

Origin, Achievements, and Prospects of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Zeng Aiping & Shu Zhan

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is an effective platform and multilateral mechanism for China and African countries to conduct collective consultations and carry out pragmatic cooperation. Since its establishment in 2000, six ministerial conferences, convened every three years, have been successfully held so far. Chinese and African cities have been taking turns to host the conferences. Beijing was the host city of the first (2000), third (2006) and fifth (2012) ministerial conferences. Addis Ababa of Ethiopia, Sharm el Sheikh of Egypt, and Johannesburg of South Africa respectively held the second (2003), fourth (2009) and sixth (2015) ministerial conferences. Among them, the 2006 Beijing conference and the 2015 Johannesburg conference were upgraded to summits. In September 2018, China and African countries held their third summit and the seventh ministerial conference again in Beijing, which generated profound influence on the FOCAC mechanism's development. This article mainly reviews the origin of the forum and the primary measures and achievements of previous conferences. It would also analyze the major impacts of the forum and pertinent challenges, as well as the prospects for the forum's future development.

Origin of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The FOCAC was jointly initiated and launched by African countries and

Zeng Aiping is Associate Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Department for Developing Countries Studies, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS); **Shu Zhan** is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, and former Chinese ambassador to Eritrea and Rwanda.

China against a rich historical background. As the resultant force of various factors, it marks the necessity of developing Sino-African relations at the beginning of the 21st century.

A China-Africa joint initiative and Africa's unique role

While the long-term friendly China-Africa cooperative relations have laid a solid foundation for the forum, the rapid development of the relations in the 1990s and Western countries' enhanced cooperation mechanisms with Africa made it more urgent to establish such a mechanism. While economic globalization has provided new opportunities for China-Africa cooperation, the active promotion on the African side and the efficient execution on the Chinese side turned the conception of a forum on cooperation into reality.¹

Since the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, China has registered fast economic development. By the 1990s, there had been increasingly stronger willingness for Chinese enterprises to trade with and invest in Africa. In May 1995, China began to introduce government-subsidized concessional loans as a new financing channel to help Chinese enterprises enter Africa. The Export-Import Bank of China became the sole provider of the concessional loan.² During their visits to 18 African countries the same year, the three premiers of Zhu Rongji, Qian Qichen and Li Lanqing expounded on the new form of assistance and the joint-venture approach in foreign aid projects, and signed 11 intergovernmental framework agreements for concessional loans with Zimbabwe and Sudan, among other countries.³ During then President Jiang Zemin's visit to six African countries in May 1996, he put forward a five-point proposal for the development of a 21st century-oriented long-term stable China-Africa relationship of all-round cooperation in a keynote speech delivered at the headquarters of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor

1 Li Anshan, "Origin of the FOCAC: Reflections on China's Africa Strategy," *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.3, 2012.

2 Huang Meibo and Hu Jianmei, "The Formation and Development of Chinese Foreign Assistance Administration System," *Journal of International Economic Cooperation*, No.5, 2009.

3 Li Anshan, "Origin of the FOCAC: Reflections on China's Africa Strategy."

to the African Union, in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.⁴ On one hand, China, at the turn of the century, felt the need to set up an institutional platform for consultation and cooperation with African countries to promote in-depth development of China-Africa relations. On the African countries' side, after years of cooperation with other foreign countries, they had not felt sufficient sincerity from Europe, the United States and Japan. Judging from past cooperation with China and the Chinese development experience, many African countries had been looking forward to joint development with China and hoped to improve the existing cooperation mechanism. Therefore, some African countries first put forward the proposal to establish a China-Africa multilateral cooperation mechanism.⁵

The proposal was communicated to Chinese leaders by senior officials from African countries and the OAU during their visits to China. After much discussion, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, agreeing that this would be an opportunity to solve the existing bottlenecks and problems in China-Africa relations, advised the CPC Central Committee and the State Council to hold a FOCAC ministerial conference in Beijing in the second half of 2000, with the theme of "building a new international political and economic order and China-Africa economic and trade cooperation for the 21st century." The conference would value African countries' wishes, balance politics and economy, focus on real results, and strive for joint development.⁶ In October 1999, President Jiang Zemin wrote to 44 leaders of African countries with which China had diplomatic relations and invited their foreign ministers or ministerial officials in charge of international cooperation or economic affairs to the conference. He also extended

4 The proposal in President Jiang's speech, entitled "Toward A New Historical Milestone of Sino-African Friendship," includes the following points: to foster a sincere friendship between the two sides and become each other's reliable "all-weather friends," to treat each other as equals and respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs, to seek common development on the basis of mutual benefit, to enhance consultation and cooperation in international affairs, and to look into the future and create a more splendid world.

