

China's Engagement and Africa Beyond Aid

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Abstract

In the current interdependent globalized world, inter-polity engagements are anticipated to unleash and empower economic development. To a larger extent, this, however, could be said not to be the case as evidenced in the African context where relations with the developed world have triggered dependence on foreign aid as a conduit to pursue and gratify vital development needs. Contemporaneously, China's intensive forays and engagement in Africa since the turn of the twenty-first century has been one characterized by irresistible development assistance to the latter. This situation has ensuingly excited agitations, cardinal among which borders on the claim about the potential deadweight and stymying effect of foreign aid on Africa's growth and development – thereby adding more odium to the discourse on the call for an 'Africa beyond aid' – currently a bourgeoning research sphere. To this end, the objective of this article is to explore how the Chinese aid engagement could relate to the Ghanaian leadership's clarion call for Africa's development beyond aid. Consequently, the study employed qualitative data and analysis to interrogate the Chinese aid policies towards Africa, as well as projects implemented across the continent. The findings show that gauging from the policy perspective, much as Chinese aid tends to be well suited to the 'Africa beyond aid agenda', it nonetheless exhibits some disquieting implementation features that could impede in the long term, Africa's development beyond aid. This unappealing situation makes it imperatively urgent for Africa to understand, and strategically align with China's aid - with recourse to the vision of Africa beyond aid.

Keywords: *Africa, China, Foreign Aid, Development, Developing Countries*

Introduction

The irresistibly baiting composition and demand for aid are such that less developed countries are more likely to be dependent on aid. Therefore, it occasions little surprise that a larger proportion of aid-dependent countries are mostly of African extraction. Although certain scholarly views such as those of Burnside and Dollar (1998), Loxley and Sackey (2008) admit that, under the right circumstances, aid could be used for promoting economic growth, poverty alleviation, and development, there is sufficient evidence suggesting that donors provide aid with disconcerting political motives. With foreign aid creeping deep into the foreign policy

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prospect arena of developed countries, the norm of conditional relations between donors and recipients has sharply been shot into prominence (Morgenthau, 1962).

Consequently, most African countries, particularly those south of the Sahara, regrettably appear incapable of shaking off such dependency shackles of aid. Metaphorically, the relationship between Africa and aid could be akin to a servant-master – within an environment where the formers' dependence on the latter remains not only dignified but also a blessed evil - until the servant asserts self-sufficiency. Implicitly, this is to say, developing countries in Africa are found between the 'devil' and the 'deep blue sea'; they continue accepting aid with the presumed donor motives, or they reject aid and miss out on the economic gaps that it could fill. Be that as it may, the possible viable option has to be exploited for Africa's development.

Over the years, studies such as those of Moyo (2009) and Edwards (2004) have delved into Africa's economic and aid dependency to examine the intricacies of the dilemma that Africa might have found itself. Such research efforts exploring aid and underdevelopment nexus, have offered possible approaches that could help the continent emerge out of its developmental abyss. This arena of discussion has become rather interesting with the rising influence of China, not only as a major contender in international power politics, but also, viewed as the country with the capabilities of challenging the dominant status quo of the United States.

Consequently, studies are copiously promulgated, generically comparing the determining factors of especially Western aid financing and that of the emerging powers, particularly China, to establish whether there is a new form of a scramble for Africa with the two superpowers at the helm of affairs (King, 2013; Landry, 2018). In the face of the intellectual excitement generated thereof, it is nonetheless still hazy whether the dearth of radical reforms for Africa's economic independence arises from the ingenuity of African leadership, the interference of the foreign powers or both. With literature and policy evolving around how to manage China-Africa relations, vis-à-vis the correlations with the West, a more recent call has emerged for an Africa beyond aid.

This call encourages Africans to initiate drastic, but yielding steps for the development trajectory that would not be influenced by priorities set by the donor countries (Pilling, 2018; Gatune, 2010; Government of Ghana, 2018a). Still and all, the solicitation so far appears to be a sort of surface dressing rhetoric, insufficiently endorsed by policy guidance that could lighten

Africa's path in dealing with either China or the West. "Africa beyond aid", as it stands, tends to be a rejuvenated old vision defective of a particular consensus and framework to generate the desired outcome.

Although a vast array of literature, (Alden & Large, 2019; Brown & Harman, 2013; Alden *et al.*, 2008), have sought to address Africa's contemporary relations with China, including development financing, discussions about Africa's development beyond aid are yet to adequately attract modern academic attention to enhance research and policy. Against this backdrop, in addition to exploring Africa beyond aid amidst increasing volumes of Chinese aid to Africa, this article sets out to explore how the vision could be accomplished, if indeed it is achievable, for Africa's development against China's debatable aid policies and practices.

Material and Methods

The study used the qualitative method for both the data collection and analysis of results. That preference in the view of the researcher is paramount to investigate the research theme for more rigorous results from the disciplinary and the analytical perspectives. More so, it is in line with the methodology employed by other prominent works such as Asante (2018), Brautigam *et al.* (2018), and Cabestan (2020), which also examined Sino-African relations with aspects on aid and Africa's development. The study analyzed information from primary and secondary sources collected through government official websites, online databases, libraries, journals, and news portals. Furthermore, the researcher from 2019-2020 made other field contacts and engagements mostly in Ghana, which through semi-structured interviews and discussions solicited views and opinions from civil society, scholars, and government officials, as well as some observations from projects, programs, and institutions. In addition, the researcher also makes a field visit to the University Confucius Institute Centers, University of Ghana, and University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in July 2019.

The study investigated the Chinese aid as development cooperation, theoretically exploring how it could be situated as a responsible donor partner for Africa through the forms of implementation projects and programs. The composition demonstrates how China's aid policies and project impacts could be examined and interpreted against the possibilities of achieving Africa beyond the aid agenda. This would help devise countervailing measures for positive outcomes from China's rapidly expanding influence in Africa. Among other things, the study is expected to contribute not only towards policymaking around Africa and aid but also, to

discourses on how aid, especially from China, could be used as development cooperation for the sustainable development of Africa.

