FOCAC VI: African initiatives toward a sustainable Chinese relationship
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Dear Reader,

Prior to the upcoming 6th Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC), to be held in South Africa in 2015, it is crucial that scholars and other stakeholders review previous FOCAC commitments so as to enhance and deepen understanding on the African side and maximise benefits in the upcoming engagement. FOCAC 2015 provides an opportunity to assess China’s presence on the continent and map out its future direction, but doing so vis-à-vis the maximising of African benefits and opportunities. The special edition of the China Monitor seeks to raise awareness and provide balanced perspectives towards FOCAC and China-Africa relations more generally through debate and information exchange. A host of international scholars, specialising in a number of fields, have been invited to contribute their reflections on various aspects feeding directly into the FOCAC policy process. It is the intention that collaborative work of this nature will help contribute toward coherent, credible policy options for African decision-makers, in the interests of a sustainable relationship between China and Africa.

The upcoming 6th Forum comes at a time of shifting economic and political priorities. For the past decade and a half, since the inception of the first FOCAC meeting in 2000, there has been an underlying assumption that China’s economy only had one direction: onward and upward. It is true, that following the end of the commodity super-cycle in 2009, coupled with the global financial crises, uncertainty around China’s economic growth abounded. Nevertheless, China proved to weather the crises rather well; this was reflected in the 2012 FOCAC where Beijing pledged an unprecedented US$ 20 billion in credit development assistance. On the advent of this 6th conference, economic conditions within China are uncertain. This time, rather than the uncertainty being part of a broader economic crises, current difficulties are more domestically based. The Shanghai index lost 30 per cent of its value within three weeks in July 2015, taking US$ 3 trillion off the market’s value. This was followed by heavy state intervention, which, at least for the present, appears to have stabilised the markets. Such woes at home may have implications for markets abroad – not least African states which have come to increasingly rely on Chinese trade and development assistance. It is within this context that the outcomes of the 6th FOCAC conference will have to engage with the new reality - that like any other country, China has limits. Certainly, expectation management has manifested in China domestically - in the form of the recently dubbed ‘New Normal’, to deal with difficulties facing the re-balancing of the Chinese economy domestically.

A key question in the present context will is whether the New Normal will impact relations with China’s international partners. In this regard, China itself has something to offer. As infrastructure development tails off in China, many companies are running out of work, evidenced in the likes of ‘ghost cities’ and China’s inflated property market, the government has dovetailed their situation with a new foreign policy initiatives such as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the One Belt One Road Initiative. These policies are targeted primarily at their neighbours such as Central Asia, where the historical concept of the Silk Road has been revived to forge a vision which linked to oil and gas deals, as well as significant infrastructure projects. South East Asia is another key target of these initiatives. Further afield, are linkages to Europe and Africa. For instance, a newly launched policy within Africa, the ‘Three Networks and Infrastructure Industrialisation’ policy is an extension of this. The launching of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a Chinese led-consortium involving a host of global partners, including South Africa (but excluding, notably, the United States) will play a role in financing these and other initiatives. Such plans will most likely include Chinese companies, both private and state owned, which will increasingly seek projects abroad as China’s leaders attempt to re-balance the economy. In essence, these new measures appear as a far more economically and politically bold new phase of China’s initial ‘going out’ policy of the late 1990s,
in which state-owned enterprises sought valuable resources abroad.

In terms of the upcoming FOCAC conference, a key question is to what extent these initiatives fit with African priorities? Collective consultation and dialogue through FOCAC has met with challenges, not least of all that the relationship has been described as asymmetrical: China commands significant resources, high levels of co-ordination and a clear sense of objectives and outcomes. African counterparts largely lack these levels of resources and co-ordination, not only amongst each other but also domestically. This deficit has negatively affected Africa’s utilisation of the opportunities that could be generated from the relationship with China. Even though there has been a growing interest in, and work on, the relationship between China and Africa from the African angle, there nevertheless remains a deficit of work which can help African countries strategise, prioritise and co-ordinate their engagement with China. Developing a sound grasp on the domestic Chinese political and economic situation from the African side will further aid African states in developing policies which can strategically maximise their engagement.

We hope that the selection of articles which follow will offer food for thought for scholars, policy makers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other actors interested in pushing the FOCAC policy agenda forward.
FOCAC: The evolving China-Africa security relationship

By David Shinn*

Introduction

China’s growing physical presence, investments, and interests in Africa have a direct impact on its need for improved security on the continent and the way it supports African security. As with all countries, China is primarily interested in protecting its own interests. As terrorist groups and instability spread in some parts of Africa, this increases the security challenge facing China. Looking to the future, China is readying itself to be a global naval power. These factors have already resulted in a stronger Chinese security footprint in Africa and some modification of its non-interference principle. Current evidence suggests this trend will continue and perhaps quicken. In response, the African Union, African sub-regional organisations, and key African countries need to maximize the benefit they receive from this evolving security relationship with China.

China’s security role in Africa has evolved in a major way since the 1960s and early 1970s when China was a modest provider of military assistance and training (and substantial provider of moral support) for African liberation and revolutionary groups. With each passing decade, China became an increasingly significant supplier of conventional and light weapons to African governments and made greater use of exchange military visits. While arms sales and exchange visits continue to be an important part of the relationship, there has been a recent focus on supporting United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in Africa, combatting piracy in the Gulf of Aden, and contemplating ways to protect China’s growing physical presence and interests in Africa. Looking to the future, China is trying to determine how Africa fits into its strategy as a regional military power and eventually a global naval power. It is crucial, however, to contextualise Africa’s security importance to China within a global perspective. As compared to the countries on China’s periphery, its near neighbours, Europe, and North America, Africa is a low security priority (Huang and Ismail, 2014; Shinn and Eisenman 2012).

China seems to have given much more thought to security-related co-operation than have the African countries. This is not surprising as it is easier for a highly centralised and secretive Chinese government to grapple with these issues than it is for 54 (50 in the case of FOCAC members) independent African countries with varying interests to do so. The challenge for the 50 African FOCAC members is to agree how to obtain maximum benefit from China’s current and future security needs in and around Africa. This will require an extraordinary effort by the African Union (AU), sub-regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States, Southern African Development Community, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the leaders of key African states. Whatever they decide in terms of China-Africa co-operation, the African countries and organisations will want to avoid alienating Western countries, several of which already have major security interests in and co-operation with Africa, and key emerging nations such as India, Brazil, Turkey, and the Gulf States.

*David Shinn is affiliated to the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. He has been an adjunct professor at George Washington University since 2001 and served for 37 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, mostly in Africa.
China-Africa security relations following the 2012 FOCAC in Beijing

President Hu Jintao launched the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security at the 2012 FOCAC Ministerial in Beijing. The stated purpose was to deepen cooperation with the AU and African countries for maintaining peace and security, to provide financial support for AU peacekeeping missions, to develop the African Standby Force, and to train more security personnel and peacekeepers for the AU. The FOCAC Fifth Ministerial Action Plan (2013-2015) included these goals in addition to several others. The plan states that China will support African countries’ efforts to combat illegal trade and circulation of small arms and light weapons. China agreed to contribute within its means to Africa’s conflict prevention, management, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. It pledged to continue support for UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and implied it stood ready to mediate African hotspots. China has pledged to strengthen co-operation with Somalia, the AU, and relevant African sub-regional organisations in combatting piracy in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia. Finally, China said it was prepared to increase co-operation in fighting all forms of terrorism (FOCAC, 2012).

China issued in 2013 its most recent white paper dealing with global defence issues. The paper emphasised that the overseas goal of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is to strengthen operational capabilities such as emergency response and rescue, merchant vessel protection at sea, evacuation of Chinese nationals, and provide security support for China’s interests. This includes co-operation on maritime security, participation in UN peacekeeping missions, international counter-terrorism co-operation, joint exercises and training with foreign counterparts, and playing an active role in world peace and stability. The white paper highlights PLA participation in international disaster relief and humanitarian aid operations. It noted that the PLA provided medicine, food and tents to Tunisia and Libya in 2011. The PLA Navy hospital ship Peace Ark visited four East African countries in 2010 and a PLA medical team provided service to residents of Gabon during 2010 and 2011. The PLA has also provided demining assistance to several African countries (China, 2013).

In remarks at the UN in 2013, China’s Deputy Permanent Representative Wang Min called on the international community to promote peace and stability in Africa, strengthen collaboration with the AU and African sub-regional organisations, and take concrete measures to help Africa reinforce its collective security mechanism. He added that China is actively pursuing the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security by providing personnel to UN peacekeeping missions and military aid to the AU (Wang Min, 2013). In 2014, during a visit to the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Premier Li Keqiang reaffirmed China’s support for the Initiative and promised to enhance collaboration with Africa on peace and security issues.

Senior Chinese officials have stated repeatedly in recent years China’s willingness to assist African nations with a wide variety of security concerns. To China’s credit, it has made significant contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa by providing more personnel than any other permanent member of the Security Council. At the beginning of 2015, China had 1959 troops, police, and experts assigned to seven of the UN’s nine peacekeeping operations in Africa (United Nations, 2014:9). Except for part of the Chinese force sent to Mali, the troops have been non-combat engineers, medical, and logistical personnel. In January 2015, China began deploying a combat battalion to the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan peacekeeping headquarters at Juba in South Sudan. The unit will reach 700 before the end of the year. This is China’s first ever deployment of an infantry battalion to a UN peacekeeping mission.

Late in 2008, China began sending PLA Navy vessels to the Gulf of Aden to join an international force dedicated to deterring Somali piracy. Usually consisting of two frigates and a supply ship, these vessels continue their participation and rotate every four months. The Chinese
ships operate independently of any Western naval task forces, but have been widely praised for their professionalism and co-operation. The decision to join this operation marked a major turning point in China’s response to security threats beyond its borders. It has also led to a significant increase in PLA Navy visits to African port cities.

**China pursues its national security interests in Africa**

As in the case of all nations, China pursues its own interests in Africa and elsewhere. In a major speech on foreign affairs in 2014, President Xi Jinping underscored:

> "We should protect China’s overseas interests and continue to improve our capacity to provide such protection". (Xinhua, 2014; Godement, 2014)

Much of the time, perhaps most of the time, Chinese security interests in Africa coincide with the interests of most Africans. There is almost no criticism of Chinese support for UN and AU peacekeeping operations in Africa. At the same time, political stability in the afflicted countries is in the interest of China for economic reasons. This is particularly the case in countries where China has both peacekeepers and major commercial interests such as Sudan (oil), South Sudan (oil), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (minerals). Other PLA security engagements welcomed by Africans and immune to criticism are China’s provision of disaster assistance and help with demining.

China’s support for the anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden is widely appreciated by African governments and the international community. But make no mistake about it: China is engaged in this effort for its own interests. Chinese flagged vessels and crews have been subject to attacks and kidnapping by Somali pirates. Action has also been hastened by through public criticism in China that the government was not doing enough to protect its interests. In addition, much of the commerce passing through the pirate infested waters was headed to or from China. Were it not for these factors, it is questionable whether the PLA Navy would have engaged (Erickson and Strange, 2015:73-75).

Chinese arms sales to African governments are appreciated by the recipient governments, especially countries facing Western sanctions such as Sudan and Zimbabwe. For China, they are also a source of foreign exchange, one of its basic interests. Neighbouring countries, political opposition groups, and elements of civil society do not necessarily welcome the importation of Chinese (or other) weapons, especially in the case of repressive African governments. China has not been sufficiently attentive to the transfer of its weapons as occurred when the government of Sudan provided Chinese-made arms to its ally in Darfur, the Janjaweed, which then engaged in ethnic cleansing. This outraged groups in Darfur that opposed the government of Sudan and led to several attacks on Chinese personnel and interests in the country. Increasingly, because of their ubiquity, Chinese weapons are showing up in conflicts in the eastern Congo, Darfur, and Somalia. In some cases they were purchased in international arms markets, but on other occasions they were transferred by African governments that sympathised with the rebel movements (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:172-179; Enuka, 2011:70-79).

China’s pursuit of its security interests in Africa seems to take into account several themes. Chris Alden and Dan Large have identified four that China applies to post-conflict intervention and peace-building. First, African political stability is more important than Western-style liberal democracy or the holding of elections. Second, China puts a premium on African ownership or agency, including the AU and African sub-regional organisations, for solving security issues. Third, economic development is critical for creating or improving stability in fragile countries. Fourth, China emphasises the role of the state and regional organisations and capacity-building within these institutions as it improves security (Alden and Large, 2013:23-24).

There are at least two other themes that China follows as it implements national security inter-
ests in Africa. First, China is prepared to work with whatever government is in power. It can be democratically elected, authoritarian, a military government, an Islamist government and so forth. It makes no difference. Whenever any of these governments is changed, whether legally or illegally, China is usually quick to adapt to the new government irrespective of its composition or ideology. Second, China has traditionally relied on the host African government to protect Chinese nationals and interests. While this generally continues to be the case, China is becoming more proactive in protecting its nationals and interests as threats and actual attacks increase.

The huge financial losses and evacuation of almost 36,000 of its nationals from Libya in 2011 after the fall of the Muammar el-Qaddafi government was a wakeup call. Most of the Chinese were working on contracts valued at almost US$ 19 billion. While China orchestrated a successful evacuation, this incident exposed its limited ability to protect its economic or security interests and resulted in a serious reassessment of ways to preserve its interests more broadly in Africa (Alden, 2014:4). This event and a series of other attacks on Chinese nationals have resulted in new procedures by Chinese embassies in Africa to protect its interests (Anthony and Jiang, 2014:84-85).

China’s approach to security in Africa continues to evolve

China’s philosophy on UN peacekeeping missions in Africa began to shift in the early 1990s and its participation in the anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden signalled a dramatic change in its security policy in Africa. The debate in recent years has revolved around a possible modification in China’s long standing policy of non-intervention in Africa’s internal affairs. For the record, China insists there has been no change in this policy. Others disagree, but the discussion may be as much about semantics as it is about significant policy change.

A number of Western analysts, myself included, have suggested that China’s policy in Sudan in recent years raises serious questions about its commitment to non-interference. In 2007 and 2008, it applied pressure on Sudan’s President Umar Hassan al-Bashir to accept a hybrid AU/UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. Al-Bashir reluctantly agreed. Following the independence of South Sudan and the outbreak in late 2013 of civil war, China, which has significant oil interests in the country, was particularly active both publicly and privately in efforts to bring the fighting to an end. Early in 2015, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi personally engaged in an effort to strengthen the Intergovernmental Authority on Development peace process aimed at ending conflict in South Sudan. China earlier agreed to send a combat battalion to the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan. While both interventions were welcomed by the international community, they also demonstrated an evolving Chinese approach to security in Africa (Anthony and Jiang, 2014:88-90; Huang and Ismail, 2014:34-36).

Even Chinese scholars are having trouble determining the correct way to describe China’s policy on non-interference and support for state sovereignty. Some Chinese academics now refer to “creative involvement” or “constructive intervention” (Wang, 2011). By introducing these terms, professor Zhongying Pang at Renmin University argues China’s objective is not to abandon or replace the non-interference principle, “but rather to improve on its definition” (Pang, 2013:49). He adds that “China is adopting a new approach which combines non-interference with conditional intervention” (Pang, 2013:46). Wang Xuejun at Zhejiang Normal University acknowledges that China’s responsibilities as a big power and its need to protect its nationals and interests have forced it to get more involved in African security issues. As a result, China’s traditional concept of sovereignty and non-interference “underwent some changes” and is becoming “increasingly pragmatic” (Wang, 2012:91). Both of these explanations constitute a semantic threading of the needle.

China’s evolving security strategy in Africa is linked to President Xi’s foreign policy shift that
Zheng Wang of Seton Hall University calls China’s alternative diplomacy. Rather than challenge existing international institutions, China is creating new platforms that Beijing can control or substantially influence (Zheng, 2015). In Africa, China will continue to support UN and AU peacekeeping operations, the World Bank, the IMF, and the African Development Bank. But it is also giving more attention to the BRICS, supporting the creation of a BRICS development bank, and extending the so-called Maritime Silk Road to Africa. These initiatives will give China more control over both economic and security developments in Africa.

Implications for Africa of China’s naval expansion

China is engaged in a major expansion of the PLA Navy. It has already developed an impressive long-range submarine force, which is beginning to make appearances in the Indian Ocean, and put its first carrier, a retrofitted Soviet-era ship, into service. The carrier is outdated and not yet part of a carrier group, but does signal China’s intentions. There is strong evidence that China has laid the keel for its first home built carrier that some believe could be completed as early as 2017. Experts suggest China intends to maintain at least three carrier groups (Qi, 2014). Since the beginning of anti-piracy deployment in the Gulf of Aden, PLA Navy vessels have made at least 16 port calls at Djibouti and one or two each at Algiers, Alexandria, Mombasa, Casablanca, Maputo, Port Victoria, Durban, and Dar es Salaam (Erikson and Strange, 2015:81-82). The deployment in the Gulf of Aden has significantly improved the ability of the PLA Navy to operate in waters far from China.

