



China – Africa: High time for a common integrated African policy on China

Proceedings report

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Background

The Institute for Global Dialogue, in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and the Wits Africa- China Reporting Project (ACRP) held a one-day symposium at the University of the Witwatersrand on 20th July 2017, on the theme ***China – Africa: high time for a common integrated African policy on China.***

The symposium drew on South Africa's hosting of the Johannesburg Summit and 6th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in December 2015. The event marked the 15th year since the initiation of the FOCAC mechanism in 2000 and nearly a decade since the Beijing Summit of 2006. The 2nd FOCAC Summit adopted two outcome documents, namely the Johannesburg Declaration and the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018), laying out comprehensive plans for China-Africa relations and practical cooperation for the next three years through a range of new ideas and policies. As current co-chair of the Forum, South Africa is uniquely positioned to guide the consolidation of the African agenda in China-Africa engagements, including the realisation of greater synergy between the outcomes of Johannesburg and Africa's Agenda 2063. In line with increasing calls for a unified African policy and strategy, this symposium presented a platform to critically examine the prospects of a Pan-African policy and strategy to guide Africa's engagement with China, in addition to taking stock of the implementation of the Johannesburg Action Plan.

Symposium objectives and themes

With a focus on African agency, the symposium brought together wide-ranging participants including scholars, academics, diplomats, government representatives, media and civil society. The symposium sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To leverage South Africa's co-chairmanship of the FOCAC mechanism to initiate dialogue on an Africa policy towards China;
- To initiate dialogue leading to a coherent and coordinated Pan-African approach to engagement with China; and
- To consider broadly the role of external partners in developing a policy of Africa's engagement with them.

This proceedings report presents a synthesis of the discussions at the seminar and summarizes key policy recommendations and implications.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRP	Africa-China Reporting Project
AU	African Union
BOT	Build-Operate-Transfer
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCS	Centre for Chinese Studies
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
OBOR	One Belt One Road
MOU	Memoranda of Understanding
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
PRC	People's Republic of China
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction



Prof. Tawana Kupe, Vice-Principal, University of the Witwatersrand, opened the event by discussing the role of the ACRP. He highlighted the importance of events such as the dialogue on Africa-China relations in encouraging multi-disciplinary partnerships and cross-fertilization of fresh ideas and perspectives to address challenges of the 21st Century. Since the ACRP was convened in 2009, it has matured with time to tackle continental issues and partnerships; many stereotypes about China's entry into Africa exist, particularly because China's engagements are viewed using lenses of a colonial past.

The ACRP has disbursed 123 reporting grants to African and Chinese journalists, allowing them to travel and provide on the ground reporting and produce thousands of articles. Most general reporting is now done as a desktop study and so actual on-the-ground reporting is increasingly important. Moreover, the ACRP has provided training for reporting skills, investigative journalism, data collation and analysis; research, development and printing of policy briefs; post-graduate supervision of Masters and Doctoral students. Thus, demonstrating practical and well-sourced project outputs.

The world order is changing; Africa and China are a major geopolitical feature of the 21st Century. Thus, it is very important to understand each other. It is important to study the world as Africans, to create centres for excellence; for example, the Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS), as well as the African Centre for American Studies, which will open in February 2018. These centres are not just South African centres but inclusive of African partners.

Since the FOCAC was initiated in 2000, China has implemented two coherent policies on Africa, in 2006 and 2015. Africa does not have a China policy and it is in the best interest of all African countries to operate as a continent. There is often an assumption that Africa is a country and so Africa is treated as such. However, there is a lack of urgency by African countries to address this and there is a need for more structured engagement. The symposium's discussions represent a move forward, and so a policy framework towards China is pertinent.

Relations are often referred to as *China-Africa*, not *Africa-China* relations, which perpetuates an idea of Chinese dominance. It is important to promote African agency and frame discourse and themes appropriately. In promoting a common position to China through FOCAC, similarly, a common position towards all other partners, such as the USA, should be defined. Prof. Kupe closed his keynote address by highlighting that the symposium is not just a 'talk show', but a desire to work towards policy recommendations. Knowledge in this regard is thus important. He also noted that the ACRP intends to follow up on the policy recommendations at the next FOCAC in 2020.



Dr. Philani Mthembu, Executive Director, Institute for Global Dialogue, extended the conversation by framing the day's conference through an allegory. An article written by Hannah Ryder, (former head of Policy and Partnerships at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in China and now the founder and CEO of Project Syndicate). In the article, titled *The Imperialist People's Republic of Africa?*, the author refutes claims that China is a new world coloniser.