Key Informant Interviewees

S. No.	Key Informants	Number
1.	Hospital Official from the China-Africa Friendship (Lekma) Hospital, Ghana	1
2.	Senior Official of the Institute for Liberty and Policy Innovation (ILAPI), Ghana	1
3.	Senior Official of the Ministry of Finance, Ghana	1
4.	Policy Analyst and a contributor to the Ghana Beyond Aid Charter and Strategic Document	1
5.	Professor and an Associate Director of a China-Africa Research Institute in the U.S.	1

Aid and Policy Determinants of China's Aid to Africa

Foreign aid is the voluntary transfer of goods, services, capital, and other resources from a country or an international agency to another country, varying in forms depending on the needs of the recipient country (Williams, 2020). Aid is administered as loans, grants, gifts, or donations intended for specific developmental needs. Accordingly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which comprises the largest aid providers, weaved the term official development assistance (ODA), as the technical definition for foreign aid. In that respect, ODA is the flow of resources from a donor country, through officially recognized agencies or multi-laterals to promote development by targeting the economic growth and the welfare in the developing countries. Essentially, aid is directed to social and infrastructure services; economic infrastructure; humanitarian activities and emergency support; general funds for budgetary support; and multi-sector assistance funding (OECD, Website).

Despite that widely acknowledged definition, for a comprehensive analysis, especially concerning China, aid should not be limited to ODA for some pertinent reasons. First, ODA is a narrow definition of aid, in that, it excludes certain provisions, and at the same time restricts the spending mechanism. For instance, in the case of China, it includes military equipment, which is provided as gifts or sales with concessional rates as part of foreign aid, but the OECD

specifically excludes such military aid and antiterrorism-related assistance (Apodaca, 2017). Again, while China accounts for its peacekeeping operations as aid, the OECD excludes most aspects of peacekeeping in line with being considered as military costs (OECD, Website). China for the most recent years has provided military grants to countries such as Cambodia and Syria, military equipment and infrastructure to African countries including Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Djibouti, as well as peacekeeping and military humanitarian interventions in countries like Sudan and Mali. That does not imply that the Western donors avoid military aid, but they do not report those as aid defined in terms of ODA. Likewise, the expansive definition of Chinese aid is indicative in the fact that it is technically an integral component of other preferential financings like export buyers credit, subsidized loans for joint ventures, and the construction of huge infrastructure like sporting facilities (Carter, 2017).

Second, the parameters for identifying an aid as ODA tend to have not been lucidly settled, as it recurrently undergoes modifications over the years. This is reflected in the OECD's report explaining changes that were considered and approved to be effected subsequently. Indeed, from 2019 as the base year, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD has further introduced a new reporting mechanism termed as "the grant equivalent system" (OECD, 2018), being an example of the inconsistency with technicalities. Last, although the OECD countries collectively contribute the highest percentage of foreign aid, other countries outside the organization provide a significant amount of aid in varied forms. An official report affirms that in the year 2013 for instance, the Non-OECD donors contributed a total of \$ 23.5 billion being more than 13% of the overall global total (OECD, 2015).

Among the non-OECD donors, China by far stands tall in aid to the developing countries. China's foreign aid had sprung from \$630 million in 2003 to about \$3 billion in 2015, a whooping average growth rate of 14% (Landry, 2018). Across the years 2010 to 2012 as an example, an aggregate of \$14.4 billion was appropriated worldwide, consisting of 36.2% grants, 8.1% interest-free loans, and 55.5% concessional loans (State Council, 2014). Furthermore, China is ranked among the ten largest aid providers, with a substantial percentage of sub-Saharan Africa than any of the other regions (Carter, 2017). That is quite graspable since Africa arguably is the most underdeveloped region and comprises the majority of developing countries with development needs that foreign aid by design is intended to address. Besides, other economic and political interests of China could be more fruitful by courting the African

countries possessing manifold untapped natural resources and being the largest state caucus on the United Nations. Consequently, about 45% of China's worldwide aid financing is expended in Africa, reaching each country on the continent. Statistically supported, seven out of the 21st century top 10 Chinese aid recipients are African countries with amounts through 2000-2014 ranging between \$4.0 billion for Ivory Coast, \$3.7 billion for Ethiopia, and \$2.5 billion for Ghana (AidData, Website).

The penetration of Chinese aid into Africa is propelled by its own peculiarities, setting it apart from that of the Western countries in certain ways. Just like the ODA, China's foreign aid includes grants, interest-free or concessional loans but unlike the ODA, excludes donor's administrative cost. Furthermore, China aid is presented in eight unique forms: infrastructure projects, goods and materials, debt relief on interest-free loans, volunteering activities, medical support team, emergency humanitarian assistance, technical cooperation, and human resource development (Carter, 2017; State Council, 2014). Across the broader orientation, China has administered aid to Africa in an array of sectors suchlike education, agriculture, health, communication, energy, and transportation. In all those, infrastructural projects have taken the chunk with over 900 projects across the continent, most of which were constructed in the 21st century. The funding is a mixed financial arrangement consisting of aid, preferential loans commercial loans, and direct investments (Sun, 2014).

The Chinese financial assistance especially to Africa falls under the category of development finance more than a stand-alone aid. For the most part, cash would not be handed out to the recipient country but channeled through normally the Exim Bank and the Ministry of Commerce to finance the intended projects through material supply, labor, and other deliveries. China's developmental finance is broader in coverage as it presents a "combination of official development aid and other official financings" (Lakatos *et al.*, 2016, p. 9). Recently for the 2019-2021 length of time, China pledged \$60 billion as financing for Africa, which was made up of \$20 billion grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans, \$10 billion investment through Chinese companies, \$ 5 billion funds to stimulate export and imports, \$20 billion credit lines and \$10 billion special development fund (MFA, 2018). Although that could not have substantially been achieved due to the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is a reflection of China's development financing module inclusive of aid to Africa.

