

Inspiration and empowerment for Africa

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Forty years have passed since China began its reform and opening-up in 1978 and during that period, China has performed a miracle in the history of world development, evidenced by socio-economic indicators: a huge economy with a population of more than 1.3 billion people (total GDP ranks second in the world, and accounts for about 15 per cent of the world's), and an annual average economic growth of 9.5 per cent for 40 consecutive years. Nearly 1 billion people have transitioned from poverty to prosperity. The average life expectancy of the population has increased from 67.9 years in 1981 to 76.5 years in 2016. How did such a miracle happen? What are the lessons that need to be learned from this experience? These questions have been, and will continue to be, the preoccupation of many stakeholders across the board.

This phenomenon has been accompanied with increased cooperation, not only with countries, but also with regional and continental economic and political frameworks, such as BRICS, South –South Cooperation and African Union. In the context of Africa-China cooperation, Africa has benefited enormously in a number of ways, ranging from enhanced trade, FDI and infrastructure financing to development aid. These benefits have contributed significantly to Africa's socio-economic development in terms of addressing the continent's burning developmental challenges of poverty, infrastructural deficit, human development deficiencies and unfriendly investment climate. To the extent that these challenges are gradually being addressed we can claim, with confidence, that China's cooperation has empowered African countries, both socially and economically

Indeed, collaboration through Forum for China Africa Cooperation, or FOCAC, the China Africa Think Tanks Forum and the Belt and Road Initiative, has gained momentum and has triggered much interest. This is because China is playing an increasingly prominent

role in global trade, investment, finance, and governance to the extent that Made in China is a household name; an indication of a deepened engagement between these societies. This deepening extends also to diplomatic and cultural relations as evidenced by the established of Confucian Institutes in a number of African countries with a view to promote people-to-people exchanges.

China has indeed become a major force in the global economic arena and, with the balance of economic power shifting dramatically over the coming years, is expected to become the world's largest economy in the near future. Given this state of affairs and, the growing economic, political and social engagement between Africa and China, China's experience in the last four decades of opening up and carrying-out of fundamental reforms provides valuable lessons from which African countries, including Tanzania, can learn from. More importantly, this relationship has the potential of becoming a key enabler for achieving African's aspirations for inclusive and sustainable growth, social-economic transformation and a stronger voice in global affairs. These aspirations are clearly stipulated in the continent's poverty reduction frameworks, including Agenda 2063, coupled with global development frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals and national development visions of various African countries (such as Tanzania 2025, Kenya 2030 and Nigeria 2040)

The results of China-Africa cooperation in the late decade or so show that total goods trade has grown from \$13 billion in 2001 to \$188 billion in 2015. Likewise, Chinese stock of direct investment grew from almost zero in 2004 to \$50 billion in 2016. Further, Chinese official development aid had an annual growth of 16 per cent from 2012 to 2015. Further, China has become Africa's single largest bilateral infrastructure financier. For example, in 2015 Chinese commitments to infrastructure development in the continent amounted to \$21 billion (McKinsey, 2017). Surely, the African leadership should realize that China should be the preferred development partner given the depth and breadth of sectoral engagement. Indeed, the engagement seems to be aligned with Africa's socio-economic aspirations. This being the case, we can claim with confidence that China is a development enabler cum empowerer, and definitely not a colonizer, as some Western critics tend to claim.

It needs to be recalled that China-Africa relations have been underpinned by the Five Principles which were agreed upon during the Bandung Africa-Asia Conference in 1955 which are: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual

non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. These principles are against colonization and imperialism. More fundamentally, China has consistently adhered to these principles as evidenced by President Xi Jinping's speech in the recent FOCAC Summit in Beijing where he reiterated the "five-no's" approach in its relations with Africa: no interference in Africa countries' pursuit of development paths that fit their national conditions; no interference in African countries' internal affairs; no imposition of China's will on African countries; no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa; and no seeking of selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation with Africa. The consistence with which China has abided by these principles is a clear testimony to the fact that its cooperation with Africa is sustainable and trustworthy. Indeed, the on-going trade war between China and the US and the latter's tendency to undermine and violate the very rules of multilateralism whose crafting and advocacy were championed by the same country, enhance Africa's trust in cooperation while questioning the Western countries' double standards, wavering and hypocrisy.

Africa's resource endowments and China's pursuit of markets create opportunities to leverage Africa-China cooperation to realize Africa's aspirations while drawing on the Chinese experience in promoting inclusive growth, employment creation, and structural transformation of a country's economy. China's development success in these areas were informed by critical fundamentals: building human capital and improving access to assets; investing in infrastructure with structural transformation in mind; and using well designed social transfer programs to address poverty and inequality. These achievements were in turn underpinned by a political leadership which was development oriented, people-centered, action-oriented and fought corruption forcefully. More interestingly, the political leadership was able to promote the relationship between the state and the market; gradualism-cum-incremental approach informed the undertaking of reforms; and the ability of the Party to penetrate the grass-roots level (mass mobilization) was vital for reforms. These key Chinese characteristics can hardly be replicated elsewhere but they provide valuable lessons on aspects of leadership, governance, inclusive development and the culture of discipline, hard work and savings.

Given this rich and valuable experience to draw lessons from, African countries must therefore capitalize on their cooperation with China by ensuring that the relationship is embedded within the larger effort of promoting development in the context of the

continent's quest for poverty alleviation. However, to achieve this, Africa has to, first and foremost, play a pro-active role in that relationship, by developing comprehensive strategies at three levels. First, a continental strategy, which focuses on those issues which have a bearing on each other. These are basically infrastructural in terms of addressing the connectivity challenge, and peace and security. Second, regional strategies reflecting the priorities and agendas of different regional economic integration groupings. Third, country-specific strategies informed by countries' socio-economic development plans. We have adopted this disaggregated approach to demonstrate that Africa, as a continent, is not homogeneous, neither linguistically nor in terms of priorities, as some scholars and politicians tend to believe. This approach also puts emphasis on the need to adapt to the specific characteristics of each of the three levels.

We are quite confident that if this approach is implemented effectively, the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), with its eight major initiatives, will go a long way, not only in scaling up the alignment of the cooperation with Africa's development aspirations but also enhance its results and outcomes. And ultimately, they will silence the negative voices of those who appear to rekindle the Cold War politics of rivalry between the East and West, while forgetting one reality of the today's world: it has changed significantly in a number of dimensions, including broadening developing countries' choice in terms sources of aid, FDI, trade and development paradigms.

Currently, a pro-active approach from the African side appears to be the missing critical link in the relationship. Indeed, whereas the Chinese are crystal clear about what they want from Africa, the Africans are not. This being the case, and for African countries to effectively exploit the existing and unfolding opportunities requires a proactive role coupled with adequate commitment from and preparedness of the African leadership in terms of putting in place the requisite policies, strategies and action plans, flanked by an effective institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation of progress. It is only through shouldering such a proactive role that Africa can realize its poverty reduction dream while ensuring that Africa-China cooperation is mutually beneficial.

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