However, Ryder has also cautioned against the presumption that its growing footprint is benign. Thus, the onus remains on African actors to get their house in order and come together with concrete plans towards China. Such viewpoints have been voiced before and Chinese interests in Africa have been questioned time and time again. Washington and Brussels have warned Africans to be wary of China, which is partly based on a paternalistic approach and assumption that Africans cannot take care of themselves. These perceptions and fear mongering of China, may be counterproductive to African decision making; and instead empirical knowledge may be more useful. Africans should instead empower themselves to make decisions as well as remain conscious of developments in China. China has reached

the status of a Southern power, as it influences its own regions but also other regions across the world. For example, China has set up its first military base in Africa in Djibouti. Dr. Mthembu urged participants to actively engage in the symposium and participate in deliberations during the panel sessions and break-away groups. He concluded that fruitful engagement would go a long way in enhancing the outcome of the symposium through further research publications and dialogues.



Ms. Tamara Naidoo, Programme Manager, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), explored a view on China in the context of a new coloniser. In Davos, Switzerland, this year, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, defended economic globalisation at the World Economic Forum. European leaders have re-examined how they engage and deal with China. Sino-German relations have always been viewed as a synergy, and FES is interested in exploring this synergy between these two countries. At the same time, Germany needs to figure out how to manage its engagements with China. In 2013, Germany had accused China of dumping billions of dollars' worth of solar panels in the European market; this effected German manufacturers and leadership, but it also spoke to addressing bigger issues like climate change. In 2016, China unseated the US as Germany's largest trade partner, and is both an economic competitor and partner.

Relationships are changing at a rapid pace; just like Africa, Germany is trying to understand its role within the region and globally, and it is possible to draw parallels to African contexts too. While there are obvious differences between Africa and Europe, these regions have an important role to play in managing global governance. The solutions to today's challenges reflect in our future and so contribute to multilateral solutions.



Panel 1: Towards a common African Policy on China – Prospects, politics and challenges

Dr. Paul Tembe, Postdoctoral Fellow, Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute (TMALI), presented a position that was in opposition to a common Africa-China policy formulation strategy and questioned whether Africa needed a collective China strategy, while arguing that Africans should approach and understand China through Chinese culture.



The prospect of a common policy highlights a major point of contention; a common policy for who and what is common in Africa? It is important to debunk commonality, particularly because there are not too many instances of a common policy or resolution emanating from within Africa. He further stated that the China-Africa nomenclature has been problematic. Thus, it is important to rather phrase it as Africa-China. Another falsehood, or misconception, is that there is a large degree of misinformation, or ‘false speak’, about Africa and what China intends to do in Africa. It is important to sift out the relevant truths in the context of Africa and China and explore the possibilities that allow Africa to gain from

the partnership.

Dr. Tembe asserted that though the symposium’s discussions are focused on locating a rationale and operational framework for the promotion of African agency in the China-Africa cooperation, it is important to understand what influences decision makers to take pragmatic action; and how Africa can best draw a coherent roadmap – working in tandem, at collective continental and regional levels – that will help draw maximum shared benefits from its relations with China. This road map should not be based on an ideology, or idealism and elitism. Moreover, the focus on a collective or common policy would mean forgetting a number of historical elements, which is in itself linked to a number of false perceptions.

It is important to focus on bilateral relations between African countries and China, and allow these countries to create their own policies based on their own developmental priorities. This would allow African countries to refer to their own histories as well as individual relationships with China. In the past, our knowledge of China has been based on the parallel trajectory of anti-colonial struggles. Thus, the China that is known to Africa is perceived through lenses of anti-colonial struggles, solidarity, post-independence, and as an alternative partner of the African people. How can Africa then know and understand China beyond premises of romanticized solidarity? Particularly, when African observers are faced with Western-media fuelling an anti-China rhetoric.



China has been proactive in putting forth a roadmap through the FOCAC VI Action Plan 2016 -2018 and China’s second Africa Policy. Moreover, it has been reported that the China’s Africa strategy is complementary to Agenda 2063 because of the emphasis on mutual cooperation. However, asymmetries in these partnerships do exist. If Africa were to approach the Africa-China interaction through a common approach, it would be important to approach China by understanding China’s culture, history, politics, society, technology, and economy. Chinese culture is rooted in two main characteristics in the context of respect, honour, and the synergy among social networks and a relationship through giving and taking; *mianzi* (面子) and *guanxi* (关系). These two elements have been identified as central tools employed by individuals and nations in negotiations

and dealings in China. Moreover, they are likely to succeed when they are reciprocated. Some examples of the Chinese support for Africa through *mianzi* and *guanxi* can be seen in the aftermath of the 1971 African support for the People's Republic of China's (PRC) admission to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Although Africa has a shared colonial history, African countries have diverse realities and priorities and so African collective resolutions do not take into consideration the individual nation's domestic policies and developmental priorities. In order to bring about continental and individual change it is important to look beyond immediate initiatives like FOCAC. Currently, African countries are reactive in addressing current realities and not necessarily looking to the future. Dr. Tembe concluded that while South Africa has a contentious position on the continent, it is important to play a more meaningful role; and to make use of people who have experiences and insights into Chinese culture.



