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## The Sustainable Development of Sino-African Cooperation: Actors, Gaps and Reforms

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Relations between Africa and China have experienced an extremely fast-growing period since the beginning of this century, and such speed is quite rare in history. As for the unique close political ties, it has been a 22 year-long tradition, until 2012, that the Chinese Foreign Minister always makes his first official visit to Africa at the beginning of each year.<sup>1</sup>

What's more, booming economic ties are even labeled by some observers as “Africa's Silk Road”.<sup>2</sup> Already Africa's single biggest trading partner, China is set to become the continent's largest export destination in 2012, according to South African based Standard Bank.<sup>3</sup>

At the summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2006,<sup>4</sup> parties on both sides proclaimed “the establishment of a new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges” at the The FOCAC (the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) is held every three years since it was founded in 2000. Outside praise and criticism of FOCAC are intertwined. Upon each summit, Beijing issues its new Africa policy principles and a 3-year Action Plan in detail. Being a multilateral policy platform, FOCAC, together with Beijing's existing bilateral relations with Africa nations, enriches Beijing's Africa policy instruments and plays a key coordinating role in China's grand Africa policy. In the near future ( July ) , the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of FOCAC is to be held in Beijing. An on-time evaluation of FOCAC's past, as well as an outline of its future blueprint is essential

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To start my analysis, I believe that two issues are essential. Firstly, there is the issue of the needs and challenges of Africa. It is very often that China and Africa face similar challenges; This has served as a solid basis of mutual cooperation. The second issue is to what extent China and Africa can help each other within the framework of FOCAC under the background that some actors of China and Africa are not yet to meet the growing expectations and demands of China-Africa relations. In the following analysis, I would point out the issue of *Capacity Gap* produced by insufficient actors.

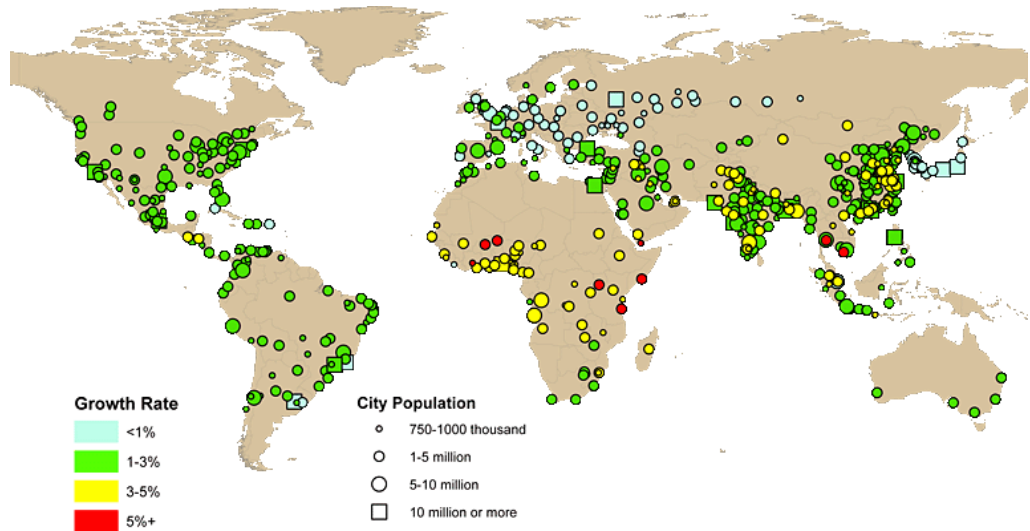
### The needs and challenges of Africa

There have been quite a lot of discussions about the problems, challenges and potentials of Africa continent, I do not want to repeat those statements again here. But I think one relatively new issue is worthy of our special attention, that is Africa's fast population growth and urbanization process.

According to the 2011 Revision of the *World Urbanization Prospects*, Africa's urban population will soar from today's 414 million to over 1.2 billion; in Asia the dramatic increase will be from 1.9 billion to 3.3 billion over the next four decades. India, China, Nigeria, the United States and Indonesia are estimated to have the largest increases

in urban population, the UN report says. The estimated increase in urban population of Nigeria between 2012 and 2050 will be higher than that of the past 40 years.<sup>5</sup> Over the past decade six of the world's ten fastest-growing countries were African. In eight of the past ten years, Africa has grown faster than East Asia, including Japan. Even allowing for the knock-on effect of the northern hemisphere's slowdown, the IMF expects Africa to grow by 6% this year and nearly 6% in 2012, about the same as Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Graph 1: Growth rates of urban agglomerations, 2011-2025



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: *World Urbanization Prospects, the 2011 Revision*. New York 2012.