5 Tang Jiaxuan, *Heavy Storm and Gentle Breeze*, World Affairs Press, 2009, p.434; Liu Guijin, "Rationally Understanding the Doubts of China-Africa Relations," *West Asia and Africa*, No.1, 2015.

6 *Heavy Storm and Gentle Breeze*, pp.434-435; the authors' interview with Ambassador Liu Guijin in Shanghai on March 30, 2018.

invitations to the heads of state of the OAU's previous, current, and future presidency (Algeria, Togo and Zambia) to attend the opening ceremony.

African countries' active participation in consultations

African countries actively responded to China's invitation and had high expectations for the forum. Their explicit demands for the institutionalization, pragmatism and efficiency of the forum and request for follow-up activities from the beginning made the forum distinct from other cooperation mechanisms between other major external powers and Africa.

In the consultations before the conference, both sides advocated and followed the three principles of "democracy and openness, equality and consensus, and highlighting the focus." Most of the hundreds of written comments and verbal suggestions from the African side were included in the outcome documents of the conference, accommodating the African countries' interests to the largest extent. The African side's advice can be categorized into four kinds. First, different from the France-Africa Summit, the Europe-Africa Summit, and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the FOCAC is a meeting of Southern countries, so it should create new paths for South-South cooperation and generate specific results. The documents of the conference should fully reflect the differences between the FOCAC and other international mechanisms for cooperation with Africa, and illustrate those opinions of African countries that cannot be fully expressed in those other mechanisms. Second, the FOCAC should not just be a glamorous event without tangible follow-up activities. The two parties should build some mechanism to execute the outcomes and implement the initiatives of the conference. While China should not dissolve the organizing committee of the forum, African countries should also maintain the liaison group of their diplomatic envoys in China. The forum should be institutionalized from the beginning, with the ministerial conference taking place every three years in China and Africa alternately and upgraded to summit in due course. Third, the China-Africa cooperation should focus on development. To facilitate economic and trade cooperation between the two sides, the forum needs

to formulate some concrete measures, such as setting up a special fund for Africa's development, offering assistance in infrastructure construction, transferring technology to Africa, tackling the issue of trade imbalance and increasing African exports to China. The conference documents should not overly emphasize Chinese assistance to Africa, so as to avoid misunderstandings or hurt feelings of some African countries. Fourth, the forum should reflect the importance attached by African countries to China's unique role in and contributions to Africa's human resources development. With the two sides' joint endeavor, the first ministerial conference of the FOCAC was held in October 2000 in Beijing. The conference adopted the Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development, directing China and Africa to develop a new long-term stable partnership of equality and mutual benefits in the 21st century.

Primary Measures and Achievements

Giving full respect to African countries' interests, successive FOCAC conferences have taken numerous major measures covering almost all aspects of pragmatic cooperation. So far, the forum has made the following achievements.⁷

Debt relief for African countries. At multiple conferences, China has relieved the outstanding debts in the form of interest-free Chinese government loans incurred by the heavily indebted and poor countries and the least developed countries in Africa. The first FOCAC conference declared the exemption of RMB10 billion worth of debts for relevant African countries.⁸ The 2006 Beijing summit, the 2009 Sharm el Sheikh conference, the 2015 Johannesburg summit, and most recently the 2018 Beijing summit respectively exempted the debts in the form of inter-governmental

7 Unless specified otherwise, statistics of all the following achievements come from the FOCAC official website, <http://www.focac.org/chn>.

8 In fact, at least RMB10.5 billion worth of debts were exempted.

interest-free loans due to mature by the end of 2005, 2009, 2015 and 2018, significantly alleviating African countries' financial burden.

Assistance in human resources development. The forum attaches great importance to the training of African human resources, helps African countries improve educational infrastructure, and nurtures well-educated talents for Africa's development. Increasing numbers of officials and technicians from Africa come to China to receive training, and more African students studying in China are entitled to scholarships offered by the Chinese government. In 2003, the Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004-2006) decided to train 10,000 people for various professions for Africa. In 2015, the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018) expanded this number to 40,000. The number of government scholarships offered by China to African students has also grown from 2,000 per year in 2006 to 10,000 in 2018. Other outcomes of the FOCAC conferences include assisting African countries in building 100 rural schools, 50 China-Africa friendship schools, several vocational education and training centers and capacity building institutes, and 5 universities of communication, among others.

