



Chinese workers at a construction site in Africa (David Haberlah)

China, Africa and the Environment

A Briefing Paper on the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation

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Executive Summary

The fourth summit conference of the Forum for China Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) will take place in Sharm-el Sheikh, Egypt, on November 8-9, 2009. The FOCAC process has so far resulted in an impressive strengthening of the cooperation between China and Africa, and has reduced Africa's dependency on Western powers. Yet from a civil society perspective, the process has two fundamental shortcomings: It has boosted financial and economic cooperation, but has so far neglected to deal seriously with the environmental challenges that have arisen as a consequence of the rapidly growing cooperation. Furthermore, while FOCAC has opened the door to the business sector, it has so far excluded civil society from its deliberations. There is a risk that the business relations between China and Africa may undermine the positive achievements of the FOCAC process if social and environmental concerns are not considered more seriously.

This paper provides background information about the FOCAC process, takes stock of the implementation of the commitments made at earlier FOCAC summits, and offers recommendations on how the upcoming challenges of the process can be addressed.

Background

The Forum for China Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) was established in 2000, with the first Ministerial Meeting taking place in Beijing in October of that year.¹ Instituted at the instigation of Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the African group of Ambassadors, FOCAC was China's largest multilateral undertaking at the time. The first summit produced the Beijing Declaration, a document that affirmed the consensus between China and Africa on international development issues.

The initial summit was followed in 2003 by FOCAC's second Ministerial Conference in Addis Ababa. FOCAC II served to consolidate Sino-African relations and identify further areas of cooperation in the areas of trade, economic assistance and cultural exchange. The Chinese delegation announced a Special Preferential Tariff Treatment program that, when it was implemented in January 2005, removed import tariffs on 190 different items from 25 African countries.² The program presented an opportunity for the countries involved to diversify exports to China, and has resulted in a substantial boost to trade with the PRC.

The year 2006 was declared the year of China-Africa relations by the Chinese leadership. January of that year heralded the release of China's African Policy Paper. This document reiterated China's policy of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of other states. The paper confirmed rhetoric dating back to President Jiang Zemin's declaration in 1996 that the five cornerstones of

China's Africa policy were "sincere friendship, equality, unity and co-operation, common development, and looking to the future."³ This foundation has been re-affirmed and expanded by the current Chinese President, Hu Jintao, in his six pillars of Sino-African relations. These are non-interference, African ownership in dealing with problems, mutual trust and co-operation, the increase of economic assistance with limited political conditions, lobbying for the international community to pay more attention to Africa, and the promotion of an international environment more conducive to Africa's development.⁴

The most recent FOCAC forum was held in Beijing in November 2006 and was attended by representatives of 48 African countries at head of state or senior government official level. At FOCAC III, China made further promises to provide support to the African continent. President Hu Jintao announced an eight-point pledge of support (see box),⁵ and promised that China would forgive all interest-free loans to the most heavily indebted and poorest African nations that matured at the end of 2008.

An Audit of China's Pledges at FOCAC III

The Forum on China-Africa Co-operation was not the first multilateral forum to be established between African countries and Asia.⁶ Particularly since 2006, it has however received the most attention. This is partly due to the Western worries about China's growing relations with African countries, and partly to the generous pledges announced by Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2006. It is expected that

¹ For a detailed description of events leading up to and following the first two FOCAC Summits, see Eastday, "China-Africa relations board the ship of a new century," 3 March 2006. Available at: <http://english.eastday.com/eastday/englishedition/node20665/node20668/node22811/node169606/node169609/node169616/node169618/userobject1ai2414979.html>

² These include Benin, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia.

³ Holslag, Jonathan (2006) "China's New Mercantilism in Central Africa," *African and Asian Studies* 5(2): p145.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p146.

⁵ Hu, Jintao, *Address at the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation*, 4 November 2006: p6-10.

⁶ The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) was first held in 1993. This forum lost momentum towards the late 1990's and was effectively eclipsed by FOCAC, despite recent attempts by Japanese policy-makers to revive it.