Dr. Bob Wekesa, Research Fellow, ACRP, University of the Witwatersrand, reiterated the point that language is important. The Chinese have many language proficiencies and yet there is an apprehension from African students and other individuals to approach other languages.

In Dr. Wekesa's view, it is possible to have an optimistic and forward-looking outlook that reimagines Africa. It is more important to have a particular Africa-China continental policy as a strategy that puts into action a number of steps that manifest into an optimistic and positive outlook. However, it appears as if Africa is waiting for China to suggest the way forward. This disposition strengthens the image that China is in the position to take the lead and extends the neo-colonial argument propagated in some quarters. This outlook tends to be pessimistic and accounts that China has overrun Africa, particularly when referring to the Chinese naval base in Djibouti, the expanse of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, and opposition to

diplomatic visits by the Dalai Lama, to name a few examples.

It is also important to inquire if Africa has a China policy, or if its engagement is on an ad hoc basis. In Africa, few countries have declared their foreign policy intent in official policy documents available for public viewership. By comparison, China has a clear foreign policy towards Africa. A great number of stereotypes are still equated to Africa on a regular basis. For example, Africa is approached as one country. Therefore, it is urgent to mobilise African agency in order to counter such stereotyping. In moving towards African-Agency, Dr. Wekesa suggested the following:

- A policy roadmap that can be considered a starting point for an Africa-China policy is the African Union's Agenda 2063;
- It is important to take a wider view of geopolitics and analyse China's policy to Africa, and the complementarities between the FOCAC and the AU's Agenda 2063;
- It is important to make use of the rhetoric of Ubuntu, African renaissance and African solutions to African problems. These popular concepts are important to mobilising African agency;
- The strategy underpinning Africa-China interactions needs to have both bilateral and multilateral dimensions;
- Africans should not stop at a China policy, but also apply it to their interactions with the US, EU, and other external powers; and
- In working towards a policy, small working groups should be constituted to work on various layers in compiling a document that contributes to a multifaceted policy.





Ms. Yu-Shan Wu, Senior Researcher, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), underscored the importance of the symposium's theme especially in view of the next FOCAC engagement. The increased momentum in China's master plan for global connectivity prompts the question: is China the new driver for globalisation?

FOCAC is the clearest example of policy whereby documents are available publicly and widely. At the last FOCAC forum in 2015, it was possible to see that Chinese engagement has evolved over time. The forum will remain relevant if both sides keep it that way. Recently, the focus of the FOCAC relationship has shifted to support industry and infrastructure and there have been interesting points of discussion such as the African agenda, regionalisation and where Africa fits into OBOR. China is starting to engage in less traditional areas, such as peace and security and the curtailment of illegal wildlife trade.

With AU reform proposals, exemplified by the Kagame Report, there is a desire to move towards a common African policy. These initiatives seek to enhance African agency towards external partners, and would need to be backed by high-level endorsements and political will for them to succeed. For instance, there have been attempts to streamline AU policies and South African diplomats have implemented some of these continental policies at a bilateral level. This is an example that encourages a common policy through multilateral interaction.

In discussing a common African policy towards China, a number of questions need to be addressed: What is Africa's policy response to external partners in general? How would a common policy be formulated to address the reality of structural issues? How would the proposed policy be implemented logistically? Who would be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of projects? And lastly, does Africa have the diplomatic capacity to ensure that the proposed policy is carried out?

More importantly, in considering if Africa can be expected to talk with one voice, what are the particular realities in Africa, and is Africa ready to integrate and for proximity issues arising from migration and xenophobia?

In conclusion, Ms. Wu noted that at an institutional level, namely the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), it is possible to formulate a common policy that addresses certain tasks.