Helping African countries develop agriculture. China actively supports African countries to improve abilities in realizing food security. Since the 2006 Beijing summit, successive FOCAC conferences have taken specific measures pertinent to strengthening China-Africa agricultural cooperation, mainly reflected in the construction of an agro-technology demonstration center, deployment of agro-technology expert groups, and training of agricultural technicians for Africa. The China-Africa cooperation plan for agricultural modernization put forward at 2015 Johannesburg summit included the implementation of the "Enriching People with Agriculture" project in 100 African villages and the "10+10" cooperation mechanism between Chinese and African agro-scientific research institutes. The summit also advocated the sharing of Chinese experience in agricultural development with Africa and transfer of applicable agricultural technologies, encouraging Chinese enterprises to develop large-scale farming, livestock breeding and grain storage and processing in Africa to create local jobs and increase farmers' incomes.

Enhancing Africa's health care sector. The 2006 Beijing summit decided to support African countries not only in constructing 30 hospitals and 30 anti-malaria centers but also in providing RMB300 million worth of free aid for helping Africa prevent and treat malaria and offering artemisinin medicine. The fourth FOCAC ministerial conference in 2009 announced the provision of an additional RMB500 million worth of medical equipment and anti-malarial supplies for these hospitals and centers, and training of 300 medical workers for African countries. From 2013 to 2015, China sent 1,500 medical workers to Africa to offer free treatments to cataract patients. At the 2015 Johannesburg summit, it was decided that China participate in the building of Africa's public health control and prevention system and relevant capacities, support 20 hospitals from each side to carry out demonstrative cooperation, strengthen African hospitals' departments for specialized diseases, and encourage Chinese enterprises to undertake local production of drugs in Africa.

Opening Chinese market to Africa. In order to change the trade imbalance between China and Africa, the forum attaches importance to opening the Chinese market to African countries with tariff-free treatment to more African products. It has also been making efforts to facilitate Africa's economic diversification, industrialization and development of the processing industry. At the 2006 Beijing summit, the number of tariff-free imported goods from the 30 least developed African countries having diplomatic relations with China increased from 190 items to 440. The fourth ministerial conference in 2009 decided to gradually give tariff-free treatment to 95% of imported goods from the least developed African countries having diplomatic relations with China, and realize first in 2010 the tariff-free treatment for 60% of the goods. At the 2015 Johannesburg summit, China announced the implementation of 50 trade promotion and aid projects and the expansion of imports from Africa, supporting African countries in improving trade and investment environment, building law enforcement capacities in customs, quality inspection and tax administration, and conducting cooperation in areas such as standardization, certification and accreditation, and e-commerce.

Expanding investment and financing in Africa. The forum actively

supports Africa's economic and social infrastructure construction, encourages Chinese enterprises to invest in Africa, and facilitates the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises. The 2006 Beijing summit decided to supply US\$5 billion worth of concessional loans and preferential export buyer's credit to African countries, which was increased to \$10 billion, \$20 billion and \$35 billion in 2009, 2012 and 2015 respectively.⁹ The forum set up a China-Africa development fund in 2006 and a special loan for African small- and medium-sized enterprises in 2009. In 2015, the forum made an additional \$5 billion worth of investment respectively to the fund and loan, and established the China-Africa capacity cooperation fund with \$10 billion. The concessional loans and preferential export buyer's credit are mainly utilized to support railways, highways, regional aviation, ports, electricity and telecom infrastructure construction, and improve Africa's sustainable development capacity. Other funds or special loans primarily serve the purpose of supporting China-Africa investment and capacity cooperation, encouraging and driving Chinese enterprises to increase direct investment in Africa, and sustaining Africa's industrialization and economic diversification process.

Consolidating social support for China-Africa cooperation. Amity between people holds the key to sound relations between states. From the outset, the forum has attached importance to expanding people-to-people exchanges, which serves to deepen understanding and friendship between Chinese and African people and avoid misunderstandings caused by ignorance. Given this, successive FOCAC conferences have taken measures to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges through activities like tourism, cultural festivals, art festivals and youth gala, which have covered a broader range of people, such as volunteers, scholars, think tank researchers, scientists, journalists, and civil groups of workers, youth and women.