The Pledges of FOCAC III

At FOCAC III, President Hu Jintao pledged that China would take the following measures:

- To extend US\$3 billion in preferential loans and \$2 billion in preferential buyer's credits over the next three years;
- To double the amount of assistance to Africa between 2006 and 2009;
- To initiate a China-Africa Development Fund that would reach \$5 billion to encourage Chinese companies to invest in Africa;
- To increase the preferential zero-tariff treatment from 190 to more than 440 products;
- To train 15,000 African professionals in China;
- To establish 10 agricultural technology demonstration centres in Africa over the next three years;
- To build 30 hospitals and to provide \$37.5 million in grants to help fight malaria;
- To dispatch 100 senior agricultural experts to Africa;
- To build 100 rural schools and increase the number of Chinese government scholarships for Africans to study in China from 2,000 to 4,000 by 2009.

the upcoming FOCAC IV conference will not usher in a new round of pledges from China, but will act as a kind of follow-up process to the previous commitments.

The monitoring of the FOCAC process is largely driven by China. As one African diplomat pointed out,⁷ this is not China's fault, but rather the result of a lack of an African counterpart to the China-based FOCAC Follow-up Secretariat. The African Group of Ambassadors in Beijing has informally assumed the role of a counterpart. A more appropriate solution would be the establishment of an official African FOCAC follow-up secretariat at the seat of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, although Morocco, a member of FOCAC but not of the AU, has objections to this. The lack of such a mechanism further serves to illustrate that while China has a policy on Africa, Africa does not yet have a co-ordinated regional policy on China.

⁷ Interview with the author, Beijing, 8 September 2009.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a review of the FOCAC implementation projects in 2008.⁸ A Chinese academic think-tank, the Shanghai Institute of International Affairs, has also published a slim volume assessing the execution of the FOCAC pledges.⁹ Both reports provided evidence that the implementation of the Chinese pledges was well on track. A Chinese government official and a counselor at the Chinese embassy in Nigeria recently reported separately that China's commitments under FOCAC III had been fulfilled and many of the targets exceeded (see box on next page).¹⁰

⁸ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Implementation of Follow-up Actions of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation," May 2008. Available at: www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t459449.htm

⁹ Li, Weijian [李伟建], *中非合作论坛北京峰会：评估与展望* [Beijing Summit and the Third Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation: Appraisal and Prospects], 上海国际问题研究院 [Shanghai Institutes for International Studies], December 2008.

¹⁰ Wang Chengan [王成安], "中非关系60年回顾与展望" ["60 Years of China-Africa relations: Reflections and Prospects"] held by The Institute of West Asian and

Taking Stock of FOCAC III Pledges

According to Chinese sources, China has taken the following actions to implement its promises under FOCAC III:

- By September 2009, China had completed more than 90% of its assistance plan and was on course to double its assistance of 2006 by the end of 2009;
- So far, China has provided over \$2.65 billion (of a committed \$3 billion) in preferential loans for 53 projects, and has provided the full committed \$2 billion of preferential buyer's credit to support 11 projects;
- China has created the China-Africa Development Fund with an initial capital of \$1 billion; the Fund has so far invested \$400 million in 24 projects;
- China has freed 478 African export items from any tariffs, compared with a commitment of 440 items;
- 150 out of a pledged 168 interest-free government loans to 32 (of 33) HIPC countries had been forgiven (by December 2008);
- 19 of a pledged 30 hospitals were under construction, 10 of a pledged 30 anti-malarial centres were completed, with 10 more due for construction, and 49 out of a pledged 100 rural schools were under construction (by December 2008);
- 263 training programmes for 6,432 African professionals from 49 countries had been conducted (by December 2008);
- 158 of the pledged 300 youth volunteers had been sent, 100 agro-technicians had been selected and dispatched to 35 African countries, and over 1,000 Chinese medical personnel were working in 40 African countries (by December 2008).

Despite some complaints about a lack of consultation, African governments seem to agree that the FOCAC process has been broadly successful and that China has implemented all pledges from 2006.¹¹ There is concern however that despite the success in “getting boots on the ground,” there is no follow-up mechanism to assess the impact of these activities and to ensure that they have enough in-country support to effectively undertake their programs.