Responding to a question in early 2015 about the PLA Navy’s submarine movements in the Indian Ocean, Senior Colonel Yang Yujun responded that “the Chinese military will send different kinds of naval ships to take part in the naval escort missions in accordance with the situation and the requirement to fulfil the task” (Rahmat, 2015). China’s growing economic interests in Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Indian Ocean will almost certainly lead to increasing demands on the PLA Navy to operate in far waters to protect Chinese nationals, investments, and shipping. Xi Jinping’s announcement in 2013 for development of the Maritime Silk Road, although focused on economic interests and maritime trade connectivity, will inevitably create additional responsibilities for the Navy.

There has been considerable discussion in recent years, especially by Indian and Western analysts, concerning China’s perceived intention of developing a series of naval bases along the northern rim of the Indian Ocean and continuing to the eastern coast of Africa. Dubbed the “string of pearls” strategy (Peherson, 2006), there is not yet any hard evidence to suggest China is pursuing this goal. While China continues to restate its long-standing policy of opposing overseas military bases, it is, however, actively seeking ways to support more effectively its PLA Navy vessels that increasingly visit far waters. In 2014, China and Djibouti signed a defence and security agreement that resulted in speculation Djibouti had offered China an opportunity to establish a military base there (Ghana News Agency, 2014). Even if the speculation is accurate, there is no indication that China has accepted the offer. A scholar at the Communist Party School in Chongqing recently suggested that to ensure its energy security, “China can obtain a staging post or access to some temporary facilities on the maritime route to overseas oil supply” (Xu, 2015). This is in keeping with the argument that, for the time being, China is seeking places and not bases where its ships can resupply and dock as needed. Then question is how long China can maintain this limited policy.

The African response

China’s expanding security interests in the Western Indian Ocean and its growing physical presence in Africa pose a challenge to African leaders for deriving the most benefit from this evolving situation. Since the 2012 FOCAC Ministerial Meeting, China has made a series of pledges cited above, some subject to limitations within its means, to help African countries in meeting their security needs. It would seem appropriate for the African Union, African sub-
regional organisations, and individual African states to hold China to these pledges. Some involve financial support while others require greater policy intervention. Yun Sun at the Africa Growth initiative of the Brookings Institution in Washington argues that China’s growing interest “in African security affairs could bring more resources and assistance to the table in terms of stabilisation and conflict resolution in Africa” (Yun Sun, 2015:12).

While China has been extremely helpful in contributing to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and the anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden, its financial contributions to other security issues have been surprisingly modest. Its relief assistance for African disasters has been equally modest. China provided the AU Mission in Somalia US$ 4.5 million worth of equipment and material to combat al-Shabaab and US$ 1.8 million in 2007 to the African peacekeeping mission in Sudan, the predecessor of the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (Alden, 2014:6). China donated US$ 100,000 in 2013 to the West and Central African Maritime Security Trust Fund of the International Maritime Organisation, donated five patrol boats since 1987 to Sierra Leone, and gave Benin US$ 4.8 million in 2011 to purchase a patrol boat (Zhou and Seibel, 2015:16).

To take advantage of China’s increasing security interests in Africa, African countries individually and collectively need to have a better understanding of China’s goals and how those goals coincide with African security requirements, including recommendations for obtaining more policy and financial help from China in meeting those requirements. In 2006, the African Union established a Task Force on Africa’s Strategic Partnership with China, India, and Brazil. Comprised of African experts, it produced an excellent report complete with recommendations (African Union, 2006). Something similar could be established by the African Union to look specifically at ways African countries can obtain greater benefit from their security cooperation with China.

Bibliography


Shaping China-Africa co-operation on Post-2015 Agenda

By Zhang Chun*

Introduction
The United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will expire at the end of 2015, and the negotiations of the succeeding framework for international development, now named as UN post-2015 development agenda (hereafter “post-2015 agenda”), is entering into its final stage, the inter-governmental negotiation. Such inter-governmental negotiation will be finished by the end of July 2015, following which the UN Summit in September 2015 will officially launch this crucial international development effort. While a universal project in nature, Africa is still the key focus of the post-2015 agenda, and China, an emerging power, has been requested to provide more global public goods for this course. Indeed, China and Africa both have solid foundations and important potential to co-operate on this topic and cement their “community of destiny”.

Solid foundations for China-Africa co-operation on post-2015 agenda
As a developing country, China is not bound by the obligation (prescribed by MDG-8) of assisting other developing countries. Nevertheless, China has always regarded strengthening co-operation with other developing countries as a cornerstone of its foreign policy (MOFA and UN, 2013:51). Under the framework of south-south co-operation in general and the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) in particular, China and Africa have had fruitful results in MDGs implementation co-operation, which lays solid foundation for co-operation on the post-2015 agenda.

Three stages of China-Africa MDGs co-operation
As the biggest developing country and the biggest developing continent, China-Africa co-operation on MDGs in the past 15 years has experienced 3 stages of development, determined by the general economic and social development progress on both sides.

Preparation: 2000-2005
The formulation of MDGs possesses a different logic in comparison to the current post-2015 agenda. In the year 2000, there was only a political guideline for MDGs, namely the UN Millennium Declaration. In the following years, the international community, dominated by the Western developed countries, did its best to crystallise the MDGs (Vandemoortele, 2011; Hulme, 2007). Thus for almost all developing countries, the first 5 years since 2000 have comprised of:

- Implementing domestic development strategies respectively and finalising the MDGs;
- Internalising MDGs and integrating MDGs with domestic development strategies respectively;
- And exploring how to implement global partnerships (MDG-8).

* Zhang Chun is the Deputy Director of the Center for West Asian and African Studies, and the Deputy Editor in Chief for the journals Global Review and China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies, at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies in Shanghai, China.
In other words, both China and Africa did not have substantive co-operation in implementing MDGs because of the general development of MDGs. It is true that the FOCAC Addis Ababa Action Plan of the 2nd Ministerial Conference in 2003 did mentioned some related indicators of MDGs (FOCAC, 2009) and that the *Millennium Development Goals: China’s Progress 2003* mentions “international co-operation” twice, but with meaning of promoting domestic MDGs implementation through absorbing international investment and assistance (UN, 2003:37-38).

**Fast Development: 2006-2011**

The year 2006 was officially named as China’s ‘Africa Year’ which witnessed the announcement of China’s *African Policy* whitepaper in January as well as the convening of the FOCAC Beijing Summit and the 3rd Ministerial Conference in November (FOCAC, 2006). Since then co-operation between China and Africa on MDGs implementation has been strengthened greatly. Even before 2006, such co-operation has been facilitated intentionally. For example, *China’s Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals 2005* mentions that ‘by the end of 2004, China has invested up to … US$ 625 million FDI in Africa’, ‘China has signed debt relief agreements with 41 countries in Africa, Asian, South America and Oceania’, among others (MOFA and UN, 2005:62-67). During this period, such co-operation between China and Africa mainly happened under the framework of FOCAC bilaterally and UN, IMF and World Bank multilaterally, and through south-south co-operation frameworks including G77+China, Non-Alignment Movement, and BRICs, among others.

The main driving forces for this fast development can be attributed (but not limited) to the following:

- The prospect of fulfilling MDGs is viewed as quite positive on the Chinese side;
- The difficulties Africa faces in terms of MDGs implementation;
- Calls for providing more public goods which has accompanied China’s rise;
- Fast development of China-Africa relations.

**Two Tracks Progressing: 2012-present**

Since 2010, the discussion about a successive plan after MDGs expiration in 2015 absorbed more and more international interest, which pushed China-Africa co-operation into a two tracks progressing period. China and Africa always pay equal importance to the persistent implementation of MDGs and the forward-looking building of the post-2015 agenda.

For example, the *Beijing Declaration* of the 5th FOCAC Ministerial Conference in July 2012 calls on:

> “The international community to, under the leading role of the UN, take seriously the inefficient implementation in the field of sustainable development, show the political will and commitment to build consensus, and reach agreement on the implementation plan of the post-MDG framework of sustainable development”. (FOCAC, 2012)

China also declared at the 18th CPC National Congress that China proposes to build ‘new type of global development partnership’, even earlier than the UN proposed ‘new global partnership’ of the post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013), and promised to ‘remain a reliable friend and sincere partner of other developing countries’.

When delivering his keynote speech at the 5th BRICS leaders’ summit in March 2013 in South Africa, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated:

> “We should jointly participate in the setting of international development agenda, fully harness the productivity and material resources accumulated in the past, fulfill the UN Millennium Development Goals, narrow the North-South gap in development, and make global development more balanced”. (Xi, 2013)
Thus, while continuing co-operation on MDGs implementation, China and Africa have been strengthening exchanges and joint action in the post-2015 agenda building. For example, there was an international conference on China-Africa co-operation in the post-2015 agenda with lots of high-level African officials participating (SIIS, 2014). Another example is that at the workshop on post-2015 agenda co-hosted by Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNDP in June 2014, African representatives introduced the Common African Position (CAP) to the post-2015 agenda and asked for strengthened co-operation (UNDP China, 2014).

Co-operative achievements in MDGs

It is important to note that the establishment of FOCAC in 2000 was earlier than the final formulation of the MDGs, which laid down a concrete platform for bilateral co-operation on MDGs implementation. Indeed, reviewing the action plans since 2006, one can identify the valuable achievements of this bilateral co-operation showing as in table 1.

Beyond and above physical achievements, this co-operation provides other bases for bilateral co-operation on the post-2015 agenda. Firstly, it provides new ideas and concepts including, for example, a new model of economic development and new inputs about south-south co-operation, while also helping changes in international perception regarding African development. Secondly, it provides new methodologies of development, especially new ways of dealing with the development-security nexus which is a traditional debate about whether development is the precondition of security or vice versa, China’s development-first policy and practice proved successful since 1980s, while African (imported) security-first approach failed to a large extent. Thirdly, it provides new platforms for future co-operation on the post-2015 agenda, FOCAC and other international platforms. Such forums are not established for MDGs, but experience of MDGs co-operation helps future performance improvement. And finally, it provides new financing sources for future co-operation on the post-2015 agenda implementation, including for example the BRICS Development Bank, which became operational in 2015.

Great potential for China-Africa co-operation on post-2015 agenda

One of the most important international consensuses regarding the post-2015 agenda is that it should be based on the achievements and lessons of MDGs and set out more ambitious development norms and goals (Zhang, 2014:86-87). Both China and African states have ambitious strategic visions and under the guidance of such visions, all parties have very important overlaps in terms of the building of the post-2015 agenda, thus laying down significant foundations for future bilateral co-operation.

Similar strategic visions

It is important to note that both China and Africa have long-term strategic visions that could guide their policy towards the post-2015 agenda, not reversely using the post-2015 agenda as guidance of their long-term development efforts.

Shortly after taking power, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the concept of the “Chinese Dream” for all Chinese in late 2012. The vision of Chinese Dream built upon “two centuries” namely 2021 (100th anniversary of CPC creation) and 2049 (100th anniversary of PRC establishment); the concept is a guiding principle for Chinese domestic development and also a vision for 2150. On African side, the year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of Africa Unity Organization. Reviewing the experience and lessons of the past 50 years and looking forward to the next 50 years, the African Union formulated the African “Agenda 2063” as its...
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<td>MDG-1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</td>
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<td>Send 100 senior experts on agricultural technologies to Africa and set up in Africa 10 demonstration centres of agricultural technology with special features.</td>
<td>In the course of the next three years, send 50 agricultural technology teams to Africa and help train 2,000 agricultural technicians for African countries; In the course of the next three years, increase to 20 the total number of agricultural technology demonstration centres built for African countries.</td>
<td>Continue to send agricultural technology teams to African countries and step up efforts to train African agricultural technicians;</td>
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<td>MDG-2: Achieve universal primary education</td>
<td>Help African countries set up 100 rural schools in the next three years.</td>
<td>Help African countries to build 50 China-Africa friendship schools in the next three years; Intensify efforts to train teachers for primary, secondary and vocational schools in Africa, and help African countries train 1,500 school headmasters and teachers over the next three years.</td>
<td>The Chinese government will implement the ‘African Talents Program’. In the next three years, China will train 30,000 African professionals in various sectors, offer 18,000 government scholarships and take measures to improve the content and quality of the training programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG-3: Promote gender equality and empower women</td>
<td>Assist African countries in building 30 hospitals and provide RMB300 million of grant for providing anti-malaria drugs to African countries and building 30 demonstration centres for prevention and treatment of malaria in the next three years; Continue to send new and additional medical teams to Africa in the next three years on the basis of China’s own capacity and the need of African countries and actively explore with African countries new ways of providing such service;</td>
<td>Provide RMB500 million Yuan worth of medical equipment and malaria-fighting materials to 30 hospitals and 30 malaria prevention and treatment centres built by China for Africa in the coming three years. China will invite African professionals working in malaria prevention and treatment centres to training programs in China in an effort to ensure sustainable development of the project; Continue to help relevant African countries train a total of 3,000 doctors, nurses and administrative personnel over the next three years; Continue to do a good job in sending medical teams to Africa.</td>
<td>China will continue to provide support to the medical facilities it has built in Africa to ensure their sustainable development and upgrade the modernisation level of the hospitals and laboratories; China will continue to train doctors, nurses, public health workers and administrative personnel for African countries; China will conduct the ‘Brightness Action’ campaign in Africa to provide free treatment for cataract patients;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG-4: Reduce child mortality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>China will continue to train doctors, nurses, public health workers and administrative personnel for African countries; China will conduct the ‘Brightness Action’ campaign in Africa to provide free treatment for cataract patients; China will continue to send medical teams to Africa. In this respect, it will send 1,500 medical workers to Africa in the next three years.</td>
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<td>MDG-5: Improve maternal health</td>
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<td></td>
<td>China will continue to train doctors, nurses, public health workers and administrative personnel for African countries; China will conduct the ‘Brightness Action’ campaign in Africa to provide free treatment for cataract patients; China will continue to send medical teams to Africa. In this respect, it will send 1,500 medical workers to Africa in the next three years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG-6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</td>
<td>Send teachers for agricultural vocational education to African countries and help Africa establish an agricultural vocational education system.</td>
<td>Continue to help relevant African countries train a total of 3,000 doctors, nurses and administrative personnel over the next three years; Continue to do a good job in sending medical teams to Africa.</td>
<td>China will continue to provide support to the medical facilities it has built in Africa to ensure their sustainable development and upgrade the modernisation level of the hospitals and laboratories; China will continue to train doctors, nurses, public health workers and administrative personnel for African countries; China will conduct the ‘Brightness Action’ campaign in Africa to provide free treatment for cataract patients; China will continue to send medical teams to Africa. In this respect, it will send 1,500 medical workers to Africa in the next three years.</td>
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<td>MDG-7: Ensure environmental sustainability</td>
<td>The two sides agreed to step up co-operation in capacity building, prevention and control of water pollution and desertification, maintenance of bio-diversity and the development of environmental protection industry and demonstration projects.</td>
<td>The two sides proposed the establishment of a China-Africa partnership in addressing climate change and the holding of senior officials consultations on a non-regular basis. The Chinese Government offered to assist African countries with 100 small-sized well digging projects for water supply and clean energy projects of biogas, solar energy and small hydropower plants in the next three years.</td>
<td>China will continue to adopt measures to help African countries build capacity for climate change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable development; China will advance co-operation with African countries in environment surveillance, continue to share with African countries the data from the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite and promote the application of the data in land use, weather monitoring and environmental protection in Africa.</td>
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long-term strategic vision. Although different in detailed goals, the Chinese Dream and Agenda 2063 share overlapping visions, including prosperity, stability, peace, international status, and so on (AU, 2014).

**Overlapping policy positions**

Under the framework of strategic visions, both China and Africa have issued their policy positions in regard to the post-2015 agenda.

On September 22, 2013, just before the start of the UN General Assembly debate on the MDGs progress, the Chinese government published its position paper on the post-2015 agenda. On the African side, while a little bit late, the final Common African Position (CAP) was launched at the end of February 2014 in N'Djamena, Chad.

In comparing these two documents, one can identify many common features. Firstly, both China and Africa share similar guiding principles for building the post-2015 agenda as shown in table 2. While less principles, African principles do cover almost all of Chinese ones: for example, African principle a (Learning from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)) covers principles 1 (Take eradicating poverty and promoting development as the centrepiece) and 3 (Ensure continuity and keep forward-looking) of China; and principle b (Assuming ownership) covers China’s principle 2 (Respect diversity in development models) and 5 (Seek consensus through consultation); and principle c (Reaffirming our common interests) covers China’s principles 4 (Adhere to the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’), 6 (Ensure universality), and 7 (Promote coordinated and balanced development). These two documents also identify key areas and priorities (table 3). To compare these detailed priorities and sub-goals, one can identify 2 major differences: 1) the 2nd pillar of CAP, “science, technology and innovation”, is totally missed in China’s position; and 2) the 5th pillar of CAP, “peace and security”, is also not on the priority list of the Chinese agenda. However, it is important to note that the FOCAC process addresses both factors. For science, technology and innovation are always two of the most important elements of the FOCAC action plan. Issues of peace and security are more sensitive because of their domestic affairs nature and non-interference principle. Nevertheless, China did propose an “Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security” in the 5th FOCAC meeting in 2012 (Zhang, 2014:98). Thus, one of the core explanations as to why such a disparity exists is because they have developed their respective policy position from different considerations. For China, both issues are actually the guarantee for realisation of the post-2015 agenda; or in other words, these two issues belong to the measures of implementation (MOIs) of the post-2015 agenda.