Questions and comments from participants

In the context of trade and infrastructure, much of the commentary sought clarity on the exact involvement of Chinese corporations in Africa as well as the perception that African countries are not proactive enough to secure the best outcomes from the FOCAC engagement. In terms of South Africa's engagement with China, there was concern about the type of trade that is focused on exporting raw materials as opposed to adding value to them. The quality of trade between Africa and China will thus remain an important arena to observe as the relationship continues to mature. While many Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) have been signed between Africa and China, it remains important to ensure that they are implemented instead of lying dormant. A number of opportunities were acknowledged in the relationship, such as the rebalancing of the Chinese economy, however the perception remained evident that there is a lack of African agency in Africa-China cooperation, which then also contributes to misconceptions and omissions of China's actual engagement with South Africa and Africa.

China's naval base in Djibouti was used as an entry point for discussing security issues on the continent. The initial discussion debated the intention of China's military presence in Africa, and reminded members of the audience that traditional powers such as France, the United States, and Japan already have military bases in Djibouti, while one should be cognisant that this is China's first base anywhere in the world, whereas the United States has approximately 800 military bases throughout the world. The naval base would be well positioned to contribute to the overall security of the Gulf of Aden, which has seen a rise in piracy since 2011, and would thus encourage more regular port visits. Strategically, this military presence contributes to soft power diplomacy through the interactions with mobile doctors and engineers and protects OBOR business interests.

The potential of cultural exchanges through the promotion of mandarin was discussed. It was highlighted that the Chinese government has been proactive in sending its citizens to acquire African language skills. Although African counterparts have been slow in absorbing and consulting with graduates that have studied in China, there is an opportunity to make effective

use of this human resource for enhancing Africa's engagement with China. Indeed, African students that have studied in China and acquired advanced language and cultural skills should be used strategically in enhancing Africa's agency. While the need for Africa to have a more coherent approach to China and other external powers was expressed, it was also felt that the codification of a formalised policy may not necessarily be realistic at present, since regional integration had not yet advanced to the extent of empowering the AU Commission to negotiate on behalf of the continent. For example, an African FOCAC policy would have to address the divergences between Anglophone African economies, and Francophone African economies that are closer to the French systems of financial governance.

Break-Away Sessions

Group 1: Key pillars of cooperation including industrialisation, trade and investment, green development, infrastructure, poverty reduction, and security cooperation. Do these match Africa's needs?

Participants that took part in the first group argued that when one looks at media accounts and available literature, a win-win scenario is not really seen; asymmetrical relationships are more visible or perceived. This perception is often centred on trade and investment in the natural resources industry, where raw materials are leaving the country as opposed to value-added products. It was additionally argued that Africa is seeking export markets for raw materials as we do not have the levels of industrialisation necessary to add value to the export products. Moreover, illicit activities, like illegal logging and exportation in Mozambique and in Gabon and the ivory and wild life trade across Africa, to name two examples, point to an urgent need for a coherent Africa-China policy. Although some of these problems, linked to the illicit economy are domestic due to corrupt activities and the lack of formal employment opportunities, a key contributing factor is the lack of policy interventions. In contrast to Africa, China has been able to drastically expand its manufacturing capacity as well as improve the quality of exports from China and has mastered the art of producing products and the large-scale availability of cheap labour allowed them to take advantage. The question is how Africa can achieve the levels of industrialisation and production of China, while addressing socio-economic inequalities.



These examples show the gaps in the FOCAC engagement and point that it may not necessarily be a win-win relationship as is often described. In terms of agency, African countries are culpable for not taking enough initiative to improve governance and driving the partnership in a direction that improves the lives of Africans. Particularly, some of the criticism was that Chinese partnerships do not abide by prescribed human and labour rights, and that local needs are not being taken care of. Another perception of the FOCAC engagement is that the rates or level of employment of Africans in Chinese projects in Africa is low and tends not to comply with our laws and regulations. This issue is linked to the levels of corruption in African societies, whereby elite groups are often connected with Chinese projects and subsequently benefit unduly. There is a perception that Chinese labour and skills have a higher calibre than the current skilled labour force available in Africa.

These perceptions certainly shed light into how the Africa-China partnership is often portrayed, and presents interesting aspects for researchers to either confirm or debunk with more empirical research. Indeed, some of the work of scholars such as Deborah Brautigam has been dedicated towards these very aspects of research, debunking some of the often-prevalent myths about China's engagement in Africa. Institutions such as IGD and the Wits ACRP should thus be at the forefront of presenting credible, objective, and empirically rich scholarship about Africa's engagement with China. In the absence of this,

narratives about the relationship will continue to be shaped by external voices carrying their own biases and interests, instead of being shaped by Africans themselves.