African Studies [亚非学院所], Beijing, 13 October 2009, and Rong Yansong, “China committed to FOCAC Beijing Summit implementation,” People’s Daily Online, 3 November 2009. Available at: www.peoplesdaily-online.com/index.php/news/foreign-a-diplomatic-scene/115-foreign-a-diplomatic-scene/4707-china-committed-to-focac-beijing-summit-implementation-

¹¹Interview, Beijing 8 September 2009.

Expectations for FOCAC IV

The forthcoming FOCAC meeting will be held in Sharm-el Sheikh, Egypt, on November 8-9, 2009. It will not be a Heads of State summit as was the case three years ago, but a meeting of ministers, senior officials and business leaders.¹² Each participating African country was invited to send the Minister of Foreign Affairs and a minister with an economic or finance portfolio.¹³ Expected

¹² The location is significant as Egypt was the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. According to an African diplomat, it is likely that Heads of State summits will be called at on *ad hoc* basis, rather than through an established convention.

¹³ Every African country with diplomatic relations with China may participate in the Forum. Those four African countries that do not have diplomatic relations with China (Burkina Faso, Gambia, São Tomé e Príncipe, Swaziland)

outcomes include a political statement or “declaration,” along the lines of those promulgated at previous FOCAC summits, and an Action Plan for the 2010-2012 period.

This year’s FOCAC is expected to focus on consolidating the political and economic gains in the China-Africa relations achieved within the past ten years. Given the impact of the financial crisis, it is unlikely that a new raft of pledges like those from FOCAC III will be announced. Rather, efforts will be made to follow-up on the prior promises and to resolve diplomatic and economic challenges that have arisen as a result of closer engagement. For instance, the China-Africa Development Fund, which was launched in June 2007 with a potential US\$5 billion to encourage Chinese investors to invest in Africa, has only managed to finance projects of approximately \$400 million to date (see above).¹⁴

The strengthened relations with China allow African countries to balance their relations with Western governments, companies and institutions. The Chinese commitment to follow up on the promises it has made under the FOCAC framework is impressive, even more so if it is compared with the inadequate follow-up of Western governments to their promises at G8 meetings and other summits. Yet from a civil society processes, there are two fundamental gaps which the upcoming FOCAC summit should address:

- FOCAC has so far neglected to deal with the environmental challenges which the intensified trade and investment flows between China and

Africa have brought about;

- FOCAC has opened the door to the business sector, but has remained closed to Chinese and African civil society. Like earlier FOCAC summits, FOCAC IV does not offer any access to non-government organizations and other civil society groups.

Integrating Environmental Concerns into FOCAC

While FOCAC offers a platform to discuss and strengthen the multilateral cooperation between China and Africa, the bulk of the diplomatic and economic relations take place outside the Forum’s framework. Chinese investment in Africa has increased rapidly, and trade between China and Africa has grown approximately 20-fold since 1999. These trade and investment relations must take social and environmental concerns into account, or they will risk undermining the progress achieved within FOCAC.

China’s rapidly growing economic relations with Africa have serious implications for the continent’s environment for a variety of reasons: Chinese investments in Africa have a strong focus on sectors that are environmentally sensitive (such as oil and gas, mining, hydropower, and timber), and on infrastructure projects that help to facilitate environmentally sensitive investments (such as roads, railway and transmission lines). While investments in the mining, oil, gas, hydropower and timber sectors generally carry high environmental risks, Chinese companies are prepared to break new ground by making previously inaccessible resources accessible. They are developing projects in remote, ecologically fragile regions, in areas that have so far been protected as national parks, and in countries with weak governance structures. This strategy compounds the environmental risks inherent in extractive and infrastructure projects.¹⁵

are invited to attend as observers.

¹⁴ This is according to two conflicting reports: Cambell, Keith, “China-Africa Development Fund opens SA office,” *Engineering News*, 16 March 2009. Available at: www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/china-africa-development-fund-opens-sa-office-2009-03-16 [Accessed 20 October 2009.] This figure is reported to be only \$150 million: China Economic Review, “China-Africa Development Fund seeks additional financing,” 23 October 2009. Available at: www.chinaeconomicreview.com/dailybriefing/2009_10_23/China-Africa_Development_Fund_seeks_additional_funding.html [Accessed 25 October 2009.]