**Common proposed goals and indicators**

Beyond and above-mentioned similarities in strategic visions and policy positions, China and Africa have many common proposed goals and indicators in the formulation of the post-2015 agenda.

Since 2013, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) started the process of condensing the more than 200 proposed goals and 2000 targets during the 2012-2013 global consultation process. The goals were transformed into a more workable negotiation framework for governments to discuss during the intergovernmental negotiation started from January 2015. During this process, both China and African states played quite positive roles in goal and target advocacy. However, concrete evidence for this enthusiasm can only be confirmed by the working document for the 11th session of the OWG, because following this, there is no record showing the details of which country proposed which target.

The document shows high similarity between China and Africa in exact targets proposed.
Among the 140 targets of 16 focus areas, China proposed 30 targets while Africa proposed 75; 19 of those targets proposed by the two countries overlapped (composing 63 per cent of the total number of China’s proposed targets). This highlights that Africa has the highest score in terms of common proposed targets, the second being China and the least developed countries (45 targets proposed) with 16 in common. In comparison, China and America (52 targets proposed) have 13 in common, China and Brazil (33 targets proposed) 9 in common (UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2014).

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Table 2: Guiding principles for building post-2015 agenda, China and Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China’s Position Paper</th>
<th>CAP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Take eradicating poverty and promoting development as the centrepiece.</td>
<td>a. Learning from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respect diversity in development models.</td>
<td>b. Assuming ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensure continuity and keep forward-looking.</td>
<td>c. Reaffirming our common interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Adhere to the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Seek consensus through consultation.</td>
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<td>7. Promote coordinated and balanced development.</td>
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Ways for future co-operation on the post-2015 agenda

While rich experiences have opened the way for great potential future co-operation, there remain many unaddressed issues. For example, both the European Union (EU) and the Group of Seven (G7) have expressed their willingness for the support of the Common African Position (CAP) (EU-Africa Summit, 2014) while China has not. In terms of the remaining negotiations and future implementation of the post-2015 agenda, both parties should follow the guidance of building China-Africa “Interest-Responsibility-Destiny” trinity community and making best use of the FOCAC.

Taking China-Africa interest-responsibility-destiny trinity community building as guiding theory

China and Africa are a “community of destiny”, using Chinese President Xi’s term, because all parties have common historical memory, common liberation histories and development experiences, and face common global challenges. Meanwhile, after 60 years engagement, especially co-operation since 2000, economic engagement between the parties has developed quickly and promoted a “community of interest” between them.

However, if one digs into this relationship further, one can find that certain elements are missing. Borrowing Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s term, the China and Africa need to develop their “community of responsibility” responsibly. Currently, the building of a “community of responsibility” in the China-Africa relationship is the weakest pillar comparing with the “community of interest” and “community of destiny” (Zhang, 2014). To further develop China-Africa relations, both parties should take the building of the interest-responsibility-destiny trinity community as a common strategic goal. Within this trinity community, the “community of interest” is the short-term economic or physical interest basis for all other two pillars, and the “community of destiny” is the long-term common strategic vision for bi-lateral relationship, and the “community of responsibility” is the mid-term goal and the bridge for the other two.

With such a trinity community, bi-lateral co-operation on the post-2015 agenda is driven by a strategic guideline which needs to stick to its principles when facing western pressures espe-

<table>
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<tr>
<th>China’s Position Paper</th>
<th>CAP</th>
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<tr>
<td>I. Eradicating poverty and hunger.</td>
<td>I. Structural economic transformation and inclusive growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Promoting social progress and improving people’s livelihood.</td>
<td>II. Science, technology and innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Encouraging inclusive economic growth.</td>
<td>III. People-centred development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Enhancing ecological conservation and promoting sustainable development.</td>
<td>IV. Environmental sustainability natural resources management, and disaster risk management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Enhancing the global development partnership.</td>
<td>V. Peace and security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI. Finance and partnerships.</td>
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Table 3: Key areas and priorities of post-2015 agenda, China and Africa

cially those pressures in the name of technical but not political or moral needs. Thus, the strategy for China-Africa co-operation in the post-2015 agenda should include the following dimensions:

- From the perspective of the “community of interest”, China and Africa should build a negotiation coalition within the inter-governmental negotiation process, the key focuses including developing a common goal/target system and a common understanding in regard to the MOIs of the post-2015 agenda;
- From the perspective of the “community of responsibility”, the parties should adhere to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, emphasising the main role of south-north co-operation and official development aid,and promote greater roles for south-south co-operation;
- From the perspective of destiny community, parties should jointly safeguard the final conclusion of the post-2015 agenda, guarantee the continuous implementation of the unfinished MDGs, and focus on the localisation and implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

**Gearing the Post-2015 Agenda into the FOCAC Framework**

As discussed above, FOCAC has the potential to be the best candidate platform for China-Africa co-operation in the post-2015 agenda. The 6th FOCAC Ministerial Conference, to be hosted in South Africa in late 2015 is the best chance to position the post-2015 agenda. This year is the 15th anniversary of the FOCAC platform, with one of the key tasks being the planning of the next 15 years of China-Africa relationship. Here one can easily identify the convergence of the post-2015 agenda with FOCAC because both envision to 2030. Thus, the 6th FOCAC Ministerial Conference should: 1) set the strategic goals for China-Africa relations by 2030, with the post-2015 agenda as one of the core elements; 2) set key stage goals for 15 years, with the post-2015 agenda as one of the core elements; 3) set the action plan for the next 3 years (2016-2018), keeping in mind how to facilitate the implementation of the post-2015 agenda as soon as possible.

**Strengthening Co-operation on the Formulation of Post-2015 Agenda**

There are still several months for formulating the post-2015 agenda, which provide a narrow window of opportunity for China and Africa to co-operate on developing joint positions in terms of the key building blocks of the post-2015 agenda.

As it stands, the post-2015 agenda includes three building blocks: the goal/targets system, MOIs, and peer-review and reporting mechanisms. While differences remain, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) proposal, the core of the post-2015 agenda, has been well developed and accepted. Thus, for China and Africa, the best strategy is not to oppose the SDGs as a whole, but rather to focus on how clear those unset x% of the detailed targets to make them friendlier to future development of both China and Africa.

More importantly, China and Africa need to focus more on the MOIs and peer-review mechanisms. Regarding the MOIs, there are more than 30 listed measures, mainly in the proposed goal 17 and some specific MOIs within different goals. It is important to note that China and Africa have potentially different even conflicting opinions with regard to certain MOIs, especially the financing arrangements for SDGs. However, due to FOCAC, both parties can find solutions beyond the post-2015 process.

Finally, regarding the peer-review mechanisms, China and Africa should join hands to carefully achieve a balance between technical rationality and political conditions. The most important issue is the issue of the “data revolution” which supports the MOIs and reviewing of the post-
2015 agenda. Technically, it is reasonable because we need better and timely data for better policymaking and the imperfections of MDG implementation has forced policymakers into a corner. However, the political implication of data revolution is closely interconnected with issues such as good governance, transparency, data sovereignty and so on. Thus, it is a real challenge for both China and Africa to balance such technical needs and political correctness.

Conclusion

The year 2015 will be one of the most important years in recent memory for many reasons; it is the 70th anniversary of the World War II (WWII), the discussion of the post-2015 agenda and the forging of the post-2020 global action on climate change. The fact that both China and Africa are involved in all these events makes the 6th FOCAC Ministerial Conference a crucial gathering for developing joint plans. However, the most important element of these potential joint efforts is how to dovetail the post-2015 agenda with the 6th FOCAC meeting, so as to simultaneously harmonize “Africa rising” and “China transforming”.

Based on the rich experience in MDGs co-operation and great potential in post-2015 agenda co-operation, it is safe to say that the post-2015 agenda will have a big voice in the final document of the 6th FOCAC meeting. The only uncertainty regards the final wording, which has instrumental importance, although little overall strategic impact.

Endnotes

1 The research is funded by the DFID project “China International Development Research Network”.
2 The Agenda 2063 lists 7 key goals for Africa by 2063; while the Chinese Dream is still not clear about its components.

Bibliography


FOCAC VI: The Chinese Dream Meets African Realities?

By Ian Taylor*

This year will see South Africa hosting the 6th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Importantly, this will be the first FOCAC meeting since Xi Jinping became the Chinese president in 2013. This context is significant as Xi has thus far demonstrated an activist foreign policy that is more assertive and outward-looking than his predecessors. Where Africa fits into this broader background provides clues as to what can be expected from the FOCAC meeting.

Current Chinese foreign policy

Since Xi assumed office, Beijing has become involved in multiple disputes with various states, including Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and the United States of America. China has challenged Japan with Beijing’s creation of an air defence identification zone that included the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands in the East China Sea and commenced drilling for oil near the Paracel islands, which are claimed by Hanoi, in the South China Sea. Whilst it is the case that the drilling stopped, such altercations suggest that Xi is willing to disregard Deng Xiaoping’s well-known maxim that Beijing should “hide our capabilities and bide our time” in its foreign policy. Xi seems to believe that the time has arrived and has launched a rather prosaic “Chinese Dream” (Zhōngguó mèng) campaign to drum up domestic support for his more self-confident approach.

According to Communist Party documents, the Chinese Dream is about Chinese prosperity, collective effort, socialism and national glory. In the area of foreign policy, it is of course the “national glory” bit that excites comment. Deng believed that economic reform and domestic growth were prerequisites for China to have any influence regionally and globally. Since coming to power, Xi has travelled extensively in Asia, Europe and Africa and in November 2014 played host to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, where Beijing’s role as a major security and economic actor was broadcast to a region that has traditionally been within the American sphere of influence. As Niu Jun, a professor of international relations at Peking University has remarked:

“It’s clear that the current leader doesn’t want to practice this [Deng] dictum any more… This is a very significant indicator of a transforming foreign policy”. (Shia and Tweed, 2014)

Instead of biding its time, China now must—according to Xi—adopt “big country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics”. This apparently is diplomacy characterised by a “distinctive Chinese style, Chinese manner and Chinese attitude”. As with a lot of Chinese government slogans, the actual meaning is rather difficult to ascertain (does Angola’s foreign policy reflect a distinctive Angolan style, Angolan manner and Angolan attitude? I suppose so, but what does that actually mean in practice?).

Xi’s foreign policy, although assertive, is not belligerent and from the Chinese perspective

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* Ian Taylor is Professor in International Relations and African Politics at St Andrews.
(and here I mean the official line and popular Chinese opinion) is reasonable. Standing up to Japan always plays well to the gallery and in Shinzo Abe, Beijing has the perfect pantomime villain. Visiting the Yasukuni shrine, where Class A war criminals are memorialised, whilst professing no intention to offend the feelings of the people in China and South Korea, does not really wash and serves as a political gift for Xi. But whilst Xi can and does turn on the nationalist taps, he is a shrewd politician and has equally worked hard to defuse potential crises. Nevertheless, a strategy of ratcheting up and then ratcheting down tensions with neighbours is perhaps misplaced. After all, there are plenty of people within key domestic constituencies in China who like the ratcheting up bit. Managing their expectations may be tricky in future.

China’s African policies

Managing expectations has long been a problem in Sino-African relations. There has always been a tendency within certain quarters and in certain presidential palaces across the continent to objectify China as some sort of cargo cult, ready to bestow material wealth and well-being onto Africa. Beijing has had to manage these demands cautiously and FOCAC has been no exception (Taylor, 2012). But we are seeing a certain reining in by China on African leaders’ hopes vis-à-vis Chinese largesse.

Zimbabwe is an example par excellence of a country that appears to view China as a benevolent uncle with bottomless pockets. Mugabe’s “Look East” policy was consciously designed to pivot the country away from the evil West and towards a country that asked no questions and seemed to sign blank cheques. The quid pro quo was of course access to Zimbabwe’s mineral riches. But after decades of Mugabe’s misrule, even the Chinese have their limits. They are no fools and know that when Mugabe came to power in 1980 Zimbabwe’s annual GNP per capita was higher than China’s; today Zimbabwe’s GNP per capita is US$ 446 whilst China’s is US$ 3,583.

Currently, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset), is Mugabe’s latest idea to rescue his country from his own incompetence. Priced at US$ 27 billion, the regime has been touting for financial support. China has clearly been targeted as a likely source of contributions to ZimAsset. The results have been disappointing however. Prior to Mugabe’s visit to Beijing in August 2014, talk was of Harare seeking a US$ 4 billion bailout. Although Zimbabwe signed a number of memorandums of understanding with China during the visit (as do virtually all visitors), Mugabe came back empty-handed. What projects that were agreed to depend on feasibility studies and satisfactory responses to Chinese concern over financial leakage from Zimbabwe’s notoriously corrupt parastatals and government ministries. It is in fact rumoured that the Chinese are asking that their officials be attached to the key parastatals so as to supervise behaviour, which puts a rather interesting twist on Mugabe’s famed defence of Zimbabwe’s sovereignty and freedom from outside influence. To add to Harare’s woes, Sinosure, a leading Chinese insurance company, is apparently refusing to guarantee loans from Chinese banks to Zimbabwean companies due to the failure to pay interest on loans. The Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe, Lin Lin, has already commented that for any new projects requiring loans from Beijing, the capability of the Zimbabwean side to repay will be considered.

Beijing as an African security actor

Whilst handing out free gifts may be over, under Xi, China has boosted its role in Africa’s security affairs with the dispatchment of 170 combat troops from the People’s Liberation Army’s to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali. This came only two months after Xi had assumed office and marked a departure from the former practice of only sending non-combat staff such as engineers and medics. Mali was the first time China has sent combat troops under a UN mandate. In December 2014 it was announced that Beijing would then send a 700-strong contingent to South Sudan as part of a UN mission to protect civilians. Because China
is a major investor in South Sudan’s oil industry, conspiracy theories abounded about how these troops were being sent to secure Chinese oilfields, neglecting the fact that as UN troops the Chinese will be under UN command and so will be deployed as per the mission’s requirements. This may or may not be anywhere near the oil.

Of course, China is concerned about its interests in South Sudan. After all, China imports twice as much oil from South Sudan as it does from Nigeria. In 2013, Beijing’s special envoy for African affairs, Ambassador Zhong Jianhua, paid more than ten visits to Africa to synchronise policies on and arbitrate the South Sudanese issue. Later, in January 2014, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi publicly called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in South Sudan, something which is unusual for the Chinese to do. China has also continued its naval missions in the Gulf of Aden and improved its naval co-operation with the government in Djibouti. Thus far, China has sent 16 fleets to the Horn of Africa and escorted more than 5300 ships and vessels in the area. Beijing has also provided military material assistance to countries involved in African Union peacekeeping missions.

What to expect from FOCAC VI

Since his induction as president, Xi Jinping has emphasised African infrastructure development. This is in part a response to the negative exposure China has experienced over claims that China’s interest in Africa is only about natural resource exploitation. Given that, according to the World Bank, Africa needs an extra US$ 93 billion per year over the next decade to bridge the infrastructure gap, this is to be welcomed. During his visit to Africa in May 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang did in fact promote what was dubbed the “461 framework” (four principles for deepening cooperation, six areas to promote new projects, and one platform for co-operation). The “three networks” were mentioned (a high-speed rail network, a highway network and an aviation network). It is likely that some of these plans will come into existence or be developed during the forthcoming FOCAC meeting. A focus on infrastructure development as well as agricultural development, industrialisation, capacity training and technology transfer through investment in manufacturing industries will no doubt also be highlighted. Furthermore, security matters will almost certainly be discussed.

Yet here is a problem. As the financier of the projects, China is in the driving seat and despite all the talk of “win-win” situations, Africa continues—now fifteen years after the first FOCAC meeting—to appear as the passive object of Chinese interest at these meetings. Whilst mutual co-operation will be talked about, it is still difficult to identify African agency in the proceedings. For instance, in late January 2015 China and the African Union agreed on an ambitious plan to develop road, rail and air transport routes to link capitals across the continent. Despite the claim by African Union chief Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma that the proposal was “the most substantive project the AU has ever signed with a partner”, the agreement contained few actual details and was merely a “commitment” to develop Africa’s infrastructure. Signed at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, the announcement coincidentally came just before a summit meeting of the AU. Surely the agreement was not a case of Beijing prepping the ground before FOCAC VI? But even if this was the case, it is again China which is revealed to be in the driving seat. This may be problematic given that the ambitious announcement, although devoid of actual details, suggests a degree and level of co-ordination between China and Africa and between and amongst African states that has never been seen before. Given that the announcement does not appear to have organically evolved from the AU, the idea that multiple actors of varying competency ranging over multiple African countries can push the project forward remains to be seen.