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Meanwhile, tough challenges facing Africa remain. The past East African and ongoing Sahel drought have shown how weak and un-sustainable these affected African states are when they face natural disasters. The aid system of the international community is also flawed in coping with such crises in time.<sup>7</sup> Besides food security, climate change, regional conflicts etc., all these traditional and non-traditional threats demand the efforts of Africa and other nations including China.

A report on FOCAC, published by Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) in 2008, argues that the success of the Beijing Olympics and Beijing Para-Olympics have boosted China's position in international politics in three respects. The developing countries cherish a 'great power expectation'. The developed countries have increased 'the great power demand' over China as well. The 'great power responsibility' is growing even within China at elite and popular levels.<sup>8</sup> The World Expo 2010 Shanghai will strengthen and consolidate China's international position further. The international community will accept the fact of a rising China to a larger extent. Thereby, the African countries should have higher expectations in terms of China's impact upon them. The expectation will be reinforced once the commitments made at the Beijing FOCAC Summit are delivered in time, or even ahead of time and over-fulfilled.

## China's Challenges: Capacity Gap

This prediction has come true after 4 years, not to mention that the ongoing global financial crisis has *de facto* upgraded Beijing's global position and African countries' expectations towards China. China has become the No.2 economic power in the world in terms of GDP. "Made in China" is ubiquitous around the world. The number of Chinese businessmen and companies within Africa is rising.

Frankly speaking, the non-state actors of Africa and China are still not strong enough to carry out effective mutual cooperation. There is still a long road ahead. Meanwhile, the diversification of international and domestic actors and their related interests in Africa will form a certain level of pressure on the development of the Forum. Internationally, various countries are paying more and more attention to Africa. Traditional powers and newly rising powers have either strengthened or created new platforms in their dealings with Africa. Additionally, international organizations, non-government actors like NGOs and transnational corporations are increasingly taking notice of Africa. They usually focus on particular problems and have significant potential to initiate new international agendas. Thus, they can create more pressure on the behaviors of national actors and international organizations.<sup>9</sup> But up to now, Beijing is still relatively weak in these sectors; a "**Capacity Gap**" exists.

### a) NGOs

For example, it is pointed out that as for NGOs, "the Africans were watching, the Asians listening, the Latin Americans talking while the North Americans and Europeans were doing business."<sup>10</sup> Until 2011, China has 462 thousand officially recognized NGOs. But almost all of them have little experience or history in effective international cooperation with foreign counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

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That is no strange that although Beijing has sent one high-level NGO delegation to Nairobi to host the first China-Africa People's Forum , the conference is successful to have had a good beginning but hard to have a deeper enough cooperation yet, I think. Since when I do research on the conference output, I discover that African NGOs fail to establish a kind of effective partnership with Chinese ones. African NGOs asked to get direct financial support from their Chinese counterparts, however Chinese NGOs face their own budget limits, making it hard to meet African demands.<sup>12</sup>

### b) Media

Traditionally, the mark of a great power was its ability to prevail in war. But in an information age, success depends not just on whose army wins but also on whose story wins.<sup>13</sup> Although Beijing has invested huge resources on its public diplomacy and soft power programmes in order to improve its global image, the mainstream global media is still located in London, Paris and New York rather than in Beijing or Shanghai. That is to say, the western media enjoys the un-challenged privilege to judge China – Africa relations from their perspectives and interests. Now fruitful cooperation between Beijing and Africa has been the HIGHLIGHT to each side, but it has also been a HOTSPOT of criticism in terms of contemporary Sino-African ties.<sup>14</sup>

The fast-growing Sino-African relationship has, however, not been without

controversy, and China regularly finds itself the subject of allegations that it undermines human rights and governance in its dealings with African governments.<sup>15</sup> “This world is far from a balanced one. Some have megaphones, some only small microphones and some none.” Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi says.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Lu Shaye, Director-General of Department of African Affairs of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs points out that around 80% of international news resources are from the western media, which often contain biases<sup>17</sup>

It is pointed out that China has ventured into Africa as a friend. This has forced the West, to sit up because it knows that it could now “lose the continent”. Demonizing China is now the main goal of Western propaganda. The West is promoting its own politico-economic system as the only one possible in the world.<sup>18</sup>