Constructive intervention in Africa's peace and security affairs. The forum, advocating the concept of "Africa belongs to Africans" and

9 The US\$20-billion loan of 2012 was used up ahead of schedule. In May 2014, Premier Li Keqiang declared increasing US\$10 billion worth of concessional loans and preferential export buyer's credit and adding US\$2 billion to the China-Africa Development Fund during his visit to Ethiopia and Nigeria.

“African affairs should be decided by Africans,” supports African countries to independently solve their internal conflicts “in an African way.” In 2012 and 2015, the forum respectively launched the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security and the China-Africa peace and security plan, to support the African Union’s peacekeeping operations in Africa and the building and operation of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crisis. China continues to participate in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and support African countries’ capacity building in national defense, anti-terrorism, anti-riot, customs supervision and immigration control, among other areas.

The FOCAC has made other significant achievements. For example, the African Union Conference Center and Office Complex in Addis Ababa, which was decided to be built by China at the 2006 FOCAC Beijing summit, was completed in 2012 and has since strongly promoted the integration process of African countries. The 2009 FOCAC conference established a China-Africa partnership for combating climate change and strengthened cooperation between the two sides in meteorological satellite monitoring, new energy development and utilization, desertification prevention and control, and urban environment protection. The 2015 Johannesburg summit put forward the China-Africa green development plan to support Africa’s low-carbon and sustainable development.

Significant Impacts of the FOCAC

The FOCAC has profound and significant impacts on China-Africa relations, China’s multilateral diplomacy, Africa’s development and international status, as well as global governance.

Boosting rapid development of overall cooperation

The forum has deepened the traditional China-Africa friendship and mutual trust in the political area, led the all-round development of China-Africa relations and enriched Sino-African cooperation. Driven by the forum,

the trade volume between China and Africa has been increasing quickly. Since 2009, China has been the biggest trade partner of Africa. In 2017, the trade volume was \$170 billion and Chinese enterprises' non-financial direct investment in Africa reached \$3.1 billion.¹⁰ China has become one of the most important sources of investment and finance for Africa. Motivated by the forum's measures, more and more Chinese state-owned and private enterprises have made their investment in Africa. By 2017, there had been more than \$100 billion worth of Chinese investment and finance in Africa.¹¹ In Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Algeria, Zambia and Côte d'Ivoire, China has become the primary source of foreign direct investment. Particularly, the China-Africa infrastructure cooperation has seen brilliant achievements. China has undertaken the construction of numerous railways, highways, airports, ports, bridges, hydropower stations, natural gas pipelines and telecommunication infrastructure projects in Africa, which has consolidated the foundation of African countries' integration and economic takeoff. Infrastructure construction has become the best-known brand of China-Africa cooperation, and also the largest factor for China's positive image in Africa.¹² By 2017, China had financed and built for Africa 6,200 kilometers of railways, 6,500 kilometers of road, 20 seaports, 20 bridges, over 80 power plants, more than 200 schools, and 80 plus stadiums.¹³ As pointed out by former President of the African Development Bank Donald Kaberuka, China is the

10 "The 2017 Annual Overview of Commercial Work No.23: Pragmatically Promoting China-Africa Economic and Trade Relations of Win-Win Cooperation," Chinese Ministry of Commerce, February 23, 2018, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/ai/201802/20180202714024.shtml>.

11 "Chinese Ambassador Lin Songtian: the Process of Industrialization in Africa Accelerates Significantly," Chinese Embassy in South Africa, June 8, 2018, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/sgxw/t1567683.htm>.

12 Zeng Aiping, "Infrastructure Construction Is the Brightest Spot," *China Investment (African Edition)*, December 2016; "China Faces More Opportunities than Challenges on Investment in Africa," *Global Financial Strategy 2018*, No.2-3, 2018; "Five Years of China and Africa: Forging an Exemplary Win-Win Relationship of Mutual Benefits among Developing Countries," *Outlook*, May 21, 2018.