Africa urgently requires a co-ordinated appraisal of the Chinese agenda, with a robust cost-benefit analysis driving the process. It is vital that strategies and priorities for Africa will line up alongside the agenda that China seems to be setting. This is not going to be easy given that
China’s growth is slowing and it is currently undergoing a strategic rebalancing of its economy away from investment and towards domestic consumption. Thus whilst agricultural transformation may be a priority for Africa, how is this in China’s interests? Whilst space precludes a more in-depth discussion, the Chinese economy is most definitely slowing down and this is likely to have an effect on Africa.

Figure 1. World Economic Forecast Revisions
(Percent change from 2013 World Economic Outlook forecast)

Investment in industry is imperative to contribute to Africa’s structural transformation and diversification of production and its export profile. But with China moving away from such investment, where does this leave Africa’s ambitions? Beijing’s answer seems to lie in the claim that infrastructure investment will lay the necessary foundations for African development. Given that there is a correlation “between infrastructure and export diversification, and the current low levels and distorted composition of exports from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are partly due to poor trade infrastructure”, it can be stated that the improvement in infrastructure “has per se a positive impact on SSA growth and trade capacity” (Sindzingre, 2013:44). Yet if Africa is not in full control, will such infrastructure projects act to further reify Africa’s economies in the natural resources corner?

The focus on infrastructure development in Africa, whilst to be welcomed in the abstract, is primarily aimed to enhance business opportunities for Chinese actors (obviously). “Chinese political and business leaders continue to enjoy record profits, so they have little reason to press for a change in economic policy” (Hart-Landsberg, 2013:65). When it is stated that “Chinese political and business leaders continue to enjoy record profits”, this is meant literally: “The net worth of the 70 richest delegates in China’s National People’s Congress…rose to 565.8 billion Yuan (US$ 89.9 billion) in 2011, a gain of US$ 11.5 billion from 2010. That compares to the US$ 7.5 billion net worth of all 660 top officials in the three branches of the US government” (Forsyth, 2012). If this is the case, China’s engagement with Africa takes on a rather personal touch. Unless African agency asserts itself and directs such investments towards economic development, the mutual benefit for both parties becomes less clear.

Here, the role of the African Union becomes paramount. As the continental body, it has a clear mandate to harmonise the continent’s policy positions on development and the wider Sino-African agenda. For African leaders serious about their commitment to development (which

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook database
sadly, cannot be guaranteed in all countries), the prioritisation of structural transformation must be central. In all instances, an evaluation of how Chinese engagement will contribute or undermine this goal needs to be rigorously applied. Demanding delivery on investments that the continent requires most—particularly in the manufacturing sector and the creation of employment—is required. In some countries this is going to be awkward because, as mentioned above, it has become quite clear that some elements of African opinion have already entered into a dependency mind-set with regard to China’s rise in Africa. Their “vision” seems to be to replace dependency on the ex-colonial powers with dependency on China. This is obviously not wise.

Such a potential negative outcome is not a problem that can be specifically associated with Chinese engagement with Africa. It is in fact intimately linked to the nature of the state in much of Africa and the colonial inheritance. In short, African politics must be understood as the utilisation of patronage and clientelism and operates within neo-patrimonial modes of governance.

“Political instability is rooted in the extreme politicisation of the state as an organ to be monopolised for absolute power and accelerated economic advancement”. (Fatton, 1988:35)

In this context, the idea that resources should be channelled towards the nebulous concept of “national development” are out of the question in many African states. Productive economic activities and notions of long-term investment are side-lined in favour of immediate consumption, display and resource diffusion.

In this regard, Chinese policy will always be vulnerable to the claim that in dealing only with the state and rigorously adhering to its “non-interference” strategy, Beijing exacerbates existing structural faults in the political economies of a number of African states. Until and unless African elites themselves advance transparency, pro-development policies and equitable growth (and are prepared to and competent enough to put them into force), China’s position in some countries is vulnerable. The recent events in the DRC reflect this. Political demonstrations and confrontations with police by protestors marching against Joseph Kabila’s regime quickly spiralled into rioting targeting Chinese businesses. Why? After all, the protests were primarily opposing a change to the electoral law that would allow Kabila to remain in office beyond 2016.

The rioters’ targets appear to have been influenced by the government’s decision to boost economic ties with China. Huge contracts between Kinshasa and Beijing signed in 2007 and 2008 gave Chinese companies the right to operate many of Congo’s mines in exchange for developing the country’s road system and other infrastructure. As a result, when anti-Kabila protests develop, there is a tendency to lump in “the Chinese” together with the unpopular regime. This has happened elsewhere across Africa and shows the danger of being too closely associated with the predatory elites on the continent.

Conclusion

The history and development of Sino-African relations thus far suggests certain patterns, but the relationship is fluid and ever changing. Indeed, it has to be said that in relative terms, the exponential increase in Chinese trade with Africa from the start of this century means that we are in the very early stages of a solidified Sino-African relationship. At present the picture appears mixed—there are instances where the Chinese role in Africa is positive and appreciated. The laying down of infrastructure is one such area. Equally, there are issues where Beijing is, at present at least, playing an equivocal role which arguably threatens to unravel some of the progress made in Africa in recent times on issues of good governance and accountability. And there are dynamics which are negative, such as the reification of Africa’s dependent status within the global political economy (Taylor, 2014). This is deeply problematic given the
current trend in commodity prices and Chinese demand. Indeed, we are already seeing a decline in importance of Africa for the supply of China’s oil.

For a continent so dependent on natural resources, the future trends indeed are not propitious:

Table 1. Commodity price forecast, 2014-2025
(price indices in real 2010 US dollars).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2025</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>119.6</td>
<td>105.3</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-energy commodities</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Agriculture</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beverages</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>103.3</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fats and oils</td>
<td>101.4</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grains</td>
<td>115.1</td>
<td>100.5</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other food</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw materials</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Timber</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>105.2</td>
<td>104.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other raw materials</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilizers</td>
<td>103.3</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metals and minerals (a)</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base metals (b)</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>74.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precious metals</td>
<td>102.2</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: (a). includes iron ore; (b). includes aluminium, copper, lead, nickel, tin and zinc.
Problematically, the continent lacks a consistent and unified collective policy to connect with Beijing. As a Kenyan report put it nearly ten years ago, “China has an Africa policy. Africa does not have a China policy” (Mbitiru, 2006). This has hardly changed and needs urgent addressing. Yet equally, sensationalist accounts of Chinese neo-colonialism are nonsensical. It should not need to be said, but there is no evidence of China seeking colonies, using prisoners as cheap labour or any of the other lurid accusations made against “the Chinese” in Africa. Chinese commercial activities in Africa are straightforward transactions. As Beijing’s Special Representative on African Affairs, Zhong Jianhua, asserted, “China is neither bad nor good. China is a combination of these things” (Africa Research Institute, 2013).

Endnotes

1 Of course, the Chinese are not unique in this regard. The vagaries of Françafrique means that French interests (and citizens) are always vulnerable to phenomena where anti-government protests quickly develop into anti-French demonstrations and attacks against les Blancs.

Bibliography


Placing FOCAC in its South-South co-operation narrative

By Sven Grimm*

Introduction

It is almost trite by now to state that the relationship between China and Africa goes well beyond the time of the establishment of a Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC). Furthermore, it seems fairly obvious that relations between the two entities go well beyond the state-to-state co-operation that is the underlying assumption of FOCAC and its establishment. However, when looking specifically at FOCAC or even China-Africa relations more broadly, the context for these interactions is often not sufficiently considered. The myopic view on China is somewhat understandable, given limited resources. However, it is academically unsatisfactory. And a myopic view potentially comes with risks for African states. Observers need to understand the context and the rationale of which FOCAC is an expression, in order to understand potential and real tensions with other, parallel or even paramount agendas.

Like other Southern countries1, the Chinese government presents its engagement in Africa as fed by long roots in a broader discourse on South-South Co-operation. South-South Co-operation (SSC), for its part, is closely linked to the liberation struggles across the world in the 1950s and 1960s. This makes the narrative of China-Africa co-operation, for which FOCAC is one forum, attractive to a number of African leaders; it certainly resonates with African nations’ historical strife. Thus, FOCAC and South-South Co-operation offer links to domestic discourses across the African continent. The anti-colonial struggle also feeds the strong bias for state-to-state relations – and, once more, offers easy connections to a post-colonial understanding of the state’s role across Africa. An uncritical and quick integration into African discourses, however, holds substantial risks for African states and societies: seeing China-Africa relations as unique and an agenda in itself without considering the context of China’s global ambitions (and policies) will necessarily blind us to underlying policy shifts that will have an effect on its African engagement.

FOCAC needs to be understood in context and an eye should also be kept on evolutions and underlying shifts in the SSC discourse which have an effect on this specific forum for co-operation between China and African states.

This contribution’s aims are thus the following: first, we will explore the context of the political debate. Secondly, more immediately on the forum as an institution, a brief stock-taking is done of its achievements and challenges2. And thirdly, a view to the 2015 meeting specifically should consider the time beyond 2015 and include a view on the institutional setting as such, so as to provide useful recommendations on how to use and develop the setting of FOCAC further. The contribution is building on earlier publications – not least so: those by the Centre for Chinese Studies on FOCAC meetings – and is aspiring to be a constructive contribution for policy-discussions in an African setting.

South-South Co-operation (SSC) is usually traced back to the Bandung conference in 1955, which also was a stepping stone towards the Non-Aligned Movement. SSC aims at mutual

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*Sven Grimm works at the German Development Institute (DIE) in Germany. He is also an Extraordinary Associate Professor at the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa and he is the Editor-in-Chief of the journal, African East-Asian Affairs.
benefit for partners that are engaging in a co-operation of equals. In the past, South-South co-operation was predominantly technical assistance amongst southern states globally. While usually small-scale and rather ad hoc, this co-operation also included some large projects, such as the TAZARA railway connecting Zambia with the port of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. While there is consistency in the narrative (if not: rhetoric), the substance has changed. Nowadays, since the mid-2000s, SSC involves concessional finance and infrastructure development at a much larger scale across a broad range of states around the world. The drastically changed setting with substantially increased financial volumes and a multiplication of actors under an umbrella approach to SSC creates administrative and policy challenges, not least also for SSC “providers” like China (Chaturvedi et al. 2012; Pérez et al. 2014).

A rapidly evolving context in South-South co-operation

The SSC context for China-Africa relations continues to evolve rapidly. In 2009, a UNDP study on the global picture of SSC stated that “for many countries, the formulation of a structured policy framework is still limited” (UNDP 2009: 27). Already then, however, China was explicitly mentioned as a positive example, given its Africa policy of 2006, and the forum with Africa (Forum on China Africa-Cooperation - FOCAC) since 2000. The Chinese government has put effort into establishing a policy framework with Africa, not least with a motivation to react to criticism and to explain its activities to the world. Within the last five years, we have seen the elaboration of two more Chinese white papers on its aid (2011 and 2014).

While the policy basis of SSC has become more sophisticated, an increasing number of actors are getting involved. These actors directly or indirectly engage African economies, societies and states; far from all of them are state-driven or state-controlled insofar as policies never cover all activities. For our present purposes however, we will focus on an analysis of the state and its agencies regarding SSC.

In the 1990s, even without the “new” (or rather: emerging) partners, aid in numerous African countries was provided by “some thirty official donors in addition to several dozen international NGOs [...] through over a thousand distinct projects and several hundred resident foreign experts” (van de Walle, 2001). Additionally, substantially increased supplementary amounts of finance (for development) in the form of SSC, are said to complement ODA. Adding to this already complex picture are sub-national entities, such as Chinese provinces, where substantial interests in private investments are based (Chen and Jian, 2009; Shen, 2013) and the various new formats of multi-lateral SSC, be it the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) development fund or the BRICS bank (New Development Bank, NDB, in planning), as well as tri-lateral co-operation that include SSC providers and “Northern” partners. The co-ordination and monitoring challenge is thus real, including for SSC providers. The co-ordination of external partners might be less of a problem for countries like South Africa, with substantial administrative capacities in its treasury. It might also not be too much of a headache for countries like, say, Angola, which are not aid dependent and receive relatively little aid money. It is, however, a real issue for smaller administrations across the African continent.

African decision-makers need more detailed knowledge, as the large increase in SSC also came with a diversification of instruments for international engagement. For instance, according to the Chinese Aid policy (white paper) of 2014,

“From 2010 to 2012, China provided foreign assistance mainly in the following forms: undertaking complete projects, providing goods and materials, conducting technical co-operation and human resources development co-operation, dispatching medical teams and volunteers, offering emergency humanitarian aid, and reducing or exempting the debts of the recipient countries”. (China’s Foreign Aid, 2014)

Within China – and other South-South actors – the diversification of instruments and proliferation of actors has triggered discussions on internal co-ordination and reforms of their institu-
tions for external engagement. SSC providers have established agencies that have to be adapted to new volumes of finance and changed institutional settings, for example the Brazilian reforms of the existing Brazilian Co-operation Agency aims at addressing co-ordination challenges internally (de Mello e Souza, 2014). India has recently established a Development Partnership Administration (Chaturvedi, 2014) so as to address co-ordination issues – not unlike South Africa (cf. Sidiropoulos, 2012; Grimm, 2011). A third set of actors, including China, plans SSC through existing structures of line ministries and aims at inter-ministerial co-ordination; this, however, is increasingly difficult, as Chinese scholars also confirm (Xu and Wang, 2015).

The plethora of institutions and potential partners is thus ever more complex. The increased number of actors provides African administrations with choice between partners; they thus gain policy space. They do, however, also need to keep abreast with policy developments and priorities across a larger range of countries and need to understand tensions between partner countries’ stated goals in SSC and other, intervening agendas or internal contradictions. FOCAC thus sits in a specific context.

**Tensions between South-South co-operation and other agendas**

Despite the formulation of high-level policies and some institutional evolution, however, tangible tensions exist between the South-South Co-operation narrative and China’s rationale for a “special relationship” with African states. It will be crucial to understand where these broader debates are moving and we will explore some in the following with a specific view on China.

**“Demand-driven co-operation” vs. a policy of “going out”**

SSC is said to be based on demand only, and providers of co-operation claim to not push projects or finance onto their partners and only to engage when and where they are asked to do so. Yet, African actors had a somewhat different impression already back in 2009 (cf. UNDP, 2009). This puzzle is only to be understood if we consider that China’s Africa engagement was closely related to the explicit Chinese aspiration to have some key industries “go out” and internationalise their activities in the late 1990s and particularly after the Chinese WTO accession in 2001 (Cissé, 2012).

This Chinese policy still seems to have effects: by mid-2013, only three African countries had committed China to a list of projects to choose from within a five-year period, in an arrangement not unlike a “bridal registry” (Grimm, 2014). Positively speaking, the very success of committing China to certain priority projects is evidence for African agency in the relationship (Mohan and Lampert, 2012; Grimm, 2013). Some Chinese rationales and rhetoric might facilitate the co-ordination of Chinese aid within – and ideally, by – African countries. However, the fact that this is highlighted as an achievement implies that tough discussions were required, which somewhat contradicts the presentation of SSC of being purely “demand driven”.

**“No strings attached” vs. tying of co-operation to Chinese procurement**

“Conditionality” in co-operation has become a sensitive topic in which SSC strives to distinguish itself from traditional aid. This, again, is far from being an exclusively Chinese topic: almost all SSC providers are very cautious to not simply emulate the practice of Western donors, as they feel that this would contradict their tradition. The tradition of providing aid without conditionality (“no strings attached”) is usually cited as a first. This is related to political conditions only, as all SSC providers also attach economic conditions to their activities.

Loans are always based on expectations of repayment and thus check on the local framework conditions. Some touting has been towards “risk primes” put onto loans to Zimbabwe, for instance. And certainly, the “finance for resource” deals, that is, the vouching of future income on immediate finance, have triggered questions on the prices used as a base for calculations.
All of these points relate to the weighing of (immediate) gains over (future) costs – a balance that is made locally and in a political debate. Is there a debate, really?

On the Chinese side, there are expectations of long-term - and of immediate economic returns. At least 51 per cent of Chinese concessional finance on goods and services explicitly need to be procured from China (“Western” donors discuss this as a tying of aid). Beyond the immediate gains, calls exist – also in China – to “pay more attention to studying and refining [their] own experience in order to engage more effectively in international development talks” (Wang and Li, 2014). This statement is certainly about the presentation of a coherent policy line towards partner countries and globally. Yet, this is most likely to be as much about the effective use of funds – and is thus not far from the aid effectiveness debate.