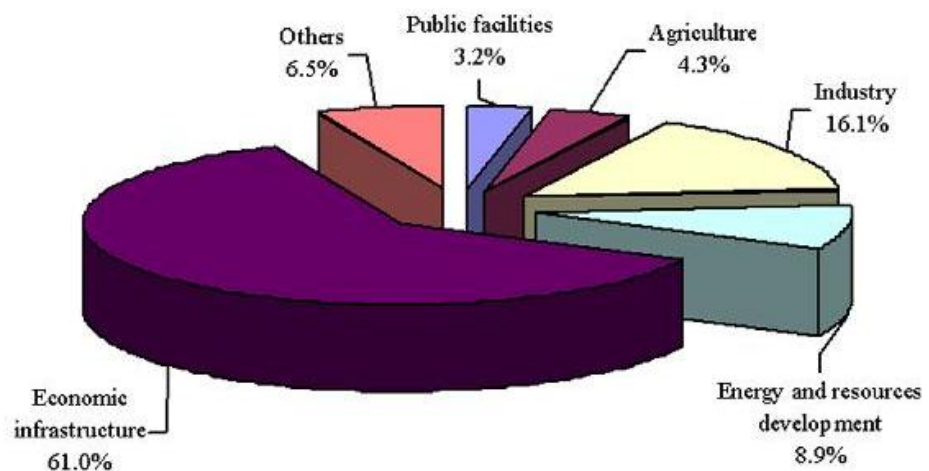
### C) China’s construction companies in Africa

A bit different from the above two sectors, China is good at infrastructure. In the past, the Tanzania – Zambia railway serves as the symbol of China-Africa friendship. Until 2011, China has helped Africa with building more than 2000 km railway and 3000 km road.<sup>19</sup> But due to the internal changes of China, its advantage is also facing challenges.

❗ *Up to now, Chinese assistance to Africa manifests itself predominantly in the form of infrastructure.* ❗

Up to now, Chinese assistance to Africa manifests itself predominantly in the form of infrastructure. This means that Chinese enterprises have been the main actor of the Chinese assistance to Africa. China has also begun making its mark as an emerging donor. In January a new \$200m African Union headquarters was commissioned in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Funded entirely by China, the opening ceremony was attended by Jia Qingling, the country’s most senior political adviser, who told those in attendance that “the towering complex speaks volumes about our friendship to the African people, and testifies to our strong resolve to support African development.”<sup>20</sup>

**Graph 2: Sectoral distribution of concessional Loans from China**



**Source and Note:**

- (1) White paper: China’s foreign aid (April 2011).
- (2) The Chinese data here is by the end of 2009, according to a white paper on China’s foreign

aid issued by China's Information Office of the State Council on April 21, 2011.

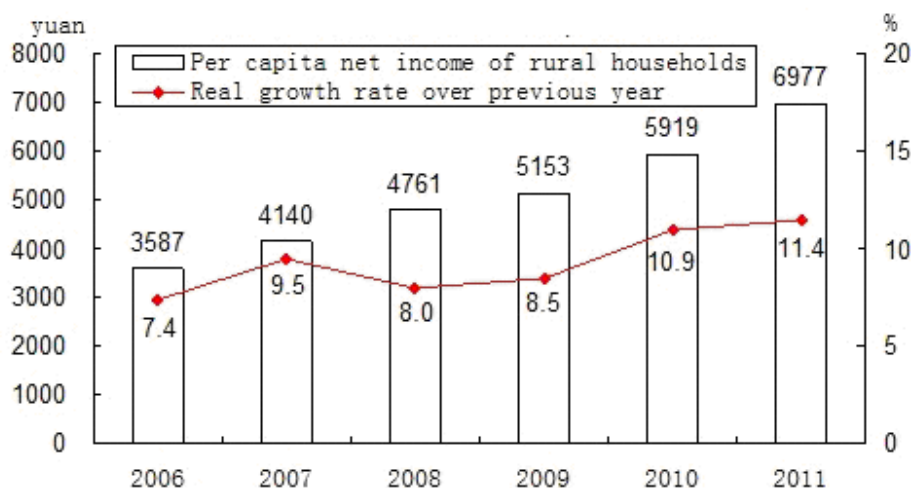
During the Chairman MAO era, Chinese enterprises did not need to worry about economic issues; the whole Chinese economic system was planned. Such non-benefit driven features of Chinese enterprises have been matched quite well with the high politics profile of Chinese ODA to Africa. But entering the 1980s, due to the open and reform policy, more and more Chinese enterprises transformed into being more and more independent economic units within the market economy. That is to say, the economic face is rising while the political face is declining.