13 "Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Lin Songtian of China to South Africa at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference on Opportunities and Challenges of China-Africa Industrial Cooperation," June 8, 2018, <http://za.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxw/t1567395.htm>.

largest contributor in Africa's power infrastructure construction.¹⁴ China and Africa have also jointly built many economic and trade cooperation zones, industrial parks, export processing zones and special economic zones, providing Chinese enterprises with good platforms to invest in Africa.¹⁵ Among them, the most influential and effective include the Suez Economic Zone in Egypt, the Eastern Industrial Zone in Ethiopia, the Lekki Free Zone in Nigeria, the Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone in Nigeria, the Sunshine International Industrial Park in Chad, the Uganda Tian Tang Industrial Park, and the Ethiopia-China Light Industry City. These industrial parks or economic and trade cooperation zones have furnished plenty of employment opportunities for African people and achieved technology transfers. They have expanded African countries' exports and foreign exchange earnings, increased tax and fiscal revenues of governments, enhanced Africa's manufacturing processing capabilities and industrialization level, and strongly promoted diversification of African economies, all of which make significant contributions to China-Africa win-win cooperation of mutual benefits and joint development.

In the field of African peace and security, China is now the permanent member of the UN Security Council that sends the largest number of peacekeeping soldiers and police to Africa. More than 2,500 Chinese peacekeepers are carrying out UN missions in Africa. China is also the second largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping expenditure. In May 2007, China assigned for the first time a special representative of the Chinese government for African affairs to mediate the conflicts in Darfur. In December 2008, the Chinese Navy sent the first fleet to the escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia, to crack down on Somali piracy and safeguard the

14 As quoted in Ma Li, et al., "Chinese State Grid in Africa's Industrialization: Achievements and Recommendations," in Zhang Hongming, *Report of African Development (2016-2017): African Industrialization and Chinese Construction of African Industrial Parks*, Social Sciences Academic Press, July 2017, p.132.

15 For relevant research at home and abroad in recent two years, see *Report of African Development (2016-2017): African Industrialization and Chinese Construction of African Industrial Parks*, and Funeka Yazini April, Garth Shelton, Chris Alden and Biliang Hu, eds. *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Industrialisation and Agricultural Modernisation*, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2018, Pretoria, South Africa.

navigation safety of Chinese and foreign merchant ships. So far, 28 patrol fleets have been sent on missions. In July 2013, China sent security forces to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for the first time to participate in peacekeeping operations and take responsibility for the security of the mission's command headquarters and camps. In December 2014, China sent a peacekeeping infantry battalion to South Sudan for the first time to protect the local civilians. China has also actively mediated the South Sudan conflicts and worked on the government and the opposition in a balanced and in-depth way. In Djibouti, China and the country reached consensus at the end of 2015 on the construction of a logistics base for the Chinese Navy. The facilities are mainly used for supporting the Chinese escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia, as well as other anti-piracy, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations. The base also provides maintenance and supply services for Chinese naval ships. With the official launch of the Djibouti logistics base in July 2017, the Chinese Navy sent out its first batch of stationed troops. Generally speaking, whether in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa or in the constructive intervention in the mediation of African countries' internal conflicts, China has always respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries involved and emphasized the roles of the UN and regional organizations. Taking peace and stability of the countries and the region as the starting point and ultimate objective, China always promotes peace talks, persuades through reasoning, without taking sides or seeking private geopolitical interests. This approach injects new elements and impetus into the cause of African peace and security.¹⁶

Leading a new type of international cooperation with Africa

The FOCAC has reshaped the paradigm of international cooperation with China, demonstrated another policy and development model for cooperation with Africa, and offered African countries a new type of partnership. Guided by the principle of “sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith,” China has always

16 Liu Guijin, “Rationally Understanding the Doubts of China-Africa Relations.”

respected African countries, treated them as equals regardless of their size or strength, and long focused on mutual benefits, win-win outcomes and common development. China's tangible contribution to African development has offered Africa more options in choosing international partners. China has also actively promoted Africa's renovation in governance experience, development concepts and worldviews. As Africa is undergoing a new round of awakening, emerging countries represented by China can serve as a key driving force. Under the FOCAC's influence, South Korea, Brazil, India, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and other emerging developing countries have been strengthening cooperation with Africa and holding similar forums or summits. Even the US, Europe, and Japan have felt the pressure and increased their investment in Africa, while adjusting and revising their respective Africa policies, for the sake of enhancing their attractiveness to African countries. In response to the strong demands from African countries, Japan followed the FOCAC and held the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, and promised to shorten the conference's interval from five to three years.

