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TAMING THE DRAGON?

DEFINING AFRICA'S INTERESTS AT THE FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA CO-OPERATION (FOCAC)

Policy Advisory Group Seminar Report

Co-organised by the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa, and the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), Midrand, South Africa

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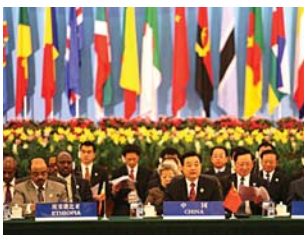
Introduction

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa, and the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), Midrand, South Africa, co-hosted a policy advisory group meeting in Tshwane (Pretoria) on 13 and 14 July 2009 on the theme, “Taming the Dragon? Defining Africa’s Interests at the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC)”. FOCAC has held three summits between 2000 and 2006. The fourth summit will be held in Egypt in November 2009.

The policy seminar examined systematically how Africa’s 53 states define and articulate their geo-strategic interests and policies for engaging China within FOCAC. Beijing has a structured long-term view of engaging Africa at FOCAC, but Africa is yet to develop a coherent multilateral response. The policy advisory group meeting sought to encourage African governments to adopt nationally, regionally and continentally appropriate policies, strategies, and responses to engaging China more effectively, in order to ensure “win-win” outcomes for the continent in this partnership. The advisory group focused on four key spheres of FOCAC: political relations; economic co-operation; international affairs; and social development, as well as on broader issues of Sino/African relations.

1. China in the Context of Current Global Dynamics

China is already an increasingly influential actor in future international relations, as its economy and geo-political interests continue to expand. African countries will continue to be important to Beijing, as China’s phenomenal economic growth is likely to increase its demand for Africa’s strategic resources, notwithstanding the global financial crisis of 2008/2009. Beijing is also increasingly adopting a more assertive and aggressive foreign policy befitting its rapid socio-economic development and rising power status as the world’s third largest economy after the United States and Japan. China’s rising international activism is accompanied by its preoccupation with domestic economic development and political stability. China ranks its foreign policy priorities in the order of, first, major powers; second, “periphery countries”; and, third, developing countries, including Africa.



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2ND CONFERENCE OF CHINESE AND AFRICAN ENTREPRENEURS, BEIJING, CHINA, 2006.
Image source - XINHUA PHOTO

2. FOCAC Action Plan 2007-2009: Economic Co-operation

China’s economic engagement with Africa is shaped by Beijing’s appetite for Africa’s resources, and disproportionately focuses on extractive industries compared to secondary and tertiary sectors. Beijing, has, in a short decade, become Africa’s third largest trading partner after Europe and the US. The lop-sided Sino-African trade relationship could, however, be made more mutually beneficial since China offers funds, technology, and infrastructure to facilitate Africa’s development. The growth trajectories of the Chinese and African economies are intertwined. Trade with China has also integrated Africa more closely into the global economy and China’s concessional

capital deployment model – directed by the state rather than by private banks – could provide lessons for Africa. Beijing has also set up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Mauritius, Nigeria, and Zambia which could promote economic integration and development in Africa.

3. FOCAC Action Plan 2007-2009: Political Relations

Since the inception of FOCAC in 2000, China has set out to improve political relations with Africa both institutionally through official forums; and bilaterally, through political exchange programmes and enlarged embassy infrastructure. This strategy is aimed at propagating Beijing's message of mutual benefit and equality; creating opportunities for Chinese firms in Africa; and gaining African support for the "one China" policy. Bilateral diplomacy remains dominant in Sino-African political relations. But China's political relationship with Africa is paradoxical in that, while premised on the principle of non-interference in domestic African politics, Beijing is increasingly involved in African internal issues in countries such as Sudan and Zambia as a result of its deepening engagement in Africa.

4. FOCAC Action Plan 2007-2009: International Affairs

Sino-Africa co-operation is important in supporting calls for the reform of the international system. The global financial crisis has created the space for Africa and China to challenge the prevailing international economic order symbolised by the unequal relations in the three Western-dominated international financial institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In terms of future UN reform, a reconstituted 15-member United Nations Security Council with permanent African representation would provide the continent with greater leverage to ensure that Africa's security interests are taken more seriously. Both Africa and China have an interest in improving the UN's effectiveness in the areas of peacekeeping, human rights, and socio-economic development. The West, however, remains politically and economically important to Beijing and, as China develops into a superpower, its interests could converge more with the West's at the UN and international financial institutions, and diverge more with Africa's and the developing world.