According to one JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization)'s comparative research, Japanese construction companies have suffered from high cost disadvantage, compared to Chinese companies. The annual salary of a Chinese engineer is just 14% of a Japanese engineer.<sup>21</sup> But such low cost advantage is now declining. Due to the fast economic growth of China, the income level is also rising fast. In 2011, the annual per capita net income of rural households was 6,977 Yuan, up by 17.9 percent, or a real increase of 11.4 percent over the previous year when the factors of price increase were deducted.<sup>22</sup> And China's underdeveloped inland areas have also been on the fast track, which have offered more jobs to young peasant workers. All these factors make overseas work, especially in a poor and risky continent like Africa, non-desirable.

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**Graph 3: Per Capita Net Income of Rural Households and the Real Growth Rates, 2006-2011**



**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics of China, *Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2011 National Economic and Social Development* (February 22, 2012).

### Policy Recommendations

Regarding the above mentioned flaws, lessons and progress that China has made in the past decades, several practical reforms should be enacted in the following areas.

**a) Think for Africa and BEYOND Africa (From 'A' to 'A')**

The history of the kind of multi-dimensional cooperation witnessed in FOCAC engagements since 2000, is relatively short. In order to outline a better future, we need to draw lessons and experience not only from the history of China-Africa relations, but also from other research beyond China-Africa relations. For example, China has promised to play more positively in promoting the regional integration process of Africa. China could borrow lessons from China's regional cooperation with its neighboring Asian countries. China's Asian regional cooperation has a lengthier history than regional cooperation with Africa.

China, facing the positive problem of being a capital surplus economy, is diverting more funds to assist with the development of Asian infrastructure, and is in high level talks with several countries to provide funds and loans for high-speed rail and related projects across the region. China and Thailand are set to agree on a plan to build high-speed rail lines that will pass from Southern China through Laos to Thailand, and then to the border of Malaysia. In 2010, the Thai Parliament approved the deal in a project likely to cost some US\$27 billion. But some ASEAN countries are afraid that such projects might *de facto* divide ASEAN into two blocs, which are the pro-Beijing ASEAN land bloc (including Laos, Thailand etc) and the pro-Washington ASEAN sea bloc (including Singapore, Philippines etc). The possible internal split would surely be bad for the integration process of ASEAN in their eyes.<sup>23</sup>

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Such kinds of un-intended double-edge effect of China's foreign policy can cause potential problems not only in Asia, but also in Africa. Some Africans have worried that Beijing's favorable policies towards LDCs may foster dependence upon Beijing instead of cooperating with their neighbors to promote Africa's regional integration.<sup>24</sup> That is to say, due to the larger scale and scope of China-Africa cooperation, the relevant research needs to be more comprehensive, multi-dimensioned, far-sighted. Only after that, both Africa and China will be able to manage these never-met-before circumstances more adequately.

**b) Internal reforms of both sides are quite essential.**

A nation's policy is based on its material capacity or hard power. But it is not a voluntary process. Without the relevant domestic policy consensus or willingness, any good ideas would still be on paper instead of carried out through action. Additionally China's own capabilities are still limited, that's why Beijing still prefers to keep a low profile in terms of facing higher external demands, including offering more aid. Facing this financial crisis, more and more developed and developing countries are arguing via different channels that Beijing is able to - and should do more - to fight against this crisis, hand in hand with others in the world. But Beijing still keeps a low profile and its reply is conservative.<sup>25</sup> Before the G20 London Summit, Beijing repeatedly insisted that what China should and could do is to keep its house in order.<sup>26</sup>

As analysed above, there are quite a lot of obstacles preventing engagement. Some Chinese businessmen in Africa complain about the low efficiency of their African counterparts and governments. Africa needs to do something to facilitate inward investments (not only towards Chinese FDI). Some Beijing regulations also need to be upgraded, such as its aid policy and immigration policy.



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Not to mention that these kinds of reforms are mainly not in the charge of Foreign Ministry. But they have had negative impact on our diplomatic ties. I believe that one top-down reform approach are needed to push such kind of reforms step by step.