Promoting democratization of international relations and improving global governance

The FOCAC is the practitioner of the Chinese concept of "building a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at the core." Over the long time of human history, international relations had been imbued with hegemony and power politics. In traditional international relations based on strength and power, the strong never seriously considered equality, mutual benefits or win-win outcomes. On the contrary, China and Africa, since the beginning of their foreign relations, have been following the principles of equality and mutual assistance. The spirit of equality and mutual respect in China-Africa relations has thus become a model, representing a new trend in the development of international relations.¹⁷ As

17 Li Anshan, "Principles and Dilemmas of China-Africa Cooperation," *Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)*, No.6, 2011; Li Anshan, "Origin of the FOCAC: Reflections on China's Africa Strategy."

a paragon of South-South cooperation, China-Africa cooperation facilitates Africa's development and strength, and has effectively promoted the global balance of North-South relations. Since Africa is an important player in international politics, the natural alliance of China and Africa has boosted the multi-polarization and democratization of international order. Besides, Africa's development has long been a major focus of global governance. Driven by the FOCAC, the UN, G20, BRICS and other international mechanisms are paying increasing attention to African issues. The international efforts to build a fairer and more reasonable global governance system cannot do without Africa's peace and development. To make greater contributions to global governance, the FOCAC needs to hold a strong faith in contributing to the common development of mankind.¹⁸

Major Challenges Facing the FOCAC

China-Africa relations have entered the best period in history. It should be said that the forum's development is faced with more opportunities than challenges. Even so, as the forum advances toward a deeper level of building a closer China-Africa community with a shared future, China and Africa will still face some difficulties individually or in common. Moreover, the FOCAC mechanism is not flawless. There exist issues that are difficult to coordinate and deal with. The major challenges facing the forum could be analyzed from the aspects of Africa, China, and the third parties.

Challenges on the African side

With 54 countries of diverse national conditions, there are relatively great differences among sub-regions on the African continent. If the forum hopes to make more achievements in cooperation and better accommodate the development demands of African countries, their initiative and activeness should be given full play. However, Africa is still weak in the formulation

18 Li Anshan, "Origin of the FOCAC: Reflections on China's Africa Strategy."

of national or regional development plans. While the African Union and governments of African countries have made grand development strategies or programs, and in principle proposed insightful ideas or roadmaps of development, concrete and workable details and content are often absent. Regarding how to execute plans or realize development goals, African countries are usually short of corresponding tools and financial, technical and talent support. For example, while African countries have mostly put emphasis on economic diversification, agro-modernization, infrastructure construction, manufacturing and processing, and building of industrial parks, they do not have sufficient capabilities in formulating relevant industrial policies, planning various industrial parks and infrastructure construction, which to a large extent still depends on foreign assistance. The effects and sustainability of some assistance, investment and financing projects decided by the FOCAC have varying degrees of problems because African countries cannot fully take these projects into their development plans, or they are not able to provide corresponding facilities and services. For example, many agro-technology demonstration centers, industrial parks or special economic zones funded by China are restrained by insufficient supporting capacities of African countries. Some infrastructure projects contracted by Chinese enterprises, such as Africa's first electrified railway from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, are not able to reach the planned operational efficiency for the moment because of power shortage or the absence of corresponding industrial layout.

The African political situation remains peaceful and stable in general, but some countries and areas are still in turbulence. It is difficult to find good solutions in the short term. Internal conflicts or civil wars may last for a long time in South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali. Other African countries are also vulnerable to various political crises, especially at the time of elections, which is hard to be completely avoided. Even in countries with a relatively stable political situation, low administrative efficiency, overlapping operations, weak coordination among government agencies, as well as the phenomenon of corruption and power

rent-seeking, are all too common. From a macro-economic perspective, the economic structure of African countries is fragile, with many problems still unsettled, such as incomplete transport and electricity infrastructure, lack of economic diversity and a complete industrial chain, insufficient foreign exchange reserves and fluctuating exchange rates, underdeveloped financial industry and high financing costs, currency devaluation and high inflation rates, and heavy debt burden. In some African countries, terrorist attacks and public security incidents are frequent. The afore-mentioned difficulties have interrupted or destroyed the implementation of FOCAC measures, posing varying degrees of negative impacts on the projects' real effects.

Challenges on the Chinese side

The numerous measures taken by each FOCAC conference feature in two aspects. One is that most measures are Chinese promises of assistance to Africa in different areas, which are jointly implemented by both sides. The other is that the measures encourage China and Africa to strengthen cooperation in investment. Chinese investment in Africa or mutual investment has gradually become a major trend of Sino-African relations. Although China has made remarkable achievements in assistance and investment to Africa, paying attention to African countries' actual needs in relevant cooperation projects, which in effect is no worse than other countries, there is still room for improvement of details and methods in practice in order to make the forum more effective and influential.