Principally, China's aid is regulated by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and China African Policy documents of 2006 and 2015 as the backing frameworks. Since its establishment in 2000, the FOCAC has progressively been employed as an inter-regional engagement instrument for the leadership to consult, commit to specific principles and projects, build consensus and strengthen the Sino-African relationship for deeper cooperation. So far, seven FOCAC conferences have been held alternating between China and an African country, with another one expected in September 2021, which over the years informed the direction of the 21st-century engagement including foreign aid execution. A high-ranking Chinese official, H.E. Wang Yi State, Minister of Foreign Affairs explained during the 20th Anniversary Commemoration of the FOCAC: The FOCAC has enhanced friendship between the Chinese and the Africans through specific aid initiatives under the mechanism. China has provided 120,000 scholarships, 21,000 Chinese medical personnel have assisted in 48 African countries and emergency health crises such as the Ebola and Covid-19, hence, China through aid has supported the African efforts (MFA, 2020).

More into the policy bargain, China released the first African Policy Paper in 2006, which encapsulated the principles for maintaining the relationship farther into the future. The policy affirmed China's commitment to providing aid to the African countries, the sub-regional organizations like the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union regional organization. On the other side, China demands that the "One China" policy – regarding the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only legitimate representative of the Chinese people – remains a non-negotiable basis for maintaining diplomatic relations with any African country (MFA, 2006). The second China African Policy Paper was released in 2015, which further highlighted the use of aid to enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges as well as security assistance. As typical of Xi's policy route, it reemphasized achieving a prosperous society by linking the Chinese Dream to an African Dream through the underlying aid delivery ethics of non-interference, no strings attached, and imposing no demands (Duggan, 2020). Viewing those principles against the inalienable "One China" by itself seems quite contradictory and casts doubts on how China in terms of policy attempts to portray aid relationship with the African countries.

Consequently, the Chinese aid to Africa is delivered as development cooperation, by which China regards itself as a partner for Africa's development. Within that setting, it debunks an

altruistic donor-recipient image while it embraces government-to-government bilateralism in a win-win pattern to facilitate Africa's emergence from economic travails and poverty (Li, 2007). That unique bilateral context also depicts the principles of South-South cooperation, where China is presented as a developing nation engaging with fellow developing African countries from the global South. Therefore, the relationship is viewed as that of friendliness, equality, and political solidarity promulgated by the South-South cooperation canon. Historically the principles of the South-South cooperation are ingrained in the Bandung Conference (a meeting of Asian and African States in 1955 in Indonesia) and the Non-Aligned Movement (a principle of not aligning with any power bloc of the international system).

China convincingly projects aid relations with the African countries as a developing country that has gained expert experience and is ready to help the other developing countries to also become successful – that of a shared identity from a once upon a time recipient country, now a donor country among the southern comrades (Mawdsley, 2012, p. 152). For that reason, China's aid is still advocated with the *Eight Principles of Economic Aid and Technical Cooperation*. The principles although founded on the 20th-century historical relations with the African countries are relevant to how Chinese aid is further administered into the 21st century. It maintains equality and mutual benefits; no conditions attached; helping the recipient countries to attain independent development; efficient aid management, quality equipment, and technology transfer with no extra demands (State Council, 2011). The Chinese aid policies towards Africa in a way have evolved from ideologically inclined but altruistic motives to a multifaceted kind of development cooperation with heightened economic benefits. Within the Sino-African relationship, Chinese aid is envisaged to facilitate mutually beneficial economic development. As to the extent of how equal such benefits are, remains a matter of deeper reasoning beyond the mere role of foreign aid superficially detectable from the policy statements. Be that as it may, China's aid as development cooperation seems to resonate more in terms of the historical background and common identity shared with the African countries. Even more, the principles of South-South cooperation maintain an objective for the global South countries to cooperate to forestall over-reliance on Western economic assistance and aid (Asante, 2018).

Overall, when viewed from the purpose and the intended objectives of aid for Africa's

development, China's aid is similar to any other foreign aid provider although not the same. The aid is meant to address economic challenges for development through infrastructure, human capital empowerment, social interventions, and livelihood programs. However, China per its own peculiarity generally administers the aid together with other commercial enterprises that when viewed from the perspective of the ODA would not qualify as foreign aid. In addition, China neither provides adequate data nor allows easy access to the spending figures, posing challenges to understanding the Chinese aid system and the extent to which it is truly delivered as development cooperation acclaimed in the backing policies. Regardless of such conspicuous shortcomings, the African countries, especially leadership and the political elite value the role of China as an alternative financing for Africa's demands, especially for the infrastructure sector.

The 21st Century Footprints of the Chinese Aid on the African Continent

China's engagement with Africa commenced in the 1950s, defined by some policies and principles according to the Chinese tradition and foreign policy. That inter-regional interaction over the years provided some significant volumes of aid to Africa, which has registered an unprecedented surge in the 21st century. The increase is commensurate with China's overall dispensing of development finance as the country economically outperforms most of its peers to becoming a global power. Evidentially, foreign aid is being employed indispensably as a foreign policy instrument by the advanced/advancing countries for diplomatic, political, and economic outreach to the rest of the world, a means that China also seems to be utilizing quite well (Apodaca, 2017; Sun, 2014). Respectively, the 21st-century financial resources for Chinese aid, burgeoning from around \$700 million in 2001 to closely \$7.8 billion in 2019 (Kitano & Miyabayashi, 2020), had implications for China's aid relation with Africa. This is more so because Africa has been established earlier attracts close to half all the Chinese aid.

