

Healing the 'Scar on World's Conscience': China in Africa

Published on 03.01.2023 16:35
www.harici.com.tr



For centuries, the fate of Africa's misery has always lingered. Former prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair has described Africa as a "scar on the conscience of the world." Food insecurity, poverty, etc., have always surrounded Africa. But in recent years, Africa has actively connected with China's "One Belt and One Road" initiative, bringing new highlights and energy to the economic growth of African countries. According to the 2022 African Youth Survey commissioned by the Ichikowitz Family Foundation in South Africa, 76% of the respondents believe China's influence on their country and life is positive. Yet some Western countries have been saying that China is not conducive to the development of Africa, and China needs to justify itself.

"Watch the enemy and help one another": China's position on China-Africa relations under Once-in-a-Century global changes

In 2022, Once-in-a-Century global changes are developing in-depth, unstable factors in the international situation are increasing, and relations between major powers started an extra round of complex interactions. Against this background, the fundamental importance of Africa in China's overall diplomatic situation has become more prominent, and the practice of China-Africa exchanges has also proved that Africa is a vital force that China's diplomacy can rely on.

Mencius once said in "Mencius, Teng Wen Gong I" that "Aid one another in keeping watch and ward"; this is not an exaggeration to describe China-Africa relations.

Both China and the African Union hold the banner of multilateralism high and focus on economics, finance, infrastructure, and other fields. The confidence to promote global governance development and the determination to oppose the containment and control of the United States and the West have brought closer China-Africa relations.

Representative achievements of China-Africa cooperation under the framework of the "One Belt and One Road" Initiative

As of the end of 2021, among the 53 African countries that have established diplomatic relations with China, 52 countries and the African Union Commission have signed cooperation documents with China on the joint construction of the "One Belt and One Road". Africa has become one of the most important directions for OBOR cooperation.

Bringing more "China opportunities" by accelerating trade development.

Despite the adverse effects of the *Covid* epidemic, under the promotion of the OBOR initiative, China-Africa economic and trade cooperation has become increasingly close, and the business scale has grown. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce of China, China has maintained its status as Africa's largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years. In 2021, China-Africa trade volume will exceed the US\$250 billion mark, a year-on-year increase of 35.3%.

China has expanded imports of non-resource products from Africa to help more African agricultural and manufacturing products enter the Chinese market. With the official implementation of the African Free Trade Area and speeding up African economic and regional economic integration, China will bring more "China opportunities" to Africa's development.

Bridging Africa's "digital divide" by expanding digital economy cooperation.

China-Africa's cooperation in the "digital economy" has developed rapidly. From the construction of digital infrastructure to the digital transformation of society, the application of new technologies such as the Internet of Things and mobile finance, cooperation in all fields has achieved fruitful results.

By the end of 2021, over 1,500 companies in 17 cities in over 15 African countries have chosen Chinese companies as their digital transformation partners, and 29 countries have chosen the intelligent government service solutions Chinese companies provide. China and Africa have jointly established a public "cloud" in South Africa serving the entire African region. Chinese and South African companies have cooperated to build Africa's first 5G independent commercial network.

China and Africa continue to deepen digital cooperation, helping Africa seize the opportunity of the information revolution and jointly build a "Digital Africa".

Solving the "Easterly Tragedy" puzzle: China's poverty reduction effect in Africa.

The two major problems of "Easterly tragedy" include the vicious cycle of poverty and high growth and the ineffectiveness of massive international aid for poverty reduction. The problem of "Easterly tragedy" in relatively backward areas represented by sub-Saharan Africa is more prominent.

As of the end of 2020, China's investment in Africa has exceeded US\$45.4 billion, with assets in over 50 African countries. Among the projects in which China's investment in Africa exceeds US\$100 million, 55.9% are infrastructure construction, while resource-type investment only accounts for 30%.

The latest research results of Chinese scholars such as Yang Li show that the poverty reduction effect of China's aid to Africa is being realized through economic paths such as "public expenditure effect" and "trade promotion effect" and political paths to reduce regional conflicts.

Countermeasures for Deepening Cooperation with Africa

"Soft power": Promoting the "people-to-people bond" between China and Africa.

The misunderstanding of China by the international community and African countries needs more time and effort to change it. The West's attacks on China's practices in Africa also remind us to strengthen the media publicity of the China-Africa partnership.

Chinese media needs to reach out to civil society in African countries as much as possible. Using appropriate rhetoric and "localized" expression communication skills through various channels, tell the language and stories that local audiences can understand. Realize the international communication of Chinese voices and promote foreign audiences to recognize Chinese culture and values and achieve "people-to-people bond" between China and foreign countries.

"Hard power" in the short-term and long-term.

In short to medium term, China can prioritize food security cooperation in developing China-Africa relations.

Food security has always been a priority for African countries. Affected by foreign factors such as the *Covid* epidemic and excessive taxation of food in African countries, food prices in Africa are rising, and food is becoming increasingly scarce.

Regarding China-Africa agricultural cooperation, many people still think that China directly aids food, but this is not the case. As of the end of 2019, in terms of agricultural help, China has assisted in the construction of 20 agricultural technology demonstration centers in 19 African countries. China has concentrated on displaying China's advanced agricultural technology to African countries, building multilateral and bilateral technical cooperation platforms, and exploring market-oriented commercialization sustainable operating models.

China trains nearly 10,000 agricultural officials, technicians, farmers, and students annually for African countries. In the future, a series of agricultural cooperation dialogue mechanisms formed under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation should be continuously improved to ensure that the agricultural cooperation plans established at the macro level can be better put into practice.

In the long run, the high-quality development of the China-Africa "Maritime Silk Road" can be empowered through the blue economy.

Africa is an essential participant in global ocean governance, and ocean security and blue economy are the core contents of Africa's ocean governance. Although African countries have a strong desire to develop a blue economy, the foundation is weak and external cooperation is urgently needed. However, the development stage, technology, and management level of China's blue economy are in the middle of the global value chain. The strong willingness of both China and Africa and the robust matching between supply and demand can strengthen cooperation in the blue economy.

In the future, marine resource development, new port projects, ship repair, building, and marine energy can be listed as long-term development projects.