With regard to assistance, China should work on a general program for assistance to Africa and specific plans for each country, identifying the priority countries, areas and means, so as to make the assistance more detailed, more effective and of higher quality. China should attach importance to the basic, national, project-specific studies in its assistance, and intensify research on the formulation of projects and the training of personnel engaged in foreign aid. In order to further adjust and change the traditional singular government-to-government model of support, the roles of the private sector, civil institutions and non-governmental organizations should be given full play, thus making

full use of their expertise, high-efficiency, and proximity to common people. China should pay more attention to the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of assistance, as well as the transfer of technologies and training of talents for Africa. At home, China should more actively strive for people's understanding of and support for the assistance, popularize the basic knowledge about development aid, and make the concept of "helping Africa is helping ourselves" more acceptable to the public. Last, China should take seriously the effect evaluation of assistance projects, to ensure the follow-up operation and sustainable development of its assistance.

With respect to investment, facing the increasingly stronger willingness and motivation of Chinese enterprises to invest in Africa, the Chinese government should strengthen macro management of investment in Africa, perfect the policy support system, further stimulate the vigor of investment in Africa, and improve investment quality. For example, the restraint, issued by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission in January 2017, on state-owned enterprises to invest in non-major business overseas could be flexibly applied based on specific situations.¹⁹ In some investment projects which have good prospects to profit and bring mutual benefits to both sides of China and Africa, it seems that the restriction could be relaxed to make it favorable for Chinese enterprises to take root in Africa and become bigger and stronger. Moreover, under the strict foreign exchange management system of China, it usually takes a long time for enterprises to complete overseas remittance, which affects the investment efficiency and delays the development process in Africa. Since private enterprises have been leading Chinese direct investment in Africa in terms of quantity, the Chinese government should step up policy support in the financing convenience of private enterprises. For enterprises, the homogeneous competition among various industrial parks or economic and trade cooperation zones set up by Chinese enterprises in Africa is increasingly prominent, which has negatively

19 Zhang Yaquan, et al., "Development of the Sunshine International Industrial Park in Chad: Problems and Corresponding Solutions," in *Report of African Development (2016-2017): African Industrialization and Chinese Construction of African Industrial Parks*, p.93.

affected both the overall interests and China's national image. The state-owned enterprises should make a more detailed calculation and evaluation of the feasibility and profitable prospects of major investment and financing projects in Africa in a prudent and scientific manner. They should fully consider the economic scale, actual conditions and prospects of relevant African countries to ensure the projects produce the most economic and social benefits. The concept of Chinese investment in Africa should be elevated from "helping Africa's development" to "integrating into Africa's development" to deepen the trend of China-Africa interactive development.

The third-party factor

The FOCAC, as it develops and fruits more achievements, will inevitably be confronted with increasing competition from various third parties. Some politicians, business figures and media of Western countries will continue their ideological attacks on China and tarnish the image of China in Africa. In their opinion, China-Africa cooperation has moved the Western "cheese" and encroached on their traditional and practical interests in Africa. Therefore, tags on China such as "new colonialist, imperialist, racist, exploiter, predator, and new creditor" have continuously sprung up in Western discourse. This kind of voice and discourse is able to affect quite a number of African elites and ordinary people. Some forces in Western countries are expected to keep playing up the issues of transparency, compliance, values, environmental and labor standards, debts, and trade imbalance in China-Africa relations, to put pressures on cooperation between the two sides.

The FOCAC will also face competition from other developing countries such as India, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore and Malaysia. They have also established various mechanisms for cooperation with Africa, and hold forums and even summits regularly or irregularly. Their cooperation concepts are similar to China's in some aspects, with unique advantages that China does not have in language, race or religion. Therefore, the African countries, with more choices and discourse power in negotiations, could select the best partner from the

standpoint of pursuing maximum self-interests. All these “third-party factors” have imposed higher standards and requirements for the FOCAC.

Future Development of the FOCAC

For China and African countries, the deepening of their win-win cooperation of mutual benefits is an irrevocable trend. Based on the cooperation approaches proved effective by practice, the forum could reinforce mechanism building in the following aspects to improve the quality and efficiency of China-Africa cooperation and play a greater role in building a closer China-Africa community with a shared future.