Beyond the financial estimations, the current state of the Chinese foreign aid enterprise across Africa could be more explored through the actual projects and programs that originated from the implementations. Due to the very nature of the Chinese aid, thus mixing official development financing with other commercial interests, not all the projects are completely aid-funded but to some extent contain financial commitment of aid kind. The Chinese aid to Africa is manifested in all eight forms but infrastructure projects are far greater and intense, possibly around 70%. More into that, China as of 2008, was found controlling half of major African

engineering and construction with 35 African countries substantially benefitted from major infrastructure projects, prominent among which are Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, Angola, Mauritania, Ghana, and Guinea (Shinn & Eisenman, 2013). As a result of the Chinese infrastructure aid being tied to the Chinese products, services, and contracts, it has aggressively promoted the country's commercial interests and presence. For example, China since 2011 commands about 40% of contractors while other Western actors decreased – Europeans from 44% to 34% while the US from 24% to 6.7%. Moreover, China's funding for infrastructure in Africa expanded swiftly to around 15% or so in the past few years when positioned against infrastructure expenditure by all the external financiers (Huang & Chen, 2016).

Into the bargain, infrastructure benefits from the Chinese aid-assisted financing are filling gaps that Western aid sources are not providing. This is not because the Chinese aid is extensively higher than the major Western actors, especially the US, but because the aid from the latter is more of the program and budget-supported aid. Western aid dispensed to Africa shot up from 30% in the 1990s to 43% in 2016 for social intervention programs and activities. On the other hand, over the same period, economic-related projects including infrastructure remained consistently below 20% (OECD, 2019).

Despite China's unrelenting efforts in providing for Africa's infrastructural needs, it also exploits Africa's vulnerability to advance its economic interests through aid mixed with other commercial financing and ventures. It could be argued that, since the 'favorable terms' aid loans and the grants are used to spice up the commercial financing to enhance the attractiveness, it is hard for the African actors to reject the Chinese funding. The commercial outlook is considerably reflected in first; the projects are financed and administered through the China Exim Bank and other state-backed entities that are commercially inclined than being development assistance agencies. The aid is consequently bonded with at least 50% of goods and services being provided by China (Brautigam, 2011).

Second, the dispensing institutions together with the executing companies are strategically positioned to promote internationalization and China's geopolitical objectives, most often smoothed by the aid terms and conditions with the African countries. The execution has provided business opportunities for those companies and state enterprises to expand across Africa posing enormous challenges to indigenous enterprises. As an exemplification,

geopolitically, China is feared to be using Huawei to provide advanced telecommunication infrastructure that could be covertly employed for surveillance and exporting a framework for Africa's internet governance and control, while widening digital technology on the continent (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020). Third, most of the concessional loans being part of the other aid financing agreements combined with credit lines are tied to Africa's natural resources for the guarantee of payment (Haneur & Lyle, 2014). For example, aspects of the payment for Ghana's Bui Dam were tied to cocoa export to China, likewise projects in Angola, Nigeria, and other African countries tied to various types of resources (Brautigam, 2011).

Besides infrastructure, other forms of Chinese aid have been marginally provided for Africa over the years. Goods and materials in machinery, transport vehicles, medical devices, testing equipment, food, and medicines among the lot are hallmarks of the Chinese aid at certain times for technical support, to augment projects, and support some social interventions. For example, China in 2017 donated patrol boats worth \$4.4 million to Ivory Coast to curb maritime crime. Again, in 2012, Zimbabwe received a \$15 million value of grains for distribution to disadvantaged communities while in 2006 machinery and equipment estimated at \$ 5 million were delivered to support maintenance works on the Tazara (Dreher *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, China offers aid to Africa to guide production and operations intended to transfer knowledge and skills to succor African expertise for managing completed projects. In that regard, two main initiatives across agriculture and research are cited as evidence of those efforts. First, the agriculture sector as one of the main areas of China's technical cooperation by 2006 had received 10,000 Chinese technicians with 200 projects undertaken. While from the year 2004 to 2010, 4200 technicians and management officials were trained and 14 agricultural demonstration centers were completed (Shinn & Eisenman, 2013). Another recent case of technical cooperation is the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center (SAJOREC) in partnership with the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) established in 2013. The initiative emphasizes wildlife protection and afforestation, monitoring climate change, and modern agriculture demonstration (Sajorec, Website).

The other forms of aid conservatively being delivered by China but for some specific demands are human resource development, Chinese medical teams, and volunteers, then emergency aid. China maintains a partnership with some African universities, which as of 2013, cooperative

programs were ongoing between 19 Chinese universities and 23 African universities. More so, by way of bridging the existing language barrier and for other broader state ambitions, China's Confucius Institute is operational with at least 61 Institutes and 44 Classrooms in 44 African countries. Additionally, professional seminars and short training are being achieved through at least 10 African research institutes in Chinese universities (King, 2013).

In Kenya for instance, 400 Chinese teachers were dispatched from 2000 to 2009, and China further offered \$ 15 million for the Ethio-China Polytechnic College (Reilly, 2015). Again, 10,000 Kenyan government officials have benefitted from training and seminars since 2001 (Xinhua, 2018). Into the bargain, the Chinese government scholarship has rapidly taken shape at the turn of the 21st century, currently estimated at around 12000 African students a year, far more than any other country could provide (Financial Times, 2020). For example, Ghana is the highest African beneficiary of the Chinese scholarships for the past recent years had 518 in 2016 alone and 5000 total from 2012 to 2016, according to Mdm. Sun Baohong, the then Chinese Ambassador to Ghana (China Embassy, Ghana, Website). As another example, 1000 Kenyans benefitted from the Chinese government scholarship as of 2018 (Xinhua, 2018).