¹⁵ See Peter Bosshard, “China’s Environmental Footprint in

The hydropower sector, which International Rivers is monitoring closely, illustrates the environmental risks of increased Chinese investment in Africa. Several proposed or ongoing Chinese projects – such as the Belinga Dam in Gabon, the Bui Dam in Ghana, the Gibe 4 Dam in Ethiopia, the Lower Kafue Gorge Dam in Zambia, and the Mpanda Nkuwa Dam in Mozambique – will or would impact national parks, World Heritage Sites or other protected areas. In the case of Sudan’s Merowe Dam, Chinese companies and financiers got involved even though the project did not have an independent Environmental Impact Assessment, and in contradiction of host country law, the superficial assessment that did exist had never been cleared by the country’s Ministry of Environment. In contrast, China Exim Bank reportedly suspended the consideration of the Belinga Dam in Gabon after Brainforest, one of the country’s leading environmental NGOs, pointed out in a letter that the project violated the Bank’s environmental guidelines.

The environmental sustainability of the closer economic cooperation between China and Africa is a concern not only for non-governmental organizations. A task force of the African Union urged all actors in September 2006 to “[e]nsure that China pays more attention to the protection of the environment in its investment practices.”¹⁶ In preparation for FOCAC IV, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also drafted a position paper on the successes and the challenges of FOCAC thus far¹⁷ in a bid to facilitate African input in the policy-formulation regarding FOCAC.¹⁸ Significantly,

Africa,” International Rivers, May 2008, for an in-depth discussion of the environmental implications of China’s growing economic relations with Africa.

¹⁶ African Union, Meeting of the Task Force on Africa’s Strategic Partnership with Emerging Powers: China, India and Brazil, September 2006, p5

¹⁷ Interview, Beijing, 8 September 2009

¹⁸ SADC is one of Africa’s regional economic communities, comprising Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

climate change and environmental protection were among the topics for which SADC proposed increased cooperation within FOCAC.

The Chinese government has recognized the importance of protecting the environment at home and internationally. At home, it has allowed the rapid growth of environmental NGOs, has strengthened environmental laws and regulations, and in 2008, created a Ministry of Environmental Protection. The Ministry has repeatedly blocked polluting companies from receiving bank loans and from listing on the Chinese stock exchanges – an authority that exceeds that of any Western environmental ministry. Starting in 2006, Chinese government agencies also issued a series of guidelines to improve the working conditions, environmental performance, and community relations in Chinese overseas projects. The State Council called on Chinese investors to “protect the legitimate rights and interests of local employees, pay attention to environmental resource protection, care and support of the local community and preserve our good image and reputation.”

Yet so far, environmental concerns have not been integrated into the mainstream of China’s political and economic relations with Africa, and have been treated as peripheral issues within FOCAC. The Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009), which was launched at the FOCAC III summit, commits to the following:

- 5.6.1 The two sides fully recognized the importance of environmental protection for achieving sustainable development and were glad to note the success of the Conference on China-Africa Cooperation in Environmental Protection in February 2005 and the substantive progress made in their cooperation in environmental protection. The African side expressed appreciation of the fund provided by the Chinese Government for the

establishment of the UNEP China-Africa Environment Centre.

- 5.6.2 The two sides resolved to promote dialogue and exchanges in environmental protection and cooperation in human resources development. In the next three years, China will increase year after year the number of environmental protection administrators and experts from Africa to receive training in China. The two sides will work with the UNEP for multilateral cooperation in environmental protection.
- 5.6.3 The two sides agreed to step up cooperation in capacity building, prevention and control of water pollution and desertification, maintenance of bio-diversity and the development of environmental protection industry and demonstration projects.¹⁹

In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established a China-Africa Partnership for Environment Cooperation, but this seems to focus solely on capacity building with regards to wastewater treatment.²⁰

A key tenet of sustainability is that economic, social and environmental aspects need to be integrated rather than being treated in isolation. FOCAC, as a multilateral institution, provides an ideal forum for discussing environmental concerns and integrating them into the overall relations between China and Africa.