**China’s special view on Africa vs. Beijing’s global aspirations**

African actors might see a Chinese “rapprochement” to global (or perhaps specifically, Western) debates with unease, as it means that some discussions on the Chinese rationale for co-operation are possibly moving away from the cherished Chinese perspective of regarding Africa as a “last economic frontier” in the world economy – and more towards the aid mainstream (O’Brien 2015). The mix of Chinese interests has always varied across the African continent, and in some countries, Chinese aid plays a more prominent role, while in others, investments from China are the key driver. A general rapprochement towards a more aid-centred view in state-led activities could actually reduce the political value of Chinese co-operation for some African states. On the other hand, for Beijing, it certainly would increase its ability to engage in global discussions on development co-operation.

We might speculate over whether Chinese decision-makers rather lean towards improving their standing with “the West” or their friendship with Africa. Various scenarios are possible. Yet, there certainly is no automaticity in the scales being tipped in favour of the African side at each and every point. African decision-makers will thus certainly need to keep abreast with the internal Chinese debate and Chinese processes on how to balance conflicting goals.

In brief: a dynamic setting requires knowledge investments. Knowledge in terms of institutions, actors, procedures and policies has to be generated and managed when it comes to finance and co-operation opportunities with a variety of state and non-state actors from China, but also India, Brazil, Malaysia, South Korea, South Africa (for other African countries) and so on. The narrative and the elements shaping it are far from static over time, even if occurring under the same heading of South-South Co-operation.

FOCAC is one of the key occasions for African governments to engage China as a group, but the format faces limitations. We shall now turn to FOCAC specifically, with regard to its achievements and its role.

**The particular role of FOCAC in China’s international relations**

The Forum on China-Africa Co-operation has various roles: most importantly, the Forum provides for a high-level opportunity of visibility of China-Africa relations. In other words: its very existence is already one main purpose. The gathering at the highest political level from a Chinese perspective shows that “China cares” and that Beijing attributes high importance to its African partners. These international meetings between countries and “Africa” have been established with Japan, the European Union, India, the USA, Turkey and others. Discussions are prepared in advance – and often, by default or intention – the meeting is mostly prepared in Beijing. There are no formal votes taking place, in other words, the Forum is not a decision-making body. Rather, prepared declarations are proclaimed. Consequently, Chinese actors speak of FOCAC as a bi-lateral setting rather than a multi-lateral body for deliberations (cf. Grimm 2012). This has not changed.

China has the structural benefit of being one political entity, which makes co-ordination some-
what easier than between the 50-odd African states and their various administrations. In fact, however, fragmentation is high on the Chinese side, too, as discussed above, and combining package deals is thus likely to be a messy affair while presenting an image of uniformity of policy. For this reason, Taylor actually speaks of FOCAC’s potential to “undermine Chinese policy in Africa in the sense that it reifies the popular perception common in Africa […] that China is and remains a centrally controlled, monolithic actor” (Taylor 2011:101). Taylor also mentions that, despite the Chinese co-ordination challenge and various debates that can be tapped into, “Africa plays a bit-part at best” (ibid:100).

Discussing Africa as one entity in the FOCAC round is a steep assumption, as it would require early, timely co-ordination among more than 50 states (plus the AU Commission). The problem, however, is even more deep rooted, as African states, in their majority, are not in a position to have formulated projects and suggestions/demands to China before the meeting. This partly has to do with very limited capacities to co-ordinate such a great number of actors, but partly also has to do with somewhat obscure or unclear political preferences, also depending on the political level that one looks for these preferences. High-level politicians can present a version of what Chinese co-operation is that is different from the perspective of administrations that are tasked with donor-co-ordination (cf. Grimm 2013). The virtual absence of structured African input is a major imbalance in the process and has been deplored in the past also by Chinese actors (cf. Grimm 2012).

The above suggests that some pushing of an agenda towards China would be possible and African states remain limited in terms of their possibilities, even if there are clear limits on how far one can push. Overall, China is cautious to not commit to global targets in its co-operation, as this is felt as reducing the space for presenting its own characteristics and building on its own learning (Mao, 2014). The possibility of commitment is illustrated by the promise to spend half of China’s aid on Africa, as done in the White Paper on Aid (2014). While this still leaves the overall amount to Chinese decision-making entirely, some ground has been made. Within FOCAC, a list of commitments is presented by China. It is thus possible to take stock of commitments via FOCAC and it has been done – including by the CCS (see Cissé 2012; Grimm 2012; Burgess and Esterhuyze 2012; CCS 2010; Taylor 2011). However, there is no official report by a FOCAC body or secretariat or by individual countries on the progress or achievements of China-Africa co-operation and the promises made through FOCAC or beyond.

Even when assuming that all parties have an interest in an honest stock-taking, the question remains how much this Forum provides for discussions of what might have gone wrong. The interest on both sides certainly is to show that progress has been made - particularly when the participants consist only of state representatives. The Chinese side would not want to see activities as irrelevant and fruitless, nor would African partners want to give an impression of being an unreliable or unsuccessful partner.

The incentives for a blunt and open debate are limited in the current setting. Civil society is not meaningfully represented and this restricts “checks-and-balances” from the ground. FOCAC meetings are already a huge organisational endeavour, given the participation of representatives of more than 50 states as well as the African Union Commission and various development banks as observers. It might thus be difficult to expand the field of participants further, even if from a purely logistical point of view. Furthermore, the exclusion of civil society might be due to format; we should be careful not to simply attribute it to a lack of interest amongst illiberal, non-democratic states, as there is, for instance, no such forum in the setting of the Africa-EU Summit, either. Nevertheless, CSOs would have a crucial role to play. They could be the catalyst for more critical discussion and honest stock-taking, if special reports were encouraged or even commissioned by FOCAC states as input and focal point for discussions with CSOs.
Lessons from the discussion and recommendations for an African FOCAC agenda

In its current form, FOCAC is a festive framework much rather than a working framework. While China, in the past, has not shown much interest in institutionalising FOCAC, African countries did not sufficiently use their bargaining powers. This is due to collective action problems amongst 50-odd states, but it is also based on a lack of foresight and lack of attention to better understand Chinese policies and their making.

The inner-Chinese debates – sometimes as a reaction to external input – determine policies, and consequently, that is where our attention should be. The criticism of some Western observers towards Chinese engagement might be interesting, even if at times almost hysterical. However, from an African perspective, these external debates should not be the key point of discussion, really. Rather, African governments should focus on triggering, enabling and structuring internal debates in China and engage with and foster knowledge about China.

China is a partner to African states at various levels: politically (including as an alternative to Western policies), economically (rather as a supplement to Western states) and culturally (pretty much like anyone else, but with some ideological particularities). Only when engaging more consistently with China – based on an own agenda and coupled with knowledge of domestic Chinese settings – can African governments achieve the best results.

China’s rhetoric of “being different” can and must be used

Politically, China is often wheeled out as an alternative to Western partners if leverage is sought over a Western agenda and/or disappointment with the latter prevails. Does China deliver on promises? Thus far, it largely seems to have done so. And certainly, Beijing builds its reputation precisely on this reliability. This can be used to African countries’ advantage, if the rhetoric of South-South Co-operation is employed properly. African leaders can commit China to an agenda they might have; the examples of three African countries offer proof of this.

Leverage for this is in the SSC narrative of a demand-driven co-operation. For a list of priorities, Beijing then certainly can choose what it has on offer and can provide (taking into account the supply-side). This does, however, require the (African) side to be bold enough to say “Thank you, but no thank you!” to projects that are not explicitly requested. As a crucial word of caution: if a country plays the China card as an alternative to Western aid, they tamper with their own credibility with traditional donors. These Western donors still make up the largest proportion of assistance and other external financial flows!

China needs to be engaged on co-operation, not on hand-outs

The entire presentation of FOCAC is that of China giving presents to Africa, which is the opposite of being “equals”. Compared to China, Africa consists of relatively small nations, even when we take the continental heavy-weights Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, or South Africa. Geographically, Africa is indeed three times the size of China, unlike the standard depiction in China-Africa meetings. However, just to illustrate the unequal setting: Guangdong Province has about the same number of inhabitants as that of Ethiopia, one of Africa’s most populous countries. Landmass or population size does not translate into leverage when the partner is interested either in access to specific resources or markets with purchasing power. African economies are growing, also fostered by Chinese engagement. Yet, working with China is always from the perspective of “un-equals”. The small partner often has some goods to offer but ultimately, Africans should not forget that they are wooing an investor. This investor comes with an agenda of its own, whatever the rhetoric is, and it has to be understood and taken into consideration in the engagement.

The pushing of the “Chinese dream” onto the African continent, in the form of the “African Dream”, can be understood as an illustration for the Chinese endeavour to magnify their own political ritual and its own political thought. It might sound good, but this idea is Chinese politi-
cal thinking writ large, not equal partners sharing ideas. It does not reflect genuine concern for African affairs. This is simply a word of caution, and should not necessarily be understood as an accusation towards China. In different contexts, Beijing rightly points out that it is no Santa Claus with selfless gifts, but that it is interested in its own share of the gains, too. The interests between individual states and China can actually coincide and can, indeed, create win-win-situations. However, the share of the win on the African side needs to be negotiated and is unlikely to be given by a benevolent Beijing without tough negotiations.

Regional projects help to attract interest – and help African economies

Given the imbalance in power and the need to attract investors, regional projects might help to make Africa interesting. The reasoning might have changed, but in fact, African leaders have pointed out that “Africa Must Unite”. This necessity has actually not diminished with the advent of China on the scene; rather, the point is being made more clearly. There is an obvious problem of collective action. Yet, if there is not more pragmatism to substantiate the vision on the African side, China will not present any force in Africa which differs significantly from what Western investors have done in the past.

The East African Community, for instance, has a joint population of 150 million. While this is still not a match to China’s population, it certainly is a more interesting market and area of engagement for Chinese companies than individual, small countries. Interlocutors in Beijing often repeat that if projects are presented in an overall worthwhile manner from a regional perspective, then even some parts that are not generating profit in themselves, stand a good chance of being included. The East African railway refurbishment might be on good example: the envisaged extension of the railway network to Rwanda and Burundi would not be viable as a separate project in itself, and only makes sense from a regional perspective.

Despite urgency in economic improvements, a long-term perspective is key

Chinese projects have a reputation to deliver quickly. Some quality issues aside, African societies, indeed, more often than not need quick delivery of benefits, given its young and (increasingly) demanding populations. In negotiations, the African side can mostly come with potential, not existing wealth. Often enough, governments are vouching with future income for current finance, thereby putting a burden on future generations. The Chinese growth was and is often at the social/economic expense of the current generation, who work for their children having a better life. Exploitation of people was certainly part of this story and created harsh conditions for numerous Chinese, even if a large number was “lifted out of extreme poverty”; China is not an all-rosy development success story. Long-term effects on the environment also create long-term costs and in this regard, costs have also been shifted onto future generations in China (which, thereby, rather follows the “Western” development trajectory).

So longer term considerations need to be made: what type of development do we want and how do we get from the current situation to the future that we aspire to. A number of African states have progressed with an own agenda. Often, however, there is still room for improvement to better fit China into this picture.

Civil society needs to be better included

The state is important, and this statement is already a shift from neo-liberal thinking, which minimalizes the state’s role. But it is not – and cannot be – all-encompassing. Some interactions will be and need to be beyond the state. As one example, suffice to mention the crisis in rhino protection or the ivory trade; in these cases the state might play an indirect role through negligence or flaws in implementation of laws, including some corrupt practice. Beyond the certainly needed monitoring role for CSOs, some issues in China-Africa relations need to address changes in actors’ mentalities and world views. Environmental protection is clearly one of the activities that require civil society involvement - for advocacy, grass-root monitoring of
regulations, and education. Others are related to labour and investment standards.

Conclusions

African decision-makers need to be aware that despite pomp and rhetoric, the continent is important, but not paramount to Chinese policy-making; other goals are potentially competing with Beijing’s emphasis on Africa, including that of global recognition as a world power. The rise of China is based on a strategy of “biding time”, and a peaceful rise requires Beijing to maintain good relations with Western states. The discussion is thus never about co-operation with China or “the West”, but rather about the question where and how both complement each other best. China’s international relations are driven by pragmatism and long-term goals, wrapped in well-familiar rhetoric of South-South co-operation.

Africa’s relations with China can only bring beneficial opportunities to the African population and economy if the fundamental truth of states not having friends, but interests is adhered to. This, of course, does not preclude some common interests and should not be understood as international relations being a zero-sum game (“we only gain if they lose”). Mutually beneficial relations are possible, but this does not mean that relations are without negotiations. While some elements of negotiation with China is best done behind closed doors and without too much international noise – as this would be offensive to an important partner, some selected international noise might help to push negotiations further. The public pushing needs to be done cautiously and in a wisely chosen battle – but it needs to be done. Even if behind closed doors: tough talking needs to occur in Africa-China relations, at least occasionally. It would be naïve to assume that China provides benefits based on its internal consideration only.

Across African states, a broader and long-term vision for relations with China is needed and some elements of FOCAC need to be reformed, not least so questions of accountability of deliverance on commitments by both the Chinese government and, possibly even more so, by the respective African government.

Endnotes

1“The South” here is a political term, not to be understood geographically. Without a doubt, China is part of the northern hemisphere. It does, however, have features of a developing country, such as still considerable levels of absolute poverty and substantial structural shortcomings in its economy.

2A more expansive and detailed one can be found for example with Taylor (2011) and CCS (2010).

3“The West” is a somewhat elusive term, including European and North American, but also some Asian (Japan, South Korea) and Pacific states (Australia, New Zealand). With regard to development cooperation, it here means those states organized in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and specifically those in the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Bibliography


FOCAC VI: African initiatives toward a sustainable Chinese relationship

By Liu Haifang*

Since the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) in 2000, and specifically the Beijing Summit in 2006 (the third ministerial Conference), observers have gained a new interest in charting African new development. The tri-annual event offers an occasion to measure new pledges as well as to evaluate their implementation and the impact on the ground.

Moreover, the impacts of FOCAC can be identified far beyond bi-lateral relations between China and African states.

“Thanks to the Chinese, we [have] rediscovered that Africa is not a continent of crises and misery, but one of 800-million consumers”. (Business Day, 19 October 2007)

This comment, made by Mr. William Hague, the former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom (UK), encapsulates why in recent years, stimulated by the success of FOCAC, traditional players have, one after the other, adapted their African policies. FOCAC has not only enhanced bi-lateral relationships significantly, but also helped to put the neglected African continent back at the centre of the world stage – something which has not occurred since the Cold War. This has been done by gaining new momentum, with fast-speed developments changing the pessimistic image of the continent (Liu, 2012). This perhaps explains why, compared with other bi-lateral or multi-lateral co-operation initiatives, be it with traditional donors or with the new emerging players - FOCAC has attracted the most attention worldwide, as illustrated by the relevant publications (for example Li et al, 2012, Ian Taylor, 2012, Zhang Zhongxiang 2014).

As attention on African countries has increased, the appeal of African agency to actively participate and to manage FOCAC has become increasingly important as it seeks “to readdress the asymmetrical relation due to China’s command of significant resources, high levels of co-ordination and a clear sense of objectives and outcomes” (CCS, 2015). There is no doubt that FOCAC has been evolving and it has been a learning curve for both the Chinese and African sides. Additionally, FOCAC was the very first forum that the Chinese government jointly launched with partners on a continental or a sub-regional basis. With no previous experience, FOCAC has been experimental, at least for the Chinese side, and it has shown much pioneering spirit. This paper, based on the author’s personal observations collected from China and parts of Africa, will point out some gaps on the African and Chinese sides. The paper further proposes some possible solutions based on the reflections of “the good practices” of the previous 15 years’ of FOCAC.

Institutional challenges to operate FOCAC

Observers like to pay attention to the differences among diverse players’ initiatives in Africa, especially since the United States (US)-Africa Leaders’ Summit was held in August 2014. Compared to FOCAC, the US Summit’s irregularity was immediately pointed out. In fact, the

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*Liu Haifang is Associate Professor at The Centre for African Studies of Peking University, in Beijing, China.
Chinese side was also unsure whether to institutionalise the forum with a regular schedule or not. During the first ministerial conference, it was the African side that collectively insisted and pushed the forum towards this direction (Li et al., 2012). To finally decide to institutionalise the forum turned out to be constructive and conducive to shaping the bi-lateral relationship towards a more comprehensive agenda. It has been followed by many other initiatives, such as the China-Arab Co-operation Forum; the Forum on Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and the Portuguese-Speaking Countries Co-operation; as well as the recently-launched China-Latin American Forum in July 2014.