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DRILLING PLATFORM OPERATION, A
PETROLEUM PROJECT IN SUDAN.
Image source - www.fmprc.gov.cn

5. FOCAC Action Plan 2007-2009: Social Development

On the surface, the indications are that China is on track to meet its Action Plan pledges in the area of social development. This, however, is based on limited reporting of implementation, with most of the statistics contained in a May 2008 report from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two obstacles could inhibit the implementation of these pledges: an underestimation of the challenges in Beijing and Africa; and a lack of adequate research and knowledge about these African projects within China. Concern has been

raised that the global financial crisis will exacerbate the challenges of implementation and limit further pledges, though Beijing has pledged not to reduce aid to, and investment in, Africa. Despite calls by African civil society for greater transparency and the establishment of quantitative targets, access to detailed information on the progress of FOCAC commitments is not readily available. In addition, these projects have focused on the physical construction of infrastructure, while trying to match this emphasis with providing value added to the social services of African countries.

6. FOCAC, China, and the West in Africa

The relationship between Africa, China, and powerful actors in the West, such as the US and European powers, is complex. The West's initial panic and hysteria over Beijing's growing interests in Africa has, more recently, developed into a more rational assessment. Certainly, many of the West's investments and business partnerships have not been undermined by China's engagement with Africa. There has, however, been resistance in Africa and Beijing to the formalisation of areas of convergence between China and the West into a trilateral dialogue (Africa-China-European Union), with the West excluded from having a significant presence in FOCAC. There has been a growing recognition in the West that Beijing may have a contribution to make towards meeting Africa's development challenges. China has, for example, provided infrastructure support to Africa that Western countries and Western-dominated financial institutions were reluctant to provide.

Policy Recommendations

The policy advisory group proposed ten actionable policy recommendations for enhancing Sino-African relations through FOCAC that should guide discussions in Egypt in November 2009.

1. Economic co-operation

- First, African countries should ensure that China observes proper labour and safety standards. African, and not Chinese, labour and professionals should be used where possible, and China must be sensitive to concerns regarding the undermining of Africa's industrial base, particularly in the textile sector;
- Second, Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Southern African Development Community (SADC); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the East African Community (EAC); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) must determine constructive forms of regional economic engagements with China through FOCAC that promote economic integration and development. The Special Economic Zones being set up by China must also be used more effectively to promote economic integration and development in Africa;



"China has provided infrastructure support to Africa that Western countries and Western-dominated financial institutions were reluctant to provide."

LARGE-SCALE CISTERN, CHINA-ZAMBIA
FRIENDSHIP FARM.
Image source - www.fmprc.gov.cn

2. Political Affairs

- Third, the African Union (AU) should consider establishing a formal and institutionalised political mechanism for enhanced dialogue and interaction with China through FOCAC. This may include the need to set up a dedicated African secretariat to engage China's FOCAC secretariat in Beijing. The AU and Africa's RECs could play a significant role in co-ordinating Africa's response to China. Beijing should also send a representative to the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, as the US and the EU have done;
- Fourth, Africa must, through its diplomatic community in Beijing, forge a common position in the continent's engagement with China's FOCAC Secretariat. Africa also needs to use its rotating position as co-implementing Chair of FOCAC – currently held by Egypt – to co-ordinate African governments more effectively in Beijing as well as in African capitals;

3. International Affairs

- Fifth, African governments must improve the quality of their representation at the UN, as well as pressuring China, as one of the five veto-wielding permanent members of the powerful 15-member UN Security Council, to ensure that UN Security Council expansion includes two additional African permanent members and more effective international peacekeeping;
- Sixth, China should work with its African allies to strengthen the representation of the global South in economic institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, to ensure the annulment of Africa's \$290 billion external debt and to ensure fairer trade for Africa;

4. Social Development

- Seventh, in the area of social development, African governments should second representatives from its RECs and the AU to serve on China's Implementation and Follow-up Committees for FOCAC, while a mechanism to assess implementation on a sectoral basis (environment, labour, education, and media) should also be developed;
- Eighth, FOCAC should promote people-to-people relations, with African and Chinese civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that should be incorporated into FOCAC processes, and a business forum should also be developed as part of FOCAC;



“China should also not be allowed to condone autocratic misrule or sell arms to tyrants while trading profitably in Africa.”

CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 2ND
CONFERENCE OF CHINESE AND AFRICAN
ENTREPRENEURS, BEIJING, CHINA, 2006.
Image source - www.fmpc.goc.cn

5. FOCAC, China and the West in Africa

- Ninth, any China-US or EU-China summit that includes discussion on Africa should have an African input through the African Union; and
- Finally, African governments and their allies, while noting the double standards of the US and some of its allies on human rights issues, must not allow Beijing to mobilise African support in the UN Human Rights Council to condone egregious human rights abuses around the globe. China should also not be allowed to condone autocratic misrule or sell arms to tyrants while trading profitably in Africa.