¹⁹ Beijing Action Plan, 2007-2009. Available at www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zyzl/hywj/t280369.htm

²⁰ UNEP, "Inter-governmental Review of the Global Programme of Action for the protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA): PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW: China-Africa, China-Arabic Partnership for Environmental Cooperation," Beijing, China, 16-20 October 2006. Available at: www.gpa.unep.org/documents/china_africa_china_arabic_english.pdf [Accessed 20 October 2009.]

Opening FOCAC for Civil Society

Unlike the business community, civil society has so far been excluded from participating in and providing input into the FOCAC summits. Like in the past, African civil society networks such as AFRODAD, the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, have expressed an interest in participating in FOCAC IV in Egypt. Their calls have not been answered, and NGOs will instead organize their own events at the fringes of the official Forum.

Engaging civil society would help governments to address environmental issues more seriously within FOCAC, and to resolve the environmental problems of China's economic cooperation with Africa. As in the case of China's own domestic social protests, many protests against Chinese involvement in Africa have been triggered by the environmental degradation caused by the negligence of some Chinese companies. Such concerns cannot simply be dismissed as the "China bashing" of Western governments and NGOs, but have often been expressed by local communities and African groups such as LOHAP in Sudan, Brainforest in Gabon, and Justiça Ambiental in Mozambique. Chinese companies have discovered that the lack of community and civil society participation can ultimately compromise the success of their projects.

The Chinese government has instituted public participation and access to information as important measures to strengthen the protection of the environment at home. Initial steps of engaging with select African NGOs have recently also been initiated by government-sponsored Chinese civil society organizations. Li Chengren, the Deputy President of the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAFIU) and a former Vice Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPC, recently announced that CAFIU would

host a group of African NGOs in China.²¹ In October 2009, Egypt's National Council for Women and the All-China Women's Federation held a two-day Women's Forum on FOCAC in Egypt and raised issues regarding the enhanced participation of women in future FOCAC meetings.²² Furthermore, a meeting of selected civil society bodies from China and Africa met in Beijing, also in October 2009.²³ The meeting emphasized the need for strengthening "people-to-people" exchanges, a theme highlighted by President Hu Jintao during his 2007 tour of Africa. Rhetorically at least, the role of civil society in rendering China-Africa relations more sustainable over the long-term has been recognized.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Forum for China Africa Co-operation has an impressive track record. In a next phase, it should mainstream the environment into the political and economic cooperation between China and Africa, and open the doors for the participation of civil society in the Forum's deliberation. FOCAC IV should decide on the following measures:

- Environmental protection should receive more attention in the FOCAC Action Plan for the 2010-2012 period, which is expected to be adopted at FOCAC IV. For example, the Chinese and African governments should coordinate more closely on monitoring the projects of Chinese companies active in Africa. China should step up

its efforts to strengthen the capacity of African environmental ministries.

- The Chinese and African governments should agree on environmental standards to be followed in their bilateral aid and investment projects, based on the international environmental conventions that they have ratified.
- Civil society organizations from China and Africa should be invited to participate in the FOCAC IV follow-up process and in future summits as observers, with a right to make inputs.
- African governments should create a FOCAC follow-up committee as an effort to encourage more regional coordination in Africa's relation with China. Interested civil society groups should be invited to participate in this committee.

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²¹ "中非关系60年回顾与展望" ["60 Years of China-Africa relations: Reflections and Prospects"], held by The Institute of West Asian and African Studies [亚非学院], Beijing, 13 October 2009.

²² China Daily, "Women push for political status at China-Africa forum in Cairo," 15 October 2009. Available at: www.china-wire.org/2009/10/women-push-for-political-status-at-china-africa-forum-in-cairo-2/

²³ Xinhua, "Great potential to be explored in Sino-Africa non-governmental cooperation: NGOs," 14 October 2009. Available at: www.china-wire.org/2009/10/great-potential-to-be-explored-in-sino-africa-non-governmental-cooperation-ngos-2/