In addition, it was seen as increasingly important to also learn from the negative examples of China's rapid growth and manufacturing experience. Indeed, African countries must take into account contemporary sustainable methods of development and minimise environmental degradation when seeking to move up the value chain. Africa's industrialisation can thus make use of modern technological advancements to put their development path on a more sustainable trajectory. With poverty and weak governance being a problem in many countries across the African continent, it was also important to acknowledge the success stories in terms of Chinese investments. For example, a Hi Sense factory in Atlantis (Western Cape, South Africa), which sources 98% of its workers from the local community, amounting to over 500 local employees. It is equally important that these success stories transcend to a larger scale across the continent.

Group 2: Soft Power, cultural exchanges, people to people engagement, public diplomacy and role of the media: How has this influenced perceptions of China?

Given that cultural awareness is spread through the media, participants in this group felt that the Chinese government has a coherent media policy that is supported in events and is disseminated from government to embassies and consulates. However, it was indeed acknowledged that African perceptions of the Chinese media, and China's presence in Africa are not always backed by empirical data since there have not been many comprehensive studies in this area. However, institutions such as the Wits ACRP were indeed playing an important role in bridging this gap and equipping journalists and researchers with the right tools to study and report on relations based on their own vantage point within the African continent. Public opinion about Chinese media in Africa was divided; and some perceived that the real goal of Chinese media is to make friends, which has been largely successful. The remainder of the group believed it was important to be wary of Chinese soft power influences through media. There was however agreement that the growing presence of Chinese media allows for greater people-to-people exchanges through journalists, official partnerships, skills and technology transfer through digital material and technical equipment and funds being put into African media provides greater potential to learn.



Although Chinese media has breached African satellite and terrestrial broadcasting, viewership is still low. Thus, an information gap persists in communicating about cultures. From the available interactions, it is possible to deduce that the Chinese are open to building upon the existing foundations in communication through media and soft power, but Africans are holding back and under-utilising the media and their own soft power to improve the FOCAC partnership. African nation states and regions must thus be more proactive in utilising the evolving media landscape to shape the evolving narrative about Africa.

In spite of attempts to depict Africa in a positive way, there is still a long way to go, and African issues are still reported from a stereotypical position. Although Chinese media presence allows for alternative spaces to frame international narratives, the structure of such narratives remains largely unchanged in the sense that others are telling the African story. It is thus important to encourage African agency in taking ownership of narratives.

The remaining challenge expressed by the group included concerns with censorship in the media landscape. In Africa, the media and press is largely driven either by the respective government or by corporatism. The leeway to censor information in order to frame a particular narrative, is thus problematic in terms of good governance and civil liberties. The Chinese government is consistently critiqued on its censorship of the media. However, the Chinese government and private investment in corporate media environments do not necessarily face the same problems with driving a particular narrative as it is possible to buy advertising time.

Group 3: African agency and how to maximise Africa's comparative advantages, South Africa's role as Co-chair?

There is a need for the establishment and maintenance of a network between decision makers, academics and people on the ground with experience in relations with China for the sharing of information on the best way to structure Africa-China relations. Civil society and academics will need to play a bigger role in efforts to maximise Africa's comparative advantages; the information shared at conferences and symposiums should not end there but be compiled into documents that can be brought to the attention of policy makers and government officials to influence the policy agenda.

Although Africa is a continent with different states that have different national interests, there are issues that unite the continent: industrialisation and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), the need for skills development and training, environmental pollution, as well as peace and security initiatives. These are issues where African agency can be enforced and implemented through regional economic communities and other continental institutions. It was also argued that perhaps formulating a number of regional frameworks that will be in line with a common vision, which are promoted by regional organisations and countries may link common African positions and direct them to common policies before addressing a common African policy.

In order to promote African agency outwardly, African states need to be made aware of the importance of having a cohesive foreign policy, since this serves as a clear indication of where the state wants to be and how it intends to get there. An Africa-China policy can be implemented on various levels; the AU as the continental level with a general framework for a plan that will be to the benefit of Africa, whereby this plan will not be rigid and allows for regions and individual states to structure their own plans that will be in line with their domestic interests. These approaches are not seeking to reinvent the wheel but merely draw from current matters, for example, Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations (also known as the Ezulwini Consensus).



Panel 2: Taking Stock of Implementation – the Johannesburg Action Plan 2016 – 2018, Key milestones and the way forward.



Mr. Mahdi Basadien, Director: China, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, opened his discussion by outlining the implementation of the South African-Chinese partnership of the Johannesburg Plan of Action (2016 – 2018), which was an outcome of the previous FOCAC summit.