It has been impossible for the Chinese government to fulfil the pledges from each FOCAC session without a specific body to undertake the implementation thereof. This is due to the efforts from both the Chinese and African sides, specifically the daily work of the Secretariat. In 2001, a year after FOCAC launched, a Secretariat was established under the Department of African Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (MFA); a counsellor level official, with several secretaries and supporting staff responsible for daily communication with the African side. Additionally, they are responsible for co-ordinating 27-related Chinese ministries and organisations. The Director General of the Department of African Affairs is automatically the Director of the Secretariat. As time passes, there has been a trend toward including all bi-lateral co-operation in the FOCAC platform, so as to improve effectiveness. Nevertheless, for professional reasons, traditional programmes likely to provide scholarships to African students or to dispatch medical teams are still operated respectively by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. More co-ordination and even direct co-operation are much needed among the Chinese ministries to manage traditional co-operations better.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has highlighted the outstanding features of the current Chinese-African co-operation as “sincere” and “real”, emphasising the active attitude of the Chinese side to fulfil the co-operation measures it consistently promotes (Xi, 2013). As the next session of FOCAC approaches, under the co-ordination of the Secretariat, the relevant Chinese ministries and organisations, will again mobilise the necessary resources in achieving the pledges on the ground, to assure that the characteristic of being “real” as Xi identified is kept. The Chinese leader’s confidence in China’s positive contribution towards Africa is based on the hard work of the institution as a pivot to co-ordinate all relevant ministries or other sectors and agencies to take full accountability. The relevant organisations and officials being committed is the most important guarantee.

In 2009, the author joined scholars from the Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) to visit some African countries to see how FOCAC’s “eight measures” had been implemented. Surprisingly, we found that in some countries affected by malaria, China’s proposal for example, of setting up an anti-malaria centre was very difficult to do, because the Chinese officials in the embassy had to go through complicated bureaucratic processes related to their host countries’ administrative organisation. It often seemed like a “one-man war” (normally the Chinese business counsellor in a small embassy or his secretary in a bigger embassy) without the necessary sympathy from the hosting society, let alone immediate support. To identify a suitable place was the first headache due to the limited understanding of the importance of the centre by the relevant officials of the country during the process, then the communication and co-ordination with different levels of interest groups, including the possible resettlement of some existing societies or other organisations. In order to conceptualise large scale projects, the work generated would be huge. Our interview with Chinese officials often turned out to be a meeting of listening to complaints; the most often-repeated response from officials was, “I cannot understand: this is assistance from China, why do I have to beg them one by one to implement it?”

In Uganda, a Chinese office was set up under the MFA as a response to FOCAC. When we travelled to the country to investigate the co-operation with China at this level in 2009, we were immediately directed to talk with the person in this office. In addition to other FOCAC
projects, such as an optical fibre construction project, the anti-malaria centre had been completed very quickly. It was pleasant to visit this well-equipped centre, located next to a hospital in Kampala.

Despite sound policies and willingness from Chinese officials, without the necessary efforts from the African side, it will be hard to expect a sustainable co-operative platform. The large quantity of FOCAC projects require consistent efforts, so institutional building on the African side is needed to co-ordinate ministries and agents. Our survey on FOCAC, carried out till 2011, found that only a few countries (such as South Africa and Ethiopia) had specific FOCAC follow-up offices. In other countries, there may be a specific desk to organise affairs from China; otherwise, it remains the Department of Asia or the Asia-Pacific, under the relevant Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or alike), that is responsible for the co-ordination of all issues regarding China.

Another exceptional case is Angola, which had channelled its huge amount of financial transactions with China under its special office called National Reconstruction Office (GRN). Because of the aim to rapidly complete reconstruction, GRN also gives special green lights to FOCAC projects. From the perspective of quality, while speed is over-emphasised, some gaps may have been left for future improvement. The key point is, when China engages Africa through the FOCAC platform, proper organisational work on the African side is needed to make sure that the projects are implemented, therefore benefitting both sides.

The African side also needs to think of creatively providing an enabling environment to accommodate these new initiatives from China in order to maximise the benefits. More than accommodating Chinese assistant projects. Since 2010, the Moroccan government has clarified its strategic position as a gateway between Africa and China, specifically through Casablanca, an international business and financial centre in the making - to set up special policies to encourage the Chinese enterprises to stay in the city and then operate in the African continental market (Zheng, 2014).

For the Chinese side, the implementation of FOCAC has also not been perfect. An independent multi-functional institution named “China–African Friendship Garden” was recently proposed by one Chinese think tank to conquer some obvious shortcomings such as the cultural co-operation and professional training programs (Yuan and Hu, 2014). A garden is to be located in each African country, as a special agency of Chinese FOCAC Secretariat to work with the local agencies of the host country. It might be difficult to organise a big institution, but some specific working groups or agencies may be more realistic. This is because, not only are the Chinese embassies in each African country pressurised with a heavy workload, (with staff numbers almost the same as they were ten or 20 years ago;) but also professional knowledge is greatly needed for the Chinese side to push FOCAC to go deeper and wider, as originally intended. Both the human resources and the knowledge and networking capacity require that there should be some specific agencies to look after different areas from more professional perspectives. A possibly quicker way to organise these professional working groups is to mobilise the large number of Chinese Diasporas in African countries, due to their knowledge of the local environment and longer stay in the host countries to make the gap that the governmental agency has left so far. During the field trips from Eastern Africa to Southern Africa in recent years, the author has found that the Chinese communities staying in these various countries probably are those that are concerned most about the image of the Chinese nationals among the host populations given their own possible long stay. Spontaneously, through promoting more cultural exchanges, sports games or philanthropic activates, improving China’s image has become a consensus among them.

**Capacity building as key, but how?**

Some concerns about the sustainability of Chinese assistance have also arisen. From the fourth ministerial conference held in Egypt in 2009, echoing the hot debate of China’s devel-
development approach domestically, FOCAC has steered the theme towards "sustainability", in terms of both the sustainability of co-operation with Africa, and the sustainability of the positive impacts (especially environmental) of the development projects (Liu, 2009).

This understanding has greatly helped the Chinese side to pay attention to the quality of all the projects that have been pledged, evaluating the effectiveness, feasibility, influencing ability, sustainability etc. Some projects may have been prevented from being launched, while others, having shown obvious effectiveness, have been emphasised or even developed on a larger scale. Since 2009 the Chinese FOCAC Secretariat has published an implementation report of the previous session's action plan. This is a response to the request from world-wide observers, and it also serves the purpose of public diplomacy. Relevant exhibitions have also been held in both China and African countries.

With increasingly more debates regarding "aid effectiveness" and "trade instead of aid" in the air, China has become more serious in giving assistance to Africa; the total amount of money has increased significantly on an annual basis. FOCAC, therefore, has been a learning curve, obliging practitioners to look deeper into the specific co-operation areas and the flexibility to learn and to adapt to new circumstances. For example, there has been critique that China had equally distributed projects amongst countries, no matter the size of the population. One example is of 100 primary schools equally distributed among 50 countries. Hence the Chinese government has been encouraged to do more feasibility studies on the ground before making decisions regarding assistance projects. Lots of adaptions could be seen in the fifth session announced from the Beijing Action Plan in 2012, such as the US$ 200 billion in concessional loans. Additionally, projects were to be selected much more seriously, based on African requests first, together with both sides engaging in feasibility investigations and follow-up actions (MOFCOM, 2012).

Be it an agricultural demonstration centre or training school, the essence of all assistance projects currently has been identified by the Chinese side to help Africans to build capacity (MOFCOM, 2012). To implement all projects with real effectiveness, quality and good reputation among the given society is not a simple thing, especially to reach the basic mission of enhancing capacity building. So far, it has been proved that if the African side has identified an existent organisation to work with the Chinese implementers, those projects normally could be sustained and make more constructive contributions to local development.

One example is Angola Huawei's experience. When the company came to carry out a telecommunication project immediately after the war, human resources was a challenge. The company managed to work with a nearly collapsed technological institute to tailor the suitable skilled workers, thus initiating stable long term co-operation; later on, this college was jointly refurbished into a telecommunication college. Similarly, carrying out a large project of affordable houses, Chinese International Trust and Investment Company (CITIC) worked with local communities to recruit and train labourers since 2008. Gradually the training centre has been upgraded into a training college.

Another successful case is the Confucius Institute in Ethiopia. Based in the already established technological Institute assisted by Tianjin University of Technology and Education, the function of Confucius Institute was awarded in 2010. As a good working relationship was built, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education developed deep co-operation with the Chinese university, and invited it to co-operate with Addis Ababa University to build up the second Confucius Institute (Tianjin University of Technology and Education, 2015).

Another important precondition that could guarantee the benefit of educational and training projects is the positive African perception towards university degrees from China. China's policy is to require all beneficiaries of the Chinese governmental scholarship to return to their host country to contribute to nation building. However, during our investigation trip in 2009, in some
countries we could not find any graduates back from China; however in other countries such as Mozambique, almost everyone goes back. In discussion with local scholars, we understood that in some countries, Chinese degrees are looked down upon, and graduates getting degrees from China find more difficulties in finding their ideal jobs than those coming back from Europe or the US. This is related to perceptions of China as having low quality universities – a perception which is increasingly at odds with reality as China rapidly improves its higher education sector. Countries like Kenya and Mozambique that have arranged many of their Chinese graduates into suitable portfolios dealing with issues in various departments have shown their efficiency in their co-operation with China; short-term trainees (ranging from several weeks to one year’s master degrees) from many countries, inspired by their exchanges with Chinese people, also have brought back lots of positive changes. Instead of passively regarding the educational programmes as showcases of bi-lateral diplomatic relationships, these learners hold a positive attitude to maximising their time in China and to understand the positive experience of China.

The Fifth session of FOCAC prioritised the capacity building for African countries through initiatives like the “African Talents Programme” which was to train 30,000 human resource candidates over a three year period; combined with an increase in the number of Chinese governmental scholarships (the latest number is over 7800 annually). It is important to note that there are some African organisations ready to work with the Chinese to ensure that Chinese initiatives are channelled into a qualified as well as meaningful direction.

**New situations and tendency of the FOCAC VI**

Since 2008, many Chinese scholars, most prominently Prof. Justin Yifu Lin, former vice-president of the World Bank, started to call for a shift in the focus of Chinese investment, with growing economic fatigue in the country’s traditional partners (the US, Japan, and the Europe Union), and argued that Beijing needs to find new markets and new spaces to transfer its excessive labour-intensive manufacturing industries too, for sustained growth. In 2014, as China’s official strategy of “One Belt and one Road” formalised and the Silk Road Fund has been launched, Prof. Lin urged that “one continent” needed to be added to the strategy and the fund should also cover Africa. To show the feasibility, he toured several model African countries (along with a group of Chinese entrepreneurs) which have successful co-operation with China already. He confidently confirmed that “African economic development is low on a global scale”, so it makes “the ideal base” for this transfer. As the discourse of “Africa Rising” has been gaining traction in recent years, Chinese enterprises may increasingly come to invest in Africa as confidence in both Chinese governmental support and African capacity gain ground. At the same time, the mandate of Chinese FOCAC Secretariat would be mainly to further help this so-called “upgraded-level co-operation” firstly raised by Premier Li Keqiang.

Another new element for promoting future smoother China-African co-operation is the increasing role of non-state actors. In March 2015, Peace China, a foundation jointly organised by Peking University and media professionals, organised a public forum, from which China Foreign Aid Proposal was announced. The main idea was that the Chinese government should open space for non-state actors to participate in the foreign aid affairs to assure the quality and professionalism of aid projects. The Chinese youth, aiming to be the qualified young generation of a global power, is also joining the process as volunteers or young professionals. In Kenya, for example, some very professional agencies have been built by young Chinese university graduates, who have realised the gaps in their study or research process. To directly address the lack of local knowledge or limited understanding of aid projects or corporate social responsibilities by the Chinese companies, these young people organised themselves as social enterprises to provide services to the Chinese companies in Kenya and other neighbouring countries. One of them that the author has been closely watching and also providing some guidance to since March 2014, is China’s House in Africa. The goal of this young group
is really worthwhile to be mentioned. As the creators of the organisation were very much motivated by the critics of China’s presence in Africa, the starting point for them is mainly to help to set up a good China’s image.

The sixth session of the FOCAC meeting will be hosted by South Africa, which raised the application to sponsor the event and has also expressed its hope to upgrade the ministerial conference into a summit. Just like the fifth BRICS Summit that was successfully held in Durban in 2013, South Africa may be able to co-ordinate other African members, including the latest member, the African Union (AU), which was accepted as an observer in 2010 and only became formal member since 2012. This includes the opportunity to promote the South-South Co-operation spirit and to work with China to maximise the collective benefit from FOCAC. Through the BRICS platform, South Africa has focused on securing financial support for infrastructure construction for the Africa continent; it would be important for all African members to reflect on FOCAC seriously and thus to creatively prioritise their wish list on what they want to co-operate on with China. To integrate these requests with each country’s workable blue plan or specifically the 2063 VISION of the AU, is the first step to own the FOCAC projects. A good example of this is Rwanda, which has set up their own co-ordination commission and receives co-ordination from the Rwanda government, to organise all external co-operation, so that FOCAC projects are also based on their own development agenda.

As the 15th African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) kicked off in Cairo on 2 March 2015, the Egyptian Environment Ministry invited the Chinese environment minister as a guest of honour to attend the conference, aiming to “benefit from the highly-advanced Chinese expertise in various environmental issues, such as monitoring and implementing the regulations of using coal as a source of energy, dealing with agricultural wastes (such as problematic rice straw)”. Instead of passively waiting for China to raise ideas on what to do, Egypt has obviously made big strides in the direction of identifying priorities that China has expertise in to work with. Similarly, in 2014, President of Tanzania, taking the advantage of his visit in China, learnt more about China’s development story by touring many places and specified what Tanzania demands from China for the next stage of co-operation, such as more scholarships, medical teams as well as professional training centres.

Conclusion

The strength of FOCAC, compared with other forums that Africa engages in, has been its tangibility regarding its impacts and contributions, moving far beyond rhetoric. For FOCAC to go forward sustainably, it is crucial to maintain its driving force in bi-lateral co-operation, as well as ensuring it is jointly owned by both the Chinese and African sides. Advantages can only be harnessed once a clear sense of ownership is determined by both sides, as it was proposed first by the African side and then jointly created (Li et al, 2012). To maximise the benefit of FOCAC on both sides more African dynamism is needed, both in terms of mind-set and institutional capacity. Such a shift will contribute toward a workable and clearly-identified agenda that could own as well as integrate FOCAC projects.

Endnotes

1 Interview to Human Resource manager, Angola Huawei, March 15th, Luanda, Angola.
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Policy meets practice: Chinese environmental protection in Africa in the wake of FOCAC VI

By May Tan-Mullins*

Introduction

Formed in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) VI meeting will be held in South Africa in 2015. For this last 15 years, success of Chinese diplomacy with African states conducted through the platform of FOCAC has been impressive. In terms of trade, for example, Chinese trade with Africa stood at US$ 817 million in 1977 just before the reforms (Servant, 2005), but goods traded surpassed US$200 billion in February 2014 (Daly, 2014). In 2012, Chinese foreign direct investment in Africa stood at US$ 2.52 billion, with an annual growth of 20.5 percent from 2009 to 2012 (Xinhua, 2014). In 2008, nearly 1,600 Chinese enterprises had started businesses in African countries with a direct investment stock of US$ 7.8 billion (Wen, 2009).

The White Paper on China-Africa economic and trade cooperation published in December 2010 also indicates that by the end of 2009 China had constructed over 500 infrastructure projects, including 107 schools and 54 hospitals and the offer of 29,465 scholarships to African students. China further dispatched 17,000 medical practitioners to the continent, and cancelled 312 liabilities of 35 African countries totalling 18.96 billion Yuan (MOFCOM, 2010; CAITEC, 2010). Xi Jinping’s most recent trip to Africa in March 2013 also saw him sign deals upwards of billions of dollars with Tanzania, South Africa and Congo (BBC news, 2013).

Bräutigam’s book ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, published in 2011, has epitomised China and Africa developmental relations as a mixed bag with a range of winners and losers, also demonstrated by Kaplinsky’s (2008) work on different aggregate gains and losses for a continent arising from Chinese investment, among other factors. For aggregate gains, Africa has benefitted from commodity exports such as oil, minerals, cotton and timber and the building of infrastructure, which brings with it greater developmental impacts in terms of provision of social services and public amenities. However, along with these gains are Chinese imports which have brought about competition, especially for the lowly skilled and low-capital industries. Alongside these losses and gains are also broader concerns from some western observers such as transparency, fair competition and good governance. For example, Naim (2007) views China’s aid activities in Africa as ‘rogue aid’, and said to be undermining international development policy in that it offers: ‘development assistance that is non-democratic in origin and non-transparent in practice. Its effect is typically to stifle real progress while hurting average citizens’, and China is ‘underwriting a world that is more corrupt, chaotic and authoritarian’. Former United States Secretary, Hillary Clinton, has also hinted that Chinese investors should not undermine good governance and pay for concessions or opportunities to invest (Huffington Post, 2011).