First, China and Africa should further enhance the communication on governance experience, the coordination and synergy of development strategies and policies, and the cooperation in their respective ruling parties’ capacity building. During the 40 years of reform and opening-up, China has made significant achievements and accumulated abundant governance and development experience. The Chinese path, theory and system has enriched the governance doctrine of the international community, expanded the approaches for developing countries to realize modernization, and provided new options for countries and nations in the world that are pursuing rapid development while desiring to retain their independence.²⁰ It is fair to say that the development experience of any country is the result of exploration and experiments in human civilization and a treasure shared by mankind. China never exports its model to Africa, nor does it oppose African countries to learn from China for the purpose of exploring a better political system and development path which correspond to their respective national conditions.²¹ The communication on governance experience is an important channel

20 “China and Africa: Jointly Building a Closer Community with a Shared Future,” *People’s Daily*, July 21, 2018, p.7.

21 “China and Africa: Jointly Building a Closer Community with a Shared Future”; Zeng Aiping, “China-Africa Governance Exchanges and Experiences,” in Garth Shelton, Funeka Yazini April and Li Anshan, *FOCAC 2015 A New Beginning of China-Africa Relations*, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2015, Pretoria, South Africa.

for ruling parties and governments from both sides to strengthen strategic synergy. It is conducive to the capacity building of African ruling parties and helps address the confusion facing African countries when they choose their development paths. On July 16, 2018, with the support of China, six parties from southern African countries jointly built the Julius Nyerere Leadership School, which represents the latest beneficial attempt of China-Africa communication on governance experience.

Second, the two sides should strengthen investment and financing cooperation, eliminate relevant policy restrictions, enhance integration of investment and financing as well as construction and operation, and endeavor to solve the debt puzzle of Africa. Almost all late-developing countries are short of capital, technology and professional talents in the early phase of development. Wisely utilizing foreign investment and financing is conducive to solving the bottlenecks. Since China has accumulated abundant experience in this respect, it can share relevant practices with African countries and help them enter a virtuous circle of development. China and Africa can further encourage mutual investment, create a more attractive investment climate, proactively lift some policy restrictions, thus integrating into the development process of the other side and deepening the synergetic effect of China-Africa interactive development. In the investment and financing process of big projects in Africa, China can more frequently adopt the model that integrates construction and operation to ensure the projects' effectiveness after completion as well as their economic and social benefits. During the transition period, China should actively transfer relevant technologies and management experience to African countries, and help them take over relevant projects as early as possible. Moreover, China should encourage more state-owned and private enterprises to carry out direct investment or joint ventures in Africa, explore the PPP (Public-Private Partnership) model of investment and financing, and reduce the sovereign debt burden of African countries. Last but not least, China should also strictly control the negative environmental effects of its investment and financing in Africa. It is the humility of mankind in front of nature that

makes the ecology on the continent more pristine than other parts of the world.²² China should closely observe the ecological principles in its African projects, find the best balance between environment and development, and avoid the destructive path of “treatment after development.”

Third, China and Africa should jointly fight back against the discourse hegemony and ideological attacks from Western countries. In respect to the influence and effects of China-Africa cooperation on Africa’s development, no one knows better than the African countries themselves. For many years, surveys conducted by both Western and African institutions have shown a positive China image in Africa’s mainstream opinion.²³ Governments, media and scholars of China and African countries should make joint efforts to introduce a comprehensive and real story of China-Africa cooperation to the rest of the world. While the two sides are open to constructive criticisms from external countries, they should resolutely fight back against those groundless accusations. In the meantime, it is noticeable that more and more Western scholars, observers and media have come to recognize China’s positive contributions to Africa’s development.

Last, China and Africa should try to reduce and avoid misunderstanding and prejudice between each other through more intensive people-to-people exchanges. It should be recognized that despite decades of development in bilateral relations, both Chinese and African people still lack enough understanding and knowledge about the national and social situation of the other side, making misunderstanding and cognitive prejudice sometimes inevitable. The FOCAC has taken measures to intensify the understanding between peoples, but there remains much to be done. Amity between people holds the key to sound relations between states. The achievements and quality of China-Africa cooperation would be seriously discounted without full understanding, support and cooperation from the public. 🌐

22 Liu Min and Liu Yanbo, “Effects, Challenges and Solutions of Zambia Agricultural Products Processing Cooperation Zone”, in *Report of African Development (2016-2017): African Industrialization and Chinese Construction of African Industrial Parks*, p.110.

23 Li Anshan, “Outlook of 2018 FOCAC Summit: Advantages and Challenges,” *The Contemporary World*, No.7, 2018, p.21.