Initiatives included: High-Level Mutual visits and dialogues; regular political consultations between Chinese and African Foreign Ministries; increase in trade of agricultural products (particularly beef products); transfer of labour-intensive competitive industrial capacities of China to Africa (particularly Beijing Automotive Group (BAIC) Plant at Coega, and motivating Chinese businesses and financial Institutions to expand investment through various means such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) (particularly in the case of Moloto Rail Development Corridor); planning of building transnational and trans-regional infrastructure in Africa (Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), championing “the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” which includes the African Continent, the Bilateral MoU on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century

Maritime Silk Road; support for Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Industrial Parks by competitive Chinese enterprises (particularly in Gauteng Science and High Technology SEZ); and enhanced cooperation in entry-and-exit inspections and quarantine of animals and plants, and food safety and phytosanitary supervision (with particular reference to the MoU on Entry-and-Exit Animal Quarantine signed on 24 February 2017).

In terms of driving the implementation of South Africa's FOCAC agreed outcomes, South Africa has formed a FOCAC Secretariat which is co-chaired by the Director-General in the Presidency, Dr. CR Lubisi and the Director-General of DIRCO, Mr. KE Mahoi. The FOCAC Secretariat monitors the status of the implementation of the Priority Projects and mitigates any challenges that may arise. This Secretariat convenes regularly with all stakeholders to assess the status of implementation. There is a FOCAC Projects Coordinator within DIRCO who coordinates the progress with regard to the proposed Priority Projects. Selected Priority Projects have completed their feasibility studies and others are in the process of finalising their Feasibility Studies. Moving forward, it is envisaged that FOCAC Senior Officials' Meetings will bring together senior officials from all relevant Departments to evaluate progress made regarding the Priority Projects and those which are ready to be tabled during the proposed FOCAC Ministerial Meeting, which will meet on the margins of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) during September 2017.



Mr. Yewen Xiao, Counsellor, Embassy of China, reiterated the outcomes of the 2015 FOCAC summit, noting that priority would be given to the implementation of ten major China-Africa cooperation plans in industrialization, agricultural modernization and other aspects. He noted that cooperation for China is pragmatic; and similarly, counterparts are also following a strategy of pragmatic cooperation. China is Africa's largest trade partner, and Africa is the third largest investment destination and the second largest contract engineering market for China. Moreover, China is becoming more aware of the type of partnerships that African countries need to focus on; for example, the Chinese government has bolstered the Special Loan agreement for the Development of African Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), focused on the development of infrastructure such as the Addis Ababa to Djibouti, Mombasa to Nairobi, and Abuja to Kaduna railways, and developing SEZs. However, the report back emphasises the employment opportunities for Africa that this partnership has generated.

Chinese representatives feel that they are living up to a beneficial cooperation between China and Africa through the spirit of equality, mutual benefit, efficiency and practical results, pointing to the vast potential and great prospects of win-win cooperation between China and Africa.

It was emphasised that the Chinese government found great success with its cooperation with South Africa and thus expressed that the Chinese government models its interaction with Africa according to the South African model of interaction. Since the Johannesburg Summit, the Chinese-South African partnership has covered sectors such as industrialization, the promotion of SEZs and the blue economy, infrastructure, IT application, financing, tourism, people-to-people exchanges, and human resources development.

With regard to the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Africa may be well positioned to conduct more strategic and practical cooperation with China in a larger landscape. This is linked to and considered FOCAC cooperation. Lastly, there is an awareness of existing policies, FOCAC and the AU Agenda 2063, which serves as a structure that promotes industrial alignment and capacity cooperation, as well as opening up new dimensions for business cooperation.

Questions and comments from participants

The audience's engagement with the panel focused on the following areas: the link between FOCAC and the OBOR initiative, investor relations in Africa, dormant MOUs, China's military presence in the Gulf of Aden, and the possibility of an encompassing Africa-China policy.

The first focus area was the question of the link between FOCAC and OBOR. There is an inclination to assume that OBOR seems to be taking precedence over existing initiatives. In response, Counsellor Xiao expressed that there is no contradiction or confrontation between existing partnerships like FOCAC and OBOR; he further expressed that the Chinese government sees that there are more opportunities because they are two major projects and OBOR is a new public product that has attracted more participants. These projects are separate but connected through a historical and natural extension.

Some participants noted that investors coming into Africa present a concern for the respective governments, particularly because of reports of poor labour practices. Moreover, in cases of government intervention in business malpractice, employees have not been represented by unions or civil society. Thus, there is a gap whereby policy and procedure may facilitate this engagement. Counsellor Xiao expressed an accord with a common Africa-China policy given that the purpose of China-Africa cooperation is to achieve the common interest of people, through a clear policy directive. Before FOCAC, partnership between Africa and China was limited; thus problems may emerge which may be linked to the FOCAC partnership, but may be addressed through mutual cooperation. It is thus important to clarify a number of perceptions; from the Chinese side, the partnership is viewed with an overarching focus on common development, common prosperity and to mobilise outcomes of the summit. Although accounts might be exaggerated, and while data can be used for particular political and economic interests, it remains important to look at what has been achieved and to judge objectively and independently.

