is already connected to SNDI's digital infrastructure. SNDI is spearheading efforts to improve the computer literacy of the Ivorians, and helping people of all ages and backgrounds become more familiar with modern technologies. It is also teaching them how to make the most of software and hardware in everyday life and in their dealings with the state.

According to Nongolougo Soro, managing director of SNDI, from 180,000 civil servants, less than two percent are familiar with computer technology, meaning more than nine out of every 10 require training if they are to make the most of the digital drive.

"The push toward the digital economy is due to our excellent statutory environment that allows investors to invest in complete safety."

Bilé Diéméléou, ARTCI Managing Director

Given all government ministries have embarked on a comprehensive digitalization program for internal and external documents, such a requirement is now pressing.

"Since most civil servants are not well educated in computer science, we educate them in this domain," Soro explained. "We accompany the rest of the administration in providing cyber security. We sell the expertise we have in Côte d'Ivoire in the sub-region, to countries such as Togo, Benin,

Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry and Senegal.

"Japan manufactures computers and it would be ideal if we could have a Japanese firm that wishes to partner with Côte d'Ivoire to manufacture computers locally and serve the Ivorian market. From such a base, the

clearly be really interested in such an approach and learn from the good practice in Japan."

Soro also sees huge potential for software development between the two countries:

"This is where a partnership with Japanese firms would allow us to take advantage of their experience, and position ourselves as a relay for the conquest of the West African markets," he said.

"Japanese companies can truly find markets in Côte d'Ivoire and use the country as a gateway to West Africa. A product that they deliver to sell in Côte d'Ivoire can certainly be resold in the rest of the sub-region.

"Another component of our development and modernization is cybersecurity. Any partnership with Japan would be welcomed as it would allow us to understand and learn from their best practices in cybersecurity, both in the software domain, as well as in the network infrastructure area."

This report was produced by Global Insight and can also be read online at: www.japantimes.co.jp/international-reports
Barbara Jankovic, Regional Director, Global Insight

ICT – Connecting consumers and businesses across Côte d'Ivoire



Composed of seven members with judicial powers, ARTCI is an independent administrative body for the ICT sector with legal responsibility and financial autonomy. Regulatory tasks are performed by the dynamic authority independently, impartially and transparently.

Missions

- » Regulate the telecommunication/ICT sector
- » Regulate the postal sector
- » Ensure the security of network and information systems
- » Protect data of a personal nature
- » Manage electronic transactions
- » Manage Côte d'Ivoire host names and Internet addresses



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