Through the Chinese medical teams, China by yearly engagements provides free medical services, medical personnel training, facilities, free medication, and anti-malaria campaigns. More than 20, 000 medical team personnel had been assigned to over forty-four African countries, treating over 240 million patients in over 100 hospitals and health centers across the continent (Shinn & Eisenman, 2013). China has used the avenue to fortify the health vacuums in Africa especially in the domains of professional training, emergency health care, Chinese traditional medicine, and surgical procedures. In return, China draws international reputation due to the uniqueness of that engagement for relations, attracting attention by the West to what China might achieve for image enhancement (Li, 2011).

The relevance and the role of the Chinese medical team both to Africa and China were further evident in the recent health crisis, the Ebola (2014-2016, where about 1200 or so medical personnel including from the People Liberation Army were dispatched to Africa) as well the Covid-19 pandemic. Chinese health personnel and front-line health workers have assisted in prevention operations, treating infected patients, and constructing make-shift facilities and treatment centers (Cabestan, 2020; Xinhua, 2020). The operations of the medical teams bear

some challenges especially relating to non-collaboration with other development partners and agencies in the recipient countries, services limited to few hospitals of Chinese interest, and underutilization of what they could offer. For example in Ghana, the researcher observed and informed that the teams have consistently been dispatched to only three main hospitals including the China-Ghana Friendship Hospital (Lekma) (Interviewee 1, April 15, 2020).

Again, they are less engaged in community-level services that cut deep into the most deprived rural areas. Besides those downsides, the teams have been praised by their African counterparts for professionalism, special expertise and health delivery for the African countries (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

Briefly elucidated, the Chinese Volunteers are limited in their scope of operations unlike the Peace Corps from the Western countries that spread over the African communities. In Ghana, for example, interactions and observations from the field visit showed their presence only at the Confucius Institutes and related teaching activities for the University Chinese language teaching. Regardless, they are handy for China to introduce the culture and language through activities that span to include even primary level pupils from some basic schools around the catchment areas.

The footprints of the Chinese aid on the African continent could not be discussed without humanitarian and emergency aid. China in its 21st century expanded aid to Africa has provided packs of humanitarian and emergency aid delivered in materials, cash, or personnel to minimize the repercussions of certain predicaments on life and property from the affected areas. Selected examples are shown herein. In 2005, China supported Guinea-Bissau in cash and kind when that African country was plagued with cholera and locust, while food aid (worth CNY 10 million) was given to help drought victims in Djibouti. In 2009, China through the World Food Programme (WFP) offered \$ 5 million for drought relief in Zimbabwe. Again in 2011 and 2012 respectively, emergency food aid (valued at CNY 440 million) was distributed for Kenya, Djibouti, Somali and Ethiopia, while Chad, Niger, Mali among others received humanitarian aid (valued at CNY 70 million). Another \$3 million was granted to care for victims following the arms explosion in Congo in 2012 (Brautigam, 2009; State Council, 2011; Dreher et al., 2017).

The aforementioned interventions for the recent health crises are also humanitarian and emergency aid. The total funding that China committed to Ebola alone in West Africa was \$120 million through the direct bilateral and multilateral relief items, operations, and financial packages (China Daily, 2015). As well, assistance for Africa amidst the Covid-19 pandemic is

not yet full-fledged but China is showing signs of debt forgiveness and vaccine assistance to curb the likely impacts on the African countries. It raises the current debates about health diplomacy as a new aid tool for the foreign actors in African affairs since the continent seems to rely mostly on foreign assistance to vaccinate their populations. Over and above that, China takes advantage of the humanitarian aid to work side by side with other international teams to tap into certain practices that might be useful for its strategic planning, while forging ahead with security outreach and diplomatic interests like demonstrated during the Ebola (Cabestan, 2020).

Finally, China has canceled debts as a form of aid for the African countries. At the end of 2009, \$2.9 billion debts worth of 312 debts were canceled for 35 African countries, being 75% of China's global debt cancellation (State Council, 2014). For the past 19 years, China has overall canceled at least \$3.4 billion for the African countries (Acker et al., 2020). Under the G20 Debt Suspension Initiative to confront the economic impacts of Covid-19 for the developing countries due to debt distress, China is bent on further canceling debts for the African countries. According to reports, about \$1.353 billion debts (both aid and non-aid types) are being canceled for 23 African countries with Zambia and Angola already benefitted (South China Morning Post, 2020).

The issue of debt relief under the circumstances of China's aid being argued a major contributor to Africa's debt distress is one worth attending. Ghana for example at the end of 2020 reached an all-time high of \$24.7 billion external debt being 48.6% of the 76% debt to GDP. More alarming is the projection that the country according to the IMF estimations could reach 85.5% debt to GDP in 2026, and would be only behind Zambia and Congo in such debt levels (JoyOnline, 2021). Furthermore, China per the estimations of solely making up 12% or so of Ghana's external borrowing (see OECD, 2018), therefore contributes substantially to Ghana's debts. Even so, the Chinese aid comparative to Western aid adds up to debts since they provide much of loan aid, unlike the former, which provide more grants. In that respect, China's debt forgiveness to Africa although commendable is quite symbolic but not that much of significant.

On the flip side is also the argument that aid provided in the form of grants to Africa rather limit Africa's agency and is used to advance the donor country's interests, hence, China's delivery mode of more concessional and preferential loans as development cooperation rather than the aid gratis. Whichever side one views the debate, foreign aid in whatever form or from whichever country tends to be designed to advance the interests of the donor country while intended also to

satisfy the development needs of the recipients. In the case of Africa, the conventional view as it seems is that aid is not promoting Africa's development as it is expected to (Moyo, 2009), although it does for the short to medium term meet certain demands.

The Chinese aid as has been shown is filling in the gap for infrastructure development, which the Western aid has gradually withdrawn from, becoming alternative support. While that support is readily available with some sort of "no strings attached", to attract African leadership, it also seems to be triggering and widening the aid dependency spirally. Consequentially, as Africa continues to be viewed as being dependent on aid, it might be revealing to consider how the Chinese aid could be touching on that measure. Thereupon, there is a new call for the possibilities of Africa moving beyond aid, and that call should well be gauged discretely against the Chinese engagement.