With regard to dormant MOUs, it was important to explore what mechanisms exist in order to monitor new and old agreements. It was argued that this is a gap within the partnership. DIRCO has a facilitator role and is not responsible for other sectoral MOUs; however, representatives have written to all government departments to provide a status report on what has been signed, implemented, become dormant, taken off the table, and which future agreements will be signed. There has been an effort to implement MOUs and high priority has been given to those that are closest to expiration. Lastly, each project that has been reported has been facilitated and evaluated according to procedure.

The issue of China's military presence in the Gulf of Aden was linked to a larger discussion about cooperation between China, the UN and AU. The promotion of business and economic interests in the region are of importance to China and so the naval base in Djibouti is of significance in order to facilitate military logistics. Mr. Xiao explained that this base is in accordance with China's policy of self-defence; and the presence of Chinese military forces in the region was reached through friendly consultation. Moreover, the Chinese government sees the Djibouti base as an opportunity to carry UN counter-piracy missions, particularly in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. By building a logistical space in Africa, China may conduct convoy missions with greater ease.

In terms of an overall policy for Africa to adopt in its interaction with China, it was expressed that FOCAC does engage African countries through the AU, although many agreements take place at the bilateral level. Thus, at a continental level, it may be possible to see an overall approach and understanding of FOCAC, but that monitoring and evaluation is dependent on bilateral relations. South Africa employs a particular approach to doing business with China, however it has not been formalised. The Chinese government has also sought to model its interaction with Africa according to their South African model of cooperation. This is not to say that African countries should follow suit and adopt a South African approach towards China, but it is possible to learn a number of lessons that may work in particular contexts.

Policy Recommendations moving towards FOCAC 2018

Although there is disagreement with regard to the proposition of a common policy, there is agreement that a coherent document on African positions and African agency will have an impact with more stakeholders. This document would work towards a coherent approach to engaging China and other external powers. It will also have to address the multiple layers of engagement, using different layers of analysis to work towards coherence. The following recommendations emerged:

- 1) To realise a coherent document, stakeholders and conference participants, including experts, researchers, scholars, civil society, media representatives, public officials and any other interested parties, should form networks, which should engage in working groups heading towards the next FOCAC meeting;
- 2) There should be greater coordination with regard to second track diplomacy and engagement away from purely state-centric interactions;

- 3) Empirical knowledge for informed decision-making for citizens and government elites needs to be easily available and frequently disseminated. This would encourage stakeholders to follow up on existing MOUs, preventing them from becoming dormant.
- 4) Policy recommendations related to the *key pillars of cooperation*:
 - a. The partnership should be reviewed more proactively by African counterparts in order to craft responsive solutions to local conditions;
 - b. African leaders need to be held accountable in their interactions with China and other global powers. It is envisaged that multiple stakeholders, such as those that participated in the symposium must lead such an initiative and remain engaged in Africa-China relations both collectively and from their various focal areas.
- 5) Policy recommendations linked to *Soft Power, cultural exchanges, people to people engagement, public diplomacy and role of the media*:
 - a. There is an opportunity to communicate and share information with general populations as well as elite decision-makers. This would require creating greater awareness of China, Chinese culture and opportunities.
 - b. Chinese media has breached Africa; however, it is important to shape the African narrative and encourage African agency by also breaching the Chinese media.
 - c. It is important to seek African agency in developing communication strategies across the continent. African countries thus need to create cross-cultural diplomacy strategies, as they cannot engage the East in the same way that the West has been engaged.
- 6) Policy recommendations in view of *African agency and how to maximise Africa's comparative advantages, South Africa's role as Co-chair*:
 - a. While a number of African documents that highlight common positions already exist, it is important to draw from these examples when addressing future working groups; and
 - b. The role of academics and members of civil society may be an effective way in driving and communicating African agency.
 - c. There is a need for the establishment and maintenance of a network between decision makers, academics and people on the ground with experience in relations with China for the sharing of information on the best way to structure Africa-China relations.