Besides these transparency and good governance issues, what is equally if not more important are contentious issues surrounding environmental protection and social practices aris-

*May Tan-Mullins is the Head of the School of International Studies, and Director of the Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China.
ing from Chinese investment in the African continent. Numerous examples of poor environmental and social practices or regulatory lapses associated with Chinese investment regularly hit the headlines in the media. For example, The Economist highlighted numerous poor business practices imported alongside Chinese goods and services, such as shoddily constructed buildings and poor safety practices (The Economist, 2011), while the China Africa news discussed Africa’s dilemma of attracting Chinese investment to align with economic developmental needs, at times ‘sacrificing’ environment protection (China Africa News, 2011). Al Jazeera also indicated that many ‘Chinese projects raised labour and environmental concerns….. the destruction of African ecosystems could have long term environmental consequences’ (Al Jazeera America, 2014).

This paper hence examines China-Africa developmental relations’ shift in environmental issues arising from Chinese investment in Africa from macro policy and its implementation from the micro perspective. The article will first look at the 2006 China-Africa White Paper and the FOCAC announcements associated with environmental protection from the last five FOCAC meetings. This section will demonstrate that the Chinese central government has recognised the importance of environmental protection, that Chinese enterprises’ environmental practices in Africa are lacklustre and that regulations are included in the FOCAC action plans to enhance the situation. The second part of this paper will then look at examples of practices of Chinese enterprises in various countries and sectors to demonstrate the gap between regulations and implementation of these environmental policies. The paper will conclude with recommendations on how best to capitalize on China-Africa cooperation to ensure it is a balanced, win-win situation for the Chinese enterprises, African stakeholders (such as central and local government, communities, Non-governmental organisations etc.) and the environment.

China-Africa Policy on environmental protection: White Paper and FOCAC mechanisms

There are two main components to the political directives regarding the direction of China-Africa relations. According to He (2007:36), ‘China’s African Policy’, comprises the China Africa White Paper of 2006, which is the blueprint for future relations, and FOCAC, which is the vehicle to explore and implement effective methods to realize the goals of the white paper (Taylor, 2011). With the White Paper outlining various areas of cooperation between China and Africa, FOCAC became the engine to implement these stated aims. According to Xinhua (2006), FOCAC is considered a ‘platform established by China and friendly African nations for collective consultation and dialogue and a cooperation mechanism between developing countries, which falls into the category of south-south cooperation.’ As a collective multilateral consultative mechanism between China and Africa, this forum is intended to allow Africa to ‘speak with one voice’ and to increase efficiency in diplomatic interaction, especially among 54 African states (He, 2007). Accompanying the triennial meetings at the top ministerial level, there are also the biennial senior officials meetings and yearly ambassadorial meetings.

The first FOCAC meeting was held on 10-12 October 2000 and 44 African nations were present. The Beijing Declaration was signed as the founding working document for the forum and its main principles are based on the Five Principles of Peaceful coexistence, such as non-interference and mutually beneficial cooperation. A programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development was then released. The first action plan (Programme for China–Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development 2001–2003) was also signed during this forum. The two main areas of cooperation were inter-governmental relations and trade and investment, with no mention of the environment at all.

The second FOCAC meeting took place on the 15-16 December 2003 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The then new premier, Wen Jiabao, presided over the meeting indicating the importance the CCP attached to the meeting and the initiative more broadly. The theme of this forum was ‘Pragmatic and Action-Oriented Cooperation’ and the emphasis was on peace and security issues, on increasing consultation between China and Africa and strengthening cooperation in
areas such as infrastructure, agriculture and trade. The first China-Africa Business Conference was also held in parallel with the 2nd Ministerial Conference. Over 500 Chinese and African entrepreneurs attended the conference with 21 cooperation agreements signed with a total value of US$ 1 billion (FOCAC, 2009a). The aftermath of FOCAC II saw a phenomenal expansion in Afro-Chinese trade and investment (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2009). The environment was mentioned only once in the context of sustainable development and energy exploration. In the ministerial document section 4.8 indicated: “the two sides undertake to see to it that all cooperation projects comply with the principle of environmental protection and that enterprises implementing cooperation projects formulate specific plans for environmental protection” (FOCAC, 2009a). What is interesting in this statement was that plans for environmental protection were devolved as the responsibility of the enterprises.

It is timely here to introduce the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concept. CSR has been widely interpreted as the way companies take into account interests of a broader range of stakeholders beyond owners and shareholders of the firm. Hence, it is about the way firms develop policies and practices to minimize the negative impacts and even increase the positive impacts of their business practices on various stakeholder groups (Tan-Mullins and Hofman 2014:3). In this case, Chinese enterprises are supposedly tasked with responsibilities, to protect the African environment and mitigate any negative externalities arising from their investments, most likely through the CSR initiatives which were concurrently promoted in the domestic context in China through Hu Jintao’s “harmonious society” political approach (for more information on the CSR concept, please see Tan-Mulllins and Mohan, 2012 and Tan-Mullins and Hofman, 2014).

The third FOCAC meeting was held in Beijing on 4-5 November 2006, and catapulted Chinese’s increasing involvement in Africa into the media spotlight with the meeting bringing together over 1,700 delegates from China and Africa under the banner of ‘friendship, peace, cooperation and development’ (CCS, 2010:5). Commitments to ‘south-south’ and ‘win-win’ cooperation were also reiterated during this summit. Proposals were put forward by Vice Premier Wu Yi in the same summit, calling for the forum to be the lead organisation in advancing China Africa relations. She suggested that China and Africa should fully utilize each other’s strengths to expand and upgrade the cooperation and more importantly, recommended that the two entities should strengthen coordination in order to facilitate both bilateral and multilateral interaction (CCS, 2010:5) The FOCAC III action plan is divided into four main sections, namely: political, economic, and international affairs and social development. New areas of concern include information, air and maritime transport and social development, human resource development and environmental protection. Environment protection is no longer a one-liner in this event but a whole section (5.6) was dedicated to it. One particular achievement from the previous action plan, highlighted here, is the setup of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) China-Africa Environment Centre, with funds from the Chinese government (FOCAC, 2006). This is a clear commitment from the Chinese government on the increasing importance and attention on environmental issues, perhaps reflecting from their domestic experiences (Tan-Mullins and Chen, 2012).

The fourth FOCAC event was held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, on 8-9 November 2009, with 49 African states participating in the discussions. Environmental issues were featured prominently in this action plan, not just at the local level, but with also at the international level, with cooperation in global climate change mitigation highlighted in section 3.5 of Cooperation in International Affairs. This China–Africa partnership proposed by Wen (2009) in addressing climate change, enhancing cooperation on satellite weather monitoring, and in developing and using new energy sources is vital for Africa as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated that between 75 and 250 million people in Africa will be affected by water stress brought on by climate change (IPCC, 2007). Further mentions of environmental protec-
tion were observed in section 4.6 on Sustainable development of energy and resources and finally Climate change and environmental protection in section 5.7 (FOCAC, 2009b). What is interesting in this FOCAC meeting was also the announcement by Premier Wen (2009) that China would build 100 clean energy projects that cover solar power, biogas and small hydro plants and ‘enhance cooperation on satellite weather monitoring, development and utilization of new energy sources, prevention and control of desertification and urban environmental protection’. Instead of just policy announcements on environmental protection in previous FOCAC events, this announcement translated environmental protection from the policy level to concrete investment-related projects which have everyday impact on the African people. FOCAC V was again held in Beijing 19-20 July 2012. In this meeting, 50 out of 54 African states were present. A continuation of FOCAC IV, commitments to environmental protection in forms of climate change, energy resource exploitation and clean and renewable energy projects, were reaffirmed in this FOCAC’s document (FOCAC, 2012).

There has been a major shift of China-Africa policy since the inception of FOCAC. The policies have evolved from material support to transferring skills and building local capacity, focusing on new areas of cooperation, such as environmental governance and climate change. In some ways this could be interpreted as a move towards the global ‘norms’ of international development cooperation and a recognition after a decade or more ‘in the field’ that African capacity is key to the success of Chinese investments which is sorely lacking (Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2012). In this narrative China has been doing well at the macro policy and government to government level, in terms of focusing on the environment with various protection and mitigation initiatives, such as the UNEP China-Africa Centre and working with the Africa on the ‘United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’ and ‘Durban Platform for Enhanced Action’. However, as mentioned earlier, headlines of environmental violations of Chinese enterprises indicated that at the enterprise and local level, things are less rosy than demonstrated at the macro level. Moreover from the above, although we have been discussing China and Africa as two entities through the multilateral framework of FOCAC, the actual implementation and monitoring of the FOCAC commitments remains largely bilateral (Guérin, 2008:5-6). As such, it is important to examine China’s differential outcomes of environmental protection policy directives on various African states and sectors, which we will now turn to.

**Chinese investment in Africa- differential outcomes in environmental impacts and protection**

China has been very successful in developing its access to African natural resources such as oil and gas reserves and various minerals, in countries like Angola, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan and Zambia. These natural resource-based projects are necessary engines for Chinese economic growth, as domestic supplies are unable to cope with demand (Rocha, 2007). It is also these very resources which have promoted the rise of environmental degradation, because of the nature of extraction, especially if the projects are located in ecologically fragile regions (Tan-Mullins, 2015). Moreover, China tends to source its supplies from places which other international partners consider insignificant in size, geographically inaccessible or politically ‘risky’. These countries are usually termed risky due to its weak governance systems and thus encourage China to reallocate their polluting industries to such countries (Bosshard, 2008).

In sectors such as oil and gas, Chinese investors are usually Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (CSOEs) such as Sinopec, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), assumed to have a close relationship to the Chinese government. These CSOEs are of particular importance, given the large scale of their projects and huge investments in Africa. As such, they possess enormous capacities to impact as well as protect the environment. Many researches (Alden and Alves, 2009; Farge, 2013; Jansson et al, 2009; Mol, 2011; Tan-Mullins, 2015; Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013) however
demonstrate in many cases environmental considerations during course of investments were rather scant. The most likely violation of environmental regulations in this sector pertain to the infringement or neglect of Environmental Impact Assessments, such as Sinopec’s experience in Loango, Gabon, in which drilling operations started before it had been approved by the Ministry of Environment (Jansson et al, 2009:16). In Angola, although the 1998 Environment Law requires a mandatory EIA for all projects if they have an impact on the environment and/or society, no EIA is evident and it is unclear if the same regulations are applied to Chinese CSOEs like the Sinopec.

Another sector with huge environmental impacts arising with large presence of CSOEs is the mining sector, in countries like Botswana, Zambia, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Uganda, Liberia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. One of the main criticisms of Chinese engagement in this industry is that concessions to these areas are usually negotiated and awarded without competitive bidding and in the absence of environmental concerns. In Zambia, many of these Chinese CSOEs and privately owned mine projects are located in high biodiversity wilderness area. The locals were unhappy towards the Chinese due to poor labour practices and environmental conservation. For example, in the Chinese family-owned Collum Mine in Sinazongwe district, the local residents protested against the mine for discharging coal effluent into the Sikalamba River, destroying their health, and water and livelihood security (Scott, 2012). In the same report, Scott (2012), however, demonstrates that operations owned by CSOEs are better managed than privately owned mining enterprises as the CSOEs are more aware of CSR and the need to mitigate environmental implications arising from their investment. Their financial muscles also mean they have more resources if they have the will to implement CSR initiatives.

Last but not least, the infrastructure sector also comes with huge environmental implications, such as constructing hydropower projects located in fragile eco-regions or linked to resource extractions through the mode of repayment. Large-scale dam projects usually come with huge environmental impacts as they are often located in national parks and have a range of extensive impacts on rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. These impacts often have led to irreversible loss of species and ecosystems (World Commission on Dams, 2000:xxxi). Moreover, local populations have often been forcibly removed and their livelihoods negatively affected. A case in point is the Chinese constructed Merowe Dam in Sudan where 50,000 people were displaced (Bosshard, 2010). Another example is the Bui Dam in Ghana, where there has been the gap between the recommendations of the EIA and its actual implementation (Sutcliffe, 2009). Chinese preference to loan to Africa countries for using natural resource as repayment has also exacerbated the environmental implications in the resource sectors, as it inevitably encourage profligate exploitation of resources. An exemplary case is the “Angola mode” (Vines, 2009), where payments for loans for infrastructure are made in barrels of oil.

The above examples demonstrate that the environmental implications arising from Chinese investments in Africa are generally negative. The lack of mitigation strategies further exacerbated the situation. There are however signs of positivity in recent years, such as the CNPC who have made concerted efforts to manage the impact on and responses from the local communities arising from their investments, by supporting CSR initiatives such as the US$ 50 million donation to Sudan for construction of hospitals and schools and building the world’s largest biodegradable waste water treatment facility in Sudan’s Block 1/2/4 oil fields to eliminate the discharge of effluents (CAITEC, 2010:5). But other CSOEs such as Sinopec have not conducted a single EIA or published a CSR report, identifying the environmental implications arising from the exploratory/extractive platforms in various African countries it has invested to date. Compared to privately-owned enterprises, the CSOEs have greater abilities and resources to mitigate the environmental impacts arising from their investments. Hence they have a greater responsibility to protect the environment in the host countries. Failure to do so
will only put their investments at risk, as they need to secure the buy-in from the various associated stakeholders to ensure their investments are sustainable in the long run.

Conclusion

Chinese national environmental responsibility now extends well beyond Chinese boundaries due to considerable increases in outward investments in resource extraction activities in Africa (as well as into other regions). Such activities have attracted significant attention from western observers and international civil society organizations who have highlighted the significant environmental degradation accompanying China’s chosen domestic development path and questioned the sustainability of such trajectories and their feasibility in other parts of the world. Non-state actors, such as environmental NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund, International River Networks and Ghana Dams Dialogue are increasing their efforts to pressure China into mitigating its environmental impacts overseas (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013).

Generally, the FOCAC commitments and various implementation mechanisms have been praised by African leaders and international observers as a successful initiative, with measurable outcomes in terms of trade, aid, infrastructure and capacity building. However, throughout the years, focus on China-Africa relations have shifted to other less tangible issues such as environmental protection and social practices, as both parties realised accompanying these increased economic ties are ‘collateral damage’ such as negative environmental implications of Chinese investment (WWF, 2012). Moreover, the collective categorisation of ‘Chinese enterprises’ is an over-simplified term which needs to disaggregate Chinese enterprises as a collective entity, subordinate to the directives from the Chinese government. In many instances, flouting of environmental laws were conducted by Small to Medium privately-owned enterprises, where the Chinese government has little influence over their business operations in an overseas context. If these State and privately owned Chinese enterprises are to succeed in creating economic opportunities which mutually benefit their own and their host economies, they will need to address the environmental challenges and opportunities they face (Zadek et al., 2009:14).

Most research¹ demonstrated environmental records of Chinese investment could be better. However, what is not reported does not mean it is not there. One possible reason that success stories are few and scant could be the nature of environmental research on Chinese investment in Africa. Many African states agencies and Chinese enterprises are very wary of giving interviews to researchers regarding sensitive topics such as environmental protection and labour and social practices, for fear of a backlash if things are not well-received by associated stakeholders. Hence we need a paradigm shift from the economic versus environment nexus to economic-environment win-win relationship. It is only through future research in this field, will we be able to identify gaps, exchange knowledge and transfer capacity from the various stakeholders associated with Chinese investment in Africa.

The importance of the local government’s will to implement, govern and mitigate environmental impacts also needs to be emphasized as ultimately the projects and investments fall within the jurisdiction and sovereignty of African states. Accordingly, there is a need to promote and enhance the local capacity of the states to implement and enforce laws and regulations for overseas investors as well as a strong need for collective dialogue and action from African states concerning possible strategies for managing the environmental implications of foreign investments (e.g. through the African Union). Other than the local capacity of the African states to enforce legislation and the Chinese companies’ willingness to comply with international environmental standards, what is also vital in successful environmental governance is the presence of a local and global civil society (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013).
Endnotes

1 For example, please see ESRC funded project “China relations with Angola and Ghana”, led by Giles Mohan from Open University 2006-2009, and ESRC funded “China Goes Global: Comparison study of Chinese Dams in Africa and Asia”, led by Frauke Urban from SOAS 2011-2015.