The New Call for "Africa Beyond Aid": Ghana in Focus

Recently, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana commenced a campaign first expressed in the joint press conference with Emmanuel Macron, the French President during a visit to Ghana in December 2017. The Ghanaian President echoed a stance that resonated well among most Ghanaians and other Africans at home and abroad, who applauded him for the bold commitment to changing Africa's quandary (Akwei, 2017). The president emphatically stated that Africans could not be able to make policies for themselves because of the external aid that the respective governments receive from donor countries. Retrospectively, cumulative aid has led to more and more dependency: becoming a conundrum that seems not to be getting any better.

The call became more official (particularly for Ghana) through the speech delivered by the president during the national parade commemorating the 61st independence anniversary of Ghana on March 6, 2018. In the delivery, the president contended that the country could not realize its economic reformation through aid since it had relied on aid for the past six decades without any significant progress. The reasons for such a failure, he implied, are first, there could be aid fatigue; second, donors decide how the funding is spent; and third, there can never be enough aid to propel the country (or the continent) into the expected level of development. Accordingly, "Ghana beyond aid" implies that the country would be in charge of its own destiny and could engage competitively with the rest of the world through trade, finance and investment. Ghana beyond aid is a vision to actualize the country's resources, being effectively

used for attaining self-reliance.

That salient call emanated from the convincing assumption that, Africa's retarded economic transformation, among other socio-economic and political challenges, has been triggered by the dependency on foreign aid (Kumi, 2020). The sources of the dependency could be twofold – internal and external. Over the years, experts have argued that despite some successes attributable to foreign aid in Africa, it has endangered a dependency culture and nursed paternalism more than a partnership. Patrimonialism, extraversion, and some sort of political elitism are being fecundated through the aid engagements with foreign donors, undermining the intended use of development aid, but depending on it for certain parochial interests. African actors with influence and involvement in the aid delivery processes are shown to have appropriated aid in ways that could inure to their individualistic benefits for economic control and political dominance at the cost of the societal gains (Alves & Chichava, 2019).

Regarding the external cause of Africa's dependency, aid is admissibly an integral component of the foreign policy for the developing countries, employed as a tool for particular state interests. Certainly, research has established that foreign powers could either withdraw aid or provide aid to make a regime or a region act in certain defined ways for ideological and strategic interests. Beyond that, economic interests are the major driving force behind most aid programs while politically pursued to modify the state behavior of the recipient (Apodaca, 2017). That being the case, it is quite convincing to assert that, aid to Africa is designed and delivered in a way that could sustain that dependency on the donor countries into the unforeseeable future.

Thereupon, Africans, said Nana Addo on another occasion in France, should “take charge of their own destinies, abandon the mentality of being dependent on aid and charity, and work towards transforming their countries” to farther away from the dependency mindset (Government of Ghana, 2019a, para. 5). Further echoed in an article, *Forging Ahead, Ghana Means Business*, it explains that Ghana, as a campaigner and an example for Africa beyond aid, is a country that could mobilize material and human resources internally and expand trade and commercial activities with developing partners instead of subsisting on charity and handouts for wealth generation. Indeed, the recent call radiated from an African ‘grandiloquent president’ and resonating internationally as a new wave for Africa beyond aid (Pilling, 2018).

In further discussions and interactions with the other African and world leaders, the President of the Republic of Ghana seizes every opportunity to expand Ghana beyond aid campaign to Africa beyond aid. Hence, in a speech delivered at the 73rd UN General Assembly in 2018, he noted that Ghana beyond aid is also a vision for an Africa beyond aid. An interesting point from that speech was the historical antecedent of Western powers' exploitation of China through infrastructural aid, which consequently led to the lease out of Hong Kong Port. That draws attention to China as to whether it might be employing just exploitation strategies in their engagements with the African countries through aid or it could be helping the African countries to develop.

The government of Ghana, actively championing Ghana's beyond aid agenda produced the Ghana Beyond Aid Charter and Strategy Document. It explains that to achieve the vision, the behavioral changes that Ghanaians, and for that matter, Africans would be committed to for a better transformation, is very crucial. The document further points out that, a country beyond aid does not mean the rejection of aid, but rather, pursuing strategies for economic transformation that are well aligned with aid. By so doing, the country should be relying less on aid for public services (such should be catered for internally) while encouraging donors to channel aid packages into economic transformation programs for the furtherance of a stronger economy to eventually be weaned off aid (Government of Ghana, 2019b).

The Charter in terms of policy outlines the measures that could hurl an African country like Ghana to move beyond aid. It calls for agriculture modernization, industrialization, infrastructure development, private sector and entrepreneurship growth, social intervention, domestic resource mobilization, protecting the public purse, and financing initiatives to implement the policy objectives. To facilitate the processes, Ghana proposed the establishment of the Ghana Beyond Aid Council with its secretariat to coordinate with the National Development Planning Commission to develop the framework that will reflect specific priorities, programs, and projects. Those policies and strategies are intended for utilizing aid from various quarters in a way that would empower the country. In that regard, it is also important that the type of aid from prominent donors like China is well comprehended.

Chinese Aid Engagement and Achieving “Africa Beyond Aid”

From the policies and principles that propel the Chinese aid system, it could be argued that the South-South development cooperation evident from the FOCAC framework and the various

policy outlines could drive Africa beyond aid. This is more so because as stated earlier, the vision is 'encouraging donors to channel aid packages into economic transformation programs'. However, reasoning further beyond the policies and the rhetorical principles, practical engagement might possess certain attributes that would demand thorough examination to establish its suitability to the vision.