Closing Remarks



Mr. Barry van Wyk, Project Coordinator, ACRP, concluded by focusing on the importance of formulating common African positions towards China. China has an African policy, outlined in their 2006 and 2015 Africa policies, which allows for a more coherent strategy when engaging with 54 African countries. However, Africa does not have a China policy; moreover, several African countries do not have their own declared foreign policies, which are available to the public. The symposium was able to make progress in developing African positions towards China but not in terms of an overall African policy towards China. It may be noted that one of the biggest challenges to Africa is to act in a strategic manner, as a region and continent. Mr. van Wyk further asked if it is possible for Africa to be expected to speak with one voice and to integrate more closely. Furthermore, if Africa had a common position, would particular actors or individuals lead such an integration of African policy; and whether or not the private sectors of China and African countries could be mobilised.

It may be possible to address these questions by attempting to formulate common African positions on specific issues of common interest, and then to build from there. It is important to start with what African states agree on. What might emerge from this discussion is not necessarily a common African policy but a common African framework that utilises a multi-pronged approach. For this to be achieved, various African networks like this one here today can be integrated and operationalised to feed into a common African framework. This framework may include specific issues of common interest, such as environmental issues and industrialisation, which may highlight that African agency can take a unified position.

The onus is on Africa to get its house in order and to develop concrete plans towards engagement with China. In addition, it is essential to make use of empirical knowledge, which informs the Africa-China relationship and allows stakeholders to make constructive decisions. As part of this effort, Africans should enquire into what such an African policy would look like, and how to best embody African agency by means of a coherent road map, particularly because much of the current discourse, taxonomy and paradigms are based on colonialism. Africa must base its deliberations on a thorough understanding of China and Chinese culture so it can then approach China in a more prepared manner. Africa has various structures in place to engage with China, notably FOCAC.

However, it is becoming vital for Africa to question whether or not it must look beyond FOCAC and OBOR, and if these institutions that can facilitate African agency appropriately. In carrying the agenda forward, it was emphasized that the networks that are formed around the symposium would continue practically via working groups to develop a coherent document and involve more stakeholders, thus aiming to make a decisive impact on developing an African framework towards China by the next FOCAC meeting in 2018.



Dr. Philani Mthembu, Executive Director, Institute for Global Dialogue, closed by expressing the importance of sustaining and expanding networks in the aftermath of the symposium through involvement in working groups. He also highlighted the existing capacity to map a coherent direction towards a position and framework, and involve key stakeholders. In addition, it will be important to sustain momentum and action in realising the move from words to deeds. Lastly, in considering the relationship with China, questions persist around perceptions of China in Africa and vice versa. In light of the deliberations during the symposium, it will be vital to re-evaluate Africa's approach to China and to examine how to engage more strategically.

Acknowledgements

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Programme



Symposium: *China –Africa: high time for a common integrated African policy on China*

20th July 2017, Senate Room, University of the Witwatersrand

- 09:30- 10:00 Arrival & Registration
- 10:00 – 10:30 Welcome and Opening Remarks:
- Prof. Tawana Kupe**, Vice-Principal, University of the Witwatersrand
Dr. Philani Mthembu, Executive Director, IGD
Ms. Tamara Naidoo, Programme manager, FES
- 10:30- 12:00 *Panel 1: Towards A Common African Policy on China: prospects, politics and challenges.*
- Chair: *Dr. Philani Mthembu, Executive Director, IGD*
Speakers:
Dr. Paul Tembe, *Post-doctoral Fellow, TMALI*
Dr. Bob Wekesa, *Research Fellow, ACRP*
Ms. Yu-Shan Wu, *Senior Researcher, Foreign Policy, SAIIA*
- 12:00-12:30 Q & A session and discussion
- Briefing on breakout sessions
- 12:30-13:30 Lunch
- 13:30-14:15 Breakaway sessions
- Group 1: Key pillars of cooperation including industrialisation, trade and investment, green development, infrastructure, poverty reduction, security cooperation etc. do these match Africa's needs?*
- Group 2: Soft power, cultural exchanges, people to people engagement, public diplomacy, role of media: how has this influenced perceptions of China in Africa?*
- Group 3: African agency and how to maximise Africa's comparative advantages, South Africa's role as Co-chair?*
- 14:15 -15:00 Reports and feedback from sessions
- 15:00- 15:30 Tea break
- 15:30- 17:00 *Panel 2: Taking stock of implementation of Johannesburg Action Plan 2016-2018: key milestones and the way forward*

Chair: *Ms. Meryl Burgess, Research Fellow, CCS*

Speakers:

Mr. Mahdi Basadien, *Director: China, DIRCO*

Mr. Xiao Yewen, *Counsellor, Embassy of China,*

17:00-17:30 Q & A session and discussion

17:30-18:00 Concluding remarks and wrap-up:

Mr. Barry Van Wyk, *Project Coordinator, ACRP*

Further contact information on symposium partners IGD, ACRP and FES



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