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Regimes of truth, localisation of Chinese Enterprises, and African agency

By Barry Sautman* and Yan Hairong**

The “truth” of Chinese non-localisation in Africa

Western political and media elites often expound that Chinese firms in Africa do not localise employment. This view is especially strong in the United States of America (USA). President Obama, Vice-President Biden, and Secretary of State Kerry all expressed this view at the 2014 US/Africa Summit [The Economist, 2014; The Citizen (Tanzania), 2014; BBC Hardtalk, 2014]. The claim is part of a larger discourse designed to estrange Africans from Chinese and thus advantage the West in what elites perceive as competition with China. That perception was reflected at the 2014 US/Africa Summit by Jeffrey Immelt, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of General Electric, who stated that:

“We kind of gave Africa to the Europeans first and to the Chinese later, but today it’s wide open for us”. (Washington Post, 2014)

Earlier Obama, referring to China, told young African leaders that:

“You produce the raw materials, [sell] them cheap and then all the way up the chain somebody else is making the money and creating the jobs and the value”. (White House, 2013)

Michel Foucault argued that power constructs knowledge through “regimes of truth” that create certainty even where a “truth” has no empirical basis (Lorenzini, 2013). Thus, Horst Koehler, International Monetary Fund head from 2000-2004 and Germany’s President from 2004-2010 pronounced that:

“The Chinese bring their own workers or often employ Africans only for the most subordinated works”. (Koehler, 2012)

In a 2014 book, China’s Second Continent : How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa, former New York Times, writer Howard French stated that the Chinese presence in Africa shows “striking parallels with imperial patterns of the past” and repeatedly asserts that Chinese do not localise their workforces (French, 2014:53, 101, 124-125). Harvard Africa specialist Robert Rotberg has told Africans that:

“Chinese private- and state-owned firms employ very few Africans, preferring to import Chinese labour to complete many of most important construction contracts”, (Rotberg, 2012)

Eminent sociologist Amitai Etzioni (2012) has asserted China is colonising the world, and that:

“Chinese companies bring their own workers, pay low wages to local labourers, and discourage mingling between Chinese and local employees”. (Etzioni, 2014)

*Barry Sautman is a Professor at The Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, in SAR Hong Kong.

**Yan Hairong is an Associate Professor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, in SAR Hong Kong.
In most cases, little or no evidence is provided for such claims. Western media directly reproduce the “truth” as asserted by such specialists. Agence France Presse (2013) has stated that:

“When Chinese companies install themselves in Africa, they often bring Chinese workers with them at the expense of the local workforce”.

They also publicise the statements of Africans who accept it. An official German broadcaster has quoted a Kenyan think tank economist saying that:

“Whether it’s small business or road building, ‘the Africans barely profit from the Chinese involvement. Firms bring their own workers with them’”. (Deutsche Welle, 2014 quoting David Owiro, Institute for Economic Affairs)

Anver Versi, editor of British magazines about African business, has put it that:

“Chinese companies tend to bring in their own workers rather than hire locally, except for the most menial and dangerous jobs”. (Versi, 2014)

The regime of truth allows those who couple non-localisation with “Chinese neo-colonialism” to advance unsubstantiated claims. Thus, a scholar in the USA has stated that:

“[There is a] general Chinese tendency to bring in Chinese workers from their country, China. This has caused some Western and African scholars to argue that China is involved in some form of neo-colonialism. This neo-colonialism embraces all aspects of classic colonialism except for occupying foreign lands . . . In this neo-colonialism, the exploiting power (China) controls weaker states economic resources and political systems and exploits their wealth under the name of partnerships”. (Emeagwali, 2007)

So powerful is the regime of the truth that even an article on the Beijing-based Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) website, taken from an Australian wine industry internet magazine, states that:

“Unlike Western investors on the [African] continent, many Chinese companies bring in their own workforce”. (FOCAC, 2013)

A USA professor’s piece in the official China Daily claimed that when abroad:

“For construction projects, Chinese state-owned companies prefer to bring in their own workers and rely little on the local labour market”. (China Daily, 2012)

These assertions have not gone entirely unchallenged however. Querying, among other issues, whether “Asian contractors tend to use their own compatriots on their projects?”, China/Africa specialist Deborah Brautigam rightly answers that:

“Much of what is known about these issues is gleaned from somewhat sensational media accounts. However, evolving research suggests a more nuanced set of conclusions”. (Brautigam, 2010)

A USA think tank researcher has noted about assertions of Chinese non-localisation in Africa:

“You hear a lot of traveler’s tales, but we don’t have any statistics on which to really make a judgment”. (Page, 2013)

Statistics however do exist -- and they belie the “truth” of Chinese non-localisation. The next section will explore this in more detail.

**What the data shows and why it may not matter to some**

Many sweeping claims of non-localisation of Chinese firms in Africa are country-specific and can be verified instantly. An article by MC Bah of Atlanta, USA, in a Sierra Leone newspaper
in 2014, asserted that “Chinese companies independently use their own native work force without Sierra Leonean workers” (Standard Times Press, 2014). Sierra Leone is a “tough case” for localisation, because it had a skill-depleting civil war from 1991 to 2001; yet China Kingho Energy Group, which plans to develop a mine, port and railway there says it employs “several hundred” locals in Sierra Leone, with “20 locals for every Chinese person on the ground” (Reuters, 2014). In 2013, Chinese firm Tianjin Materials and Equipment Group acquired 16.5 per cent of the United Kingdom (UK) firm African Minerals Ltd (ARL), Sierra Leone’s biggest employer and a company that already had Chinese citizens on its Board (Ferme and Schmitz, 2014). In 2011 ARL’s Tonkolili Iron Ore mine had a workforce of over 5000; its 1000 direct employees were 85 per cent Sierra Leonians and its 4000 contractors’ employees were 65 per cent local (Bemining, 2011).

As part of a book project on the localisation of Chinese enterprises in Africa, based on documentary research and fieldwork in a dozen countries, the authors are developing a database on workforces in Africa and studying other aspects of localisation, such as sub-contractors and suppliers, adaption to local laws and customs, and socialisation between Chinese and Africans. For the almost 600 enterprises and projects now in the database, the average proportion of local employees is in the mid 80 per cent range, although figures are much lower for managers and somewhat lower for engineers. There is not much difference in localisation rates between Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private firms or among sectors. Mining however has very high proportions of locals and telecommunications has lower than average levels (half to two-thirds), with manufacturing, construction and services in between. Countries with relatively developed education and skills, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, have higher than average localisation; other fare worse, for example, Angola falls below the average, because of the effects of 27 years of war and Algeria suffers from a skills drain to Europe. At times, African governments “allow Chinese companies to use their own labour force in order to accelerate the rapid completion of much-needed infrastructure projects,” (Imperato and Corkin, 2010) especially in run-ups to elections or international sporting events.

Our findings confirm earlier studies that show Chinese firms with longer tenures in Africa tend to be more localised (Tang, 2010; Chen et al, 2009:83). In very recent years, some larger Chinese enterprises on the continent have become almost wholly localised. Kiluwa Mining Group (China Daily, 2014) and China Africa Agricultural Investment Co. in Tanzania (Brautigam and Tang, 2012:5); Sinosteel subsidiary Zimasco in Zimbabwe (Xiangkun, 2014); Akosombo Textiles in Ghana (Sutton and Kpentey 2012:94); Beijing Geophysical Prospecting in Nigeria (CNPC, 2012:43); and Jinshui in Zambia (Sichone, 2013) are firms with more than 99 per cent localised workforces, including most managers and almost all engineers and technicians.

Despite the claims of some South Africans (Thiane-Epondo, 2014), the country’s Chinese firms have localised workforces, with the largest having rates of 99.7-99.9 percent. Sinosteel has 4000 South African employees, with only 15 managers from China (FOCAC, 2014). Its subsidiaries include joint ventures with local firms: Tubatse Chrome employed two Chinese and 1344 South Africans in 2013 and ferrochrome producer ASA Metals had four Chinese and 1525 South Africans (Radebe, 2013). China’s provincial SOE Jinchuan has pledged that all employees of Wesizwe Platinum Mine, scheduled to become fully operational in 2018, will be locals (Mail and Guardian, 2013). Provincial SOE Jiuquan Iron & Steel (Jisco) operates in South Africa and is the largest investor in Australia-based and London-listed, International Ferro Metals. It has three to five Chinese employees and 1797 South African employees at its South African ferrochrome smelter (Huang and Ren, 2013; Kabemba, 2012).

Workforce non-localisation of Chinese enterprises may be an empirically inaccurate claim, but it is politically significant, as it is one of the most persistent, ubiquitous issues connected to
Africa/China ties. It is thus unlikely that most politicians, journalists and academics mentioned above will change their view when presented with contradicting evidence, as studies by Yale Law School Professor Dan Kahan have shown that US Americans who deny climate change is anthropogenic are just as aware of the view of most (97 per cent) climate scientists, that it is man-made, as are those in the USA who agree with the majority of scientists. The denialists know there is a strong scientific majority, but reject it on cultural/political grounds (Kahan, 2014). Kahan (2014) argues that their “Identity Protective Cognition” means that for a climate change denialist:

“If she forms the wrong position on climate change relative to the one that people with whom she has a close affinity -- and on whose high regard and support she depends on in myriad ways in her daily life -- she could suffer extremely unpleasant consequences, from shunning to the loss of employment”. (Klein, 2014)

Similarly, a majority of US economists agree that higher government spending is needed in a recessionary economy. Yet, that too is ignored by those US political and media elites ideologically committed to austerity (Krugman, 2014).

For those who claim Chinese firms in Africa are not localised, to change their view to accord with the evidence would create cognitive dissonance with an ideologised worldview within which “the Chinese” are consistently associated with negative attributes - especially in terms of politically-salient behaviour. For such people, a change of view might risk them being regarded in certain circles as “dupes of Chinese propaganda”. They are also likely to be influenced by not just a single “myth” about Africa/China links, but by many non-factual notions about the Africa/China relationship. For example, most persons who hold that Chinese firms do not localise their workforces also believe that Chinese firms, and not Western firms, export most of what they produce (manufactured goods, oil and minerals, and so on) to their home country. Yet, a large-scale survey of firms in Africa found that by value only 14 per cent of what Chinese firms in Africa export go to China directly. Most Chinese exports from the continent go either to the USA or other African countries (African Investor Report, 2011).

The propagators of the “truth” that Chinese firms in Africa do not localise their workforces are generally the powerful or influential few in society. Among the world's wider population, including many Africans, who are periodically surveyed by such polling firms as Pew and Gallup, the view may be more nuanced. For that reason, if the discussion goes beyond the “truth” of non-localisation, African agency can serve to press forward on employment-related issues in the Africa/China relationship.

African agency in issue of Chinese employing Africans

Contrary to the “Chinese neo-colonialism” trope, China’s Africa specialists recognise that “China needs Africa more than Africa needs China” (People's Daily, 2013). As Africa/China scholar Adams Bodomo has argued:

“even though China is a permanent UN Security Council member, Africa-China relations are asymmetrical in favour of Africa on the political front because of Africa’s massive voting clout at the UN and other international bodies”. (Bodomo, 2009)

The South Africa Chief Economist for the consultancy Econometrix, Tony Twine, has made the same observation regarding the trade and investment front (The New Age, 2011).

Africans are best served by recognising that the Chinese government and most firms understand the net benefit of localising workforces, increasing local content in operations, and bridging cultural gaps between Chinese and Africans. China’s Special Envoy to Africa Zhong Jianhua has stated that:

“I always tell Chinese companies coming to Africa, don't just bring Chinese labour with
you. If you think local staff are not skilled enough - train them. Bring together the skilled and non-skilled workers, just like we did with the TanZam [Chinese-built Tanzania-Zambia] railway in the 1970s - 60,000 Chinese workers trained 100,000 Africans” (Africa Research Institute, 2013).

Africans can go beyond the “truth” of non-localisation to deepen localisation through Chinese and African laws or guidelines that systematise investors’ obligations. Chinese strictures enjoin firms going overseas to localise operations and employment (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2012) and in the case of Chinese aid projects, “the Ministry of Commerce has stipulated that the ratio of Chinese workers to African workers should be one to eight” (Xu, 2012). As it stands however, other Chinese measures remain vague (Sauvant and Chen, 2014).

On the African side, states have a patchwork of localisation laws, contract-based obligations, or even nothing at all. Angola requires employers to have at least 70 per cent local staff (Miambo, 2010). In Cameroon, 60 per cent or more of infrastructure project employees must be locals, “but the ratio of locals to Chinese workers is decided after a protracted negotiation” (Sodalo, 2011). For each Chinese worker, four Gabonese must be hired (China Daily, 2014). Foreign retailers in Ghana must employ at least 70 per cent local staff (Kohnert, 2010). In Egypt, 90 per cent (African Development Bank, 2012) and in Tanzania 95 per cent of employees must be local (AngloGold Ashanti, 2006). Guinea requires that 60 per cent of executives, 80 per cent of skilled workers and managers, and all unskilled workers in mining be local (Australian Financial Review, 2012), while foreigners at Democratic Republic of Congo mines may only be 2-2.5 per cent of the workforce, with certain positions exclusively reserved for Congolese (HKExnews, 2013). Namibia stipulates that 90 per cent of all employees of retailers be locals (Nikondo and Coetzee, 2009). Under Mozambique law, foreigners can make up no more than 5 per cent of the workforce in large companies, and 8 per cent to 10 per cent in smaller firms, whether locally or foreign-owned (Mail and Guardian, 2013).

If the African Union (AU) had a domestic law counterpart to its International Law Commission (AU ILC), it could formulate localisation standards for the continent. Our interviews in Africa with Chinese diplomats, commercial counsellors, and leaders of business associations indicate that such guidance would be welcomed, to mitigate current uncertainties over how much to localise. The AU ILC itself might negotiate with Chinese officials to overcome visa obstacles of Africans in China, whose businesses there often have a multiplier effect on employment back home. They could also reach agreement on facilitating work permits for Chinese in non-localised positions in Africa.

African governments should also realise the advantages that inhere in Chinese SOEs’ conjoining of politics and business, particularly with regard to employment. During the 2008 to 2009 global financial crisis, non-Chinese mining firms in Zambia closed up shop or laid off workers. The SOE China Non-ferrous Metal Mining Group (CNMC) promoted a countercyclical “three no’s” policy: no layoffs, no investment cutbacks, no renunciation of expansion plans. It bought a mine abandoned by a Switzerland-based firm, recalled its workers, and hired 1000 more to open up a new ore body. The policy countered claims by the opposition Patriotic Front (PF) that “the Chinese” do not contribute to employment and the PF ended up backing away from its anti-Chinese stance after it attained power in 2011. African states might work through China’s government, its SOEs, and even some private Chinese firms, to generalise a “three no’s” policy for the continent.

African governments can also boost employment by fostering a greater role for Chinese firms in adding value to Africa’s abundant natural resources, by increasing their investment in labour-intensive manufacturing and services. Chinese firms are already important contributors to laying foundations for Africa’s industrialisation, through building its infrastructural
prerequisites, particularly in transportation. The Chinese state manages some key aspects of outbound foreign direct investment to Africa, making it the world’s most likely external actor to encourage firms to take the risks that come with large-scale development of industry and services on the continent.

African states together have the sovereignty and agency needed to get the Chinese state to take such measures, if African leaders are specific about how they think localisation can be deepened. Before the 2012 FOCAC heads of state meeting, Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga said he wanted to engage with Chinese actors about tractor and fertiliser manufacturing plants replacing imports from China, thereby creating what would likely be highly localized production (Odinga, 2012). Other African leaders may have similar wish lists they could co-ordinate. These might be made more feasible if coupled with proposals for a China-sponsored, continent-wide polytechnic or vocational institute that would carry out industrialisation-related studies and train students.

Finally, raising labour standards can benefit employment, by creating conditions useful for expanded enterprise activity. In terms of such standards, Chinese firm practices are worse in some respects (lower wages), the same in most (safety), and better in other aspects (more reliable employment during downturns) than those of foreign investors generally (Sautman and Yan, 2013). Chinese and African governments can however influence firms to adopt a long-term view and improve wages and benefits even where they are not yet profiting. This can create more stable workforces and obviate problems of the kind encountered by Sucoma, a privately-owned Chinese sugar producer in Madagascar that experienced widespread rioting in late 2014, in part because it paid some workers little more than a US$ 1 a day. Sucoma claims to have “created 10,000 direct jobs throughout Madagascar, including 90 Chinese citizens” (Xinhua, 2014). This shows that even highly localised companies can experience difficulties in relation to Africans if they do not adequately meet local needs in terms of labour, environmental and other key standards.

Conclusion

As it stands, there is neither sufficient data gathering nor guidance with regard to the localisation of Chinese enterprises in Africa. That is surprising, given the political and economic importance that both African states and China attach to localisation. Low-cost steps to correct these deficiencies can be discussed at FOCAC VI and carried out fairly quickly and easily. Data on workforce localisation, training, partnering, sub-contracting, and so forth, should be systematically gathered for Chinese enterprises in all African states. This can most easily be done through a questionnaire administered by the Commercial and Economic Section of Chinese embassies, working together with local government ministries and interested scholars from African states and China. Based on a thorough study of workforces, partnering, sub-contracting, and social data, multi-national guidelines on localisation, from both the African and Chinese sides, should be elaborated. These guidelines can take into account actual existing constraints and opportunities for localisation. They should particularly aim to significantly increase skills transfer, in order to stabilise and increase the local workforce at all levels within Chinese and other foreign-owned enterprises.

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See e.g. "中国企业境外商务透析服务暂行办法" (Provisional measures for Chinese overseas commercial enterprises invested in service sector) [2015, June 7].