Substantially, the stated vision by Ghana, the main projector of Africa beyond aid, has some striking resemblance with Chinese aid policies and engagement with Africa. As could be established from the Chinese aid footprint, the aid is combined with investment, trade, infrastructure development, and to some extent technology. Therefore, China's policy, especially in recent years towards Africa, is in certain ways linked with a grand strategy for economic transformation rather than a mere interest in natural resources and energy (Li, 2007). Moreover, the Chinese aid is delivered as an economic cooperation program, which for the most part emphasizes infrastructure, production, and joint ventures but also human capital development and technical cooperation that supposedly create employment and local capacity.

Aid packages are predominantly channeled into the infrastructural-based economic reforms than public services, social grants, and humanitarian incentives. That point of direction has helped to address energy, transportation, telecommunication, and other health and education needs for most of the African countries. Specific examples across the continent are the Ruzibazi Hydropower Station of Burundi, the Souapiti Dam of Guinea, the fiber-optics network for Togo, the Bui Dam, and rural electrification projects for Ghana, the University of Dar es Salame Library and the Kibungo Hospital of Uganda. Those empowerment interventions could be utilized to move beyond aid especially where China makes the funding readily available with a wider coverage where the aid is tied to other commercial development finance.

Lastly, the Chinese aid is more demand-driven to facilitate the African agencies in deciding the projects that aid funds could be directed to (Dreher *et al.*, 2017; King, 2013). It implies that the African countries have the say in determining the kind of projects that suits their broader policy strategy and development agenda at particular times. That is an aspect of ownership, which according to the *Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness*, is one of the key determinants of how aid could be employed by a donor country for effective development for the recipient country. In Ghana, for example, most of the projects undertaken by the Chinese aid have either being on

the development agenda of the country or were decided before it was proposed to the Chinese. The Bui Dam for instance was earmarked decades back but faced setbacks with Western financing until it was carried out by the Chinese. Similarly, a \$22.5 million Chinese interest-free loan that financed the Ofankor-Nsawam Highway was already part of Ghana's grand road network to link other land-locked countries of the sub-region.

Without doubts, the Chinese aid possesses those developmental targets that could in certain measures help to achieve an Africa beyond aid. Moreover, the flexibility, the availability, and the packaging of China's aid, more enchanting from the policy perspective could justify it being the type suiting a South-South cooperation non-dependent but an interdependent relationship for 'win-win' and mutual benefits. However, the same aid could be quite challenging to the implementation of that vision for Africa, if certain practical attributes are not carefully examined for enhancement.

To achieve an Africa beyond aid, public institutions must be strengthened to participate actively in the development processes. However, the Chinese aid is yet to be directed to strengthening institutionalism for a better recipient-end internal management. Presently, the intrinsic idiosyncrasy of China's aid is founded on the non-interference and respect for sovereignty principles, which is rewarding in a certain respect but engenders institutional deficiency. Most of the Chinese aid projects are implemented in Africa through sole-sourcing agreements with less or no competitive bidding, maintaining procurement arrangements with limited local content (Williams, 2017). In the case of Ghana's Bui Dam, the processes evaded the Public Procurement Act and the mandated Public Procurement Authority of Ghana (Odoom, 2015). Similar setbacks including the less and non-transparent oversight responsibility by the recipient country's regulatory bodies do not strengthen institutional capacity.

On the other, the Chinese seem to strengthen their institutions by channeling aid through both their public institutions and government-supported private companies, to ensure the sustainability of such Chinese entities. By that, the aid delivery mechanism is also tied to Chinese goods and services. For example, the concessional Eximbank aid is officially stated to be not less than 50% of the procurement made from China (Brautigam, 2011). Besides, grants and interest-free loans could rather be tied more, not to talk of the dominating Chinese workers and services for the Chinese aid projects.

Although tying aid to goods and services is not exclusive only to China, Africans tend to be

driven to accept the readily available Chinese credit and aid facilities even when they are tied to the Chinese goods and services than the other aid sources, particularly the West. Again, Western aid to Africa has made attempts in recent years to untie aid by directing flows into budgetary support and program aid, which do not require much of the donor's goods and services. In the circumstances of tied aid, it could help economic development through the infrastructural projects, but not at the desired rate because it could thwart local production and indigenous commerce and industrialization. Consequently, the Chinese aid by principle and structure intentionally or unintentionally induces institutional dependence, contributes less to economic institutional reform, and even so more attractive to African leaders who are apprehensive of reforming their institutions to maximize their interests (Brazys & Vadlamannati, 2018).

As another point, ironically a practice that seems to be uncooperative although China holds the principles of cooperation is that the aid is implemented in isolation, undermining the collective aims of the donor partners in Africa. Overall, the Chinese aid is poorly coordinated with other donors across the African continent, maintaining no cooperation with bilateral donors in particular although initial discussions are being held for co-financing of projects, and some efforts with multilateral such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank (Barthelemy, 2011). To date, China under the South-South cooperation multilateral arrangements has only undertaken technical and personnel support for some trilateral projects such as with the Danish for a renewable energy technology transfer in Ghana (2014-2018) and with the UK for agriculture technology transfer in Malawi and Uganda (UNDP, 2017). However, it does not collaborate for coordination, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability being the established core principles designed for global aid effectiveness. That is to say, China's aid is divergent by not working together with the other donors to reconcile the broader aid objectives, which could hinder economic reforms and global development goals for Africa.

Probably more perturbing about the Chinese aid delivery in Africa is the combined issues of debt trap and resource extraction. As illustrated before now, Africa's debt is becoming complicated, worrying, and alarming caused also by China's readily available financing. That is not to say that China has ceased or is about to take total control of facilities in the African

countries due to debts owed, probably that is an overblown and unsubstantiated assumption (Brautigam, 2020). But then, China's engagement is significantly scaling the debts for the African countries, more especially when the recipient country is granted the financing so far as it craves for it. This could make such countries vulnerable to China when they are unable to meet the loan obligation in the future, which may result in some economic and political concessions. Those could be leading to higher aid dependency.