### c) TWO Scientific Approaches

The mutual development cooperation of China and Africa in the field of natural science (in the form of R&D) would help Africa with the production or even export of more technology-intensive products ("Made in Africa"). Or Africa would continue to worry or even complain to be just the resource supplier to China. For example, "Africa must not jump blindly from one type of neo-colonialism into Chinese-style neo-colonialism," cautioned Rene N'Guetta Kouassi, the head of the African Union's economic affairs department.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1: Top Thirty International Development Think Tanks**

1. Brookings Institution – <i>United States</i>
2. Center for Global Development – <i>United States</i>
3. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) – <i>United Kingdom</i>
4. Harvard Center for International Development – <i>United States</i>
5. German Development Institute, Deutsches Institut fuer Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) – <i>Germany</i>
6. United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) – <i>Finland</i>
7. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars – <i>United States</i>
8. Institute of Development Studies – <i>United Kingdom</i>
9. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) – <i>United Kingdom</i>
10. Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) – <i>Germany</i>
11. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) – <i>United States</i>
12. Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) – <i>Germany</i>
13. Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) – <i>Brazil</i>
14. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) – <i>United States</i>
15. Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) – <i>Denmark</i>
16. International Development Research Center – <i>Canada</i>
17. Cato Institute: Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity – <i>United States</i>
18. North-South Institute – <i>Canada</i>
19. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs – <i>Norway</i>
20. Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) – <i>Canada</i>
21. Center for Development and the Environment – <i>Norway</i>
22. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) – <i>Canada</i>
23. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) – <i>China</i>
24. Center for Development Alternatives – <i>India</i>
25. Atlas Economic Research Foundation – <i>United States</i>
26. South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) – <i>South Africa</i>

**Source:** James G. McGann, *The Global GO-TO THINK TANKS REPORT 2011 - The Leading Public Policy Research Organizations In The World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 19 January 2012) .

■ **The mutual development cooperation of China and Africa in the field of natural science would help Africa with the production or even export of more technology-intensive products.** ■

The intellectual support in the field of social science from both Africa and China is quite essential to our policymakers, businessmen etc. David M-Lampton , a leading American scholar on Chinese studies, argues that Chinese power has three faces. They are might, money and minds.<sup>28</sup> When we look back in history, we find fruitful examples indicating how important intellectual contributions can be, e.g. Adam Smith to the rise of Great Britain, Karl Marx to the founding of Soviet Union. According to one recent worldwide research project most think- tanks are located in developed countries and the best ones are almost all in the western countries. For instance, out of the Top Thirty international development think tanks, the top 22 are either from North America (America and Canada) or Europe (France, UK etc.). Only the 23<sup>rd</sup> one

is from China.<sup>29</sup> The existing underdevelopment situation of the academies of Africa and China are not ideal yet, not able to meet the needs from governments, companies etc.

### Conclusion: Win-Win or Weak-Weak Cooperation?

Jean Pierre Onvehoun Ezin, the African Union's (AU) Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, states that "Europe is the partner we know best and who knows us best, but we want more effective cooperation."<sup>30</sup> What he said is mostly true, one reason is that both China and Africa are still weak in terms of non-state actors, not to mention very frequent and fruitful exchanges and cooperation pushed by non-state actors. In fact, in today's globalized world, bilateral relation is pushed not only by governments, but also by foundations, transnational companies (TNCs), think tanks etc.

It has been a consensus that both China and Africa are trying to establish a new type of China-Africa Strategic Partnership, the core feature being win-win cooperation. For instance, in Chinese premier WEN Jiabao's speech at the 4th Ministerial Conference on the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation, "win-win progress" and "win-win cooperation" are mentioned more than once.<sup>31</sup> But we also have to admit that in quite a lot of areas, the actors within the Africa-China relationship are weak, that is to say, the relevant cooperation has to be taken on the basis of a **weak-weak** partnership. Such conditions surely produce the question of insufficient dynamics and unsustainable development.

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In conclusion, on the road to sustainable development of China-Africa relations, both sides are facing the challenge of a capacity gap. Prof. David Shambaugh, who is Professor at the George Washington University and is recognized internationally as an authority on contemporary Chinese affairs, points out that despite its fast growth, China's influence is globally broad but not deep enough yet.<sup>32</sup> Both Africa and China need to do a lot more to cultivate more powerful non-state actors to increase the dynamics of our cooperation.

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