Over and above that, to ensure security and guaranteed repayment, China in most of the cases give out aid and receive natural resources including oil, cocoa, and other minerals as payback demonstrated by Jiang (2009) and mentioned in this study about the payment arrangement for Ghana's Bui Dam and others like in Nigeria and Congo. Besides, such resources might be used as guarantors, which seems to be fueling the fears of China's direction regarding the economic compromises that such countries could make in the future – more and more Africa's resource vulnerability to China. Looking at the issues, Chinese aid is particularly alarming because it is more often than not commodity/resource-backed loans (Interviewee 2, June 23, 2019). The debt-trap predicament is a potential cause for massive resource extraction from the affected countries, and perhaps joint-operation of certain ventures between some African countries and China because of debts, sooner or later. Debt-trap, resource extraction, non-collaboration with other donor partners, and the undermining of institutional reforms in the recipient African countries are the high-risk factors of China aid, which could be endangering the achievement of Africa beyond aid.

Conclusion

The article referred to the current call for an Africa beyond aid, establishing that, although not entirely a new call, it sounds convincing, rejuvenating, and timely with the rapid inflow of Chinese aid to Africa. It has demonstrated how Africa beyond aid could be aligned to the Chinese aid engagement on the continent, to understand how their approach might be affecting the success or otherwise of the vision. The general discussion dissected the dynamics of the Chinese aid, theoretically viewing aid as development cooperation and South-South cooperation as enshrined in the backing policy principles of the Chinese. Furthermore, the study empirically examined the Chinese aid footprints, especially infrastructure projects on the African continent with the likely benefits and detriments to Africa.

As a contribution to the aid discourse at large, and specifically how the Chinese aid could be

suited to achieving an Africa beyond aid, the study has shown that, policy-wise, besides the questionable so-called 'no strings attached', China maintains attributes of aid packages meant for economic transformation programs more than just altruistic gratis and gifts. Those features the study has contended are compatible with promoting Africa's development beyond aid. However, in practice, the same aid is implemented in ways that are noticeable to maximize China's commercial interests, in essence not enhancing Africa's development like expected. Indeed, Africa beyond aid is a worthy call, but then more needs to be done instead of the Chinese aid engagements to achieve the intended objectives for Africa's development. In that vein, certain recommendations are advanced forthwith to position China's aid appropriately to that pragmatic objective.

Recommendation

Having identified the characteristics and the possible risk factors of the Chinese aid provides an insightful guide for effective decision-making and research. More importantly, it demonstrates how China's aid engagement with the continent could be ominous to long-term development objectives, hence cautiously interpreted to achieving Africa beyond aid vision. Even though China's practical implementation of aid could pose challenges, the policies and the principles, i.e. aid as development cooperation and the bilateral delivery hinged on South-South cooperation mechanism, are suited for an engagement that could propel Africa to becoming less dependent on aid. Such positive aspects could serve as a favorable ground for other measures that would collectively assist to tune the Chinese aid to an Africa beyond aid.

First, African leaders should effectively ensure the collaboration among the activities of the aid providers – the West (otherwise the OECD countries), China, and the non-OECD countries like India, Brazil, and Russia in the African countries. Possibly, the *Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness* and the *Accra Agenda for Action* are the global frameworks for aid harmonization and alignment, which China endorsed to adhere to, so could be shoved to apply. Consequently, Africa needs measures, for instance, a unified African policy framework toward China, which concisely would define how the Chinese aid as development cooperation would be in harmony with all the other development partners. 'The absence of an African policy speaks to the slanted nature of the relations, a fact that should inspire corrective action' (Wekesa, 2021, p. 11).

Second, there ought to be a specific institution in each of the African countries for the

coordination, policy implementation, and administration of aid-related activities. Currently, in Ghana, for example, there seems to be a lack of unified and definite responsibility across the ministries and agencies for issues relating to foreign aid (Interviewee 3, June 5, 2020). Again, although Ghana has established a Ghana beyond aid office, as an adjunct to the Office to the President, may not appropriately function as a standing institution or agency could (Interview 4, June 11, 2020). In that same vein, China ought to coordinate its aid activities in a cohesive partnership with the responsible institutions in the African countries. For example, the recently established China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) is a step in the right direction that could encourage African countries to establish parallel ones, and at the same time, the CIDCA be willing to work effectively with the African counterparts. To add to that, the African countries should be determined to strengthen institutions rather than political agenda since political leaders change over time, lapsing with their pledges.

Third, the African countries need to set stringent debt sustainability threshold that corresponds with the long-term potential of achieving Africa beyond aid. This could help to avoid the alarming debt trap that could be resulting from the readily available Chinese aid. Regarding that, China should be acting in good faith by closely working with the African countries to help them achieve the objectives, even when they seem desperate for aid funding. Moreover, China could provide more grants and interest-free loans than loans with interest, and possibly restructure or provide debt relief for such countries likely to be drowned in debts. Indeed, China on a more commendable note has shown signs of commitment to debt relief for the African countries (see Acker *et al.* 2020) but should correspond more to the levels of indebtedness.

Finally, scholars and experts of China-Africa relations from both ends should be actively involved in foreign aid-connected bilateral arrangements and agreements to ensure balanced fairness and stronger African agency for the economic deals. The Chinese policies and state behavior could be misunderstood because it involves a great deal of multiple actors, with Chinese operational characteristics and no direct variation between the political and economic interests (Interviewee 5, November 23, 2019). Thus, academic expertise requires in dealing with that complex web of interdependence. On a positive note, however, China's attention could easily be drawn to certain shortcomings about its engagement with Africa the difficulties and the harm that the specific practice may be posing to the intended objectives of development cooperation, which could be expertly referred to from the Chinese own foreign policy principles

towards Africa.

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