

Sino-Africa Relations - a Peek Into the Future



By Phyllis Johnson

J'BURG, South Africa, November 27, 2015 (SARDC) -- Africa and China have agreed to strengthen co-operation in international affairs through mutual respect for the UN Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, the Constitutive Act of the African Union and other universally recognised norms governing international relations.

Africa has an agenda - Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want - developed by the African Union in consultation with all formations of African society.

Agenda 2063 has a 50-year horizon with five 10-year implementation plans that cover 2013-2063, founded on the African Union vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena".

Agenda 2063 was adopted in January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the 24th African Union

(AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government as a shared strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

This aspires to an Africa that is integrated, united, peaceful, sovereign, independent, confident and self-reliant; with world class, integrative infrastructure that crosses the continent; seamless borders and management of cross-border resources through dialogue; and dynamic links with the African Diaspora.

The plan for Agenda 2063 notes that it will not happen spontaneously, but requires "conscious and deliberate efforts to nurture a transformative leadership that will drive the agenda and defend Africa's interests".

Each region and country has a plan that contributes to the vision. The AU has its first 10-year plan 2013-2023. SADC has its 15-year Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan.

Zimbabwe has the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIM-ASSET) 2013-2018 for "an empowered society and a growing economy".

The African Agenda 2063 predicts that African countries will be among the best performers in the global "quality of life" measures by that date.

"This will be attained through strategies for inclusive growth, job creation, increasing agricultural production, investments in science, technology, research and innovation; gender equality, youth empowerment and the provision of basic services including health, nutrition, education, shelter, water and sanitation.

"Africa's collective GDP will be proportionate to her share of the world's population and natural resource endowments."

Just as China has helped the African Union to construct its new headquarters for the 21st century so too is China providing support and investment to advance the African vision for a connected and prosperous continent.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese leaders have attached great importance to the relations between China and Africa, and have worked out a series of principles and policies for the development of China-Africa relations.

In 1996, the Chinese government put forward a five-point strategy for a long-term relationship with Africa that is the foundation of China's Africa policy.

"Whatever change may take place in the world, our policy of supporting Africa's economic and social development will not change."

China announced plans in 2003 to shape this partnership based on long-term stability, equality and mutual benefit, stressing that there is no intention to impose ideology, social system or mode of development.

The Chinese and African leaders who met in Beijing in 2006 at the first Summit of the Forum on China Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) proclaimed a new type of strategic partnership.

The Beijing Action Plan that emerged from that Summit provided the roadmap for 21st century relations, including political and economic co-operation, as well as co-operation in international affairs, social development, human resources, education and health, environmental protection, tourism, culture, media, and people-to-people exchanges.

The 2007-2009 Action Plan gave priority to infrastructure, notably for transportation, telecommunications, water conservancy and power generation. China also pledged to expand co-operation with Africa's financial institutions.

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As the FOCAC, founded in 2000, had emerged as an important platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism for co-operation, the leaders decided to strengthen its role.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Action Plan 2010-2012 focused on trade, agriculture, infrastructure, climate change and social welfare, among other issues approved at the fourth ministerial FOCAC held in Egypt in 2009.

China pledged to further open its market to African products, and to build clean energy power

stations to increase the uptake of solar power, biogas and small hydropower, set targets for road and rail construction, and increase agricultural technology demonstration centres, teams and training.

By 2012, the scholarships for African students to study in China had passed 5 000 and teaching training had reached 20 000, as well as provision of medical equipment and materials, and training of 3 000 doctors and nurses.

FOCAC also pledged to establish a China-Africa partnership in addressing climate change, and to launch a joint science and technology partnership.

The fifth FOCAC ministerial conference held in Beijing in 2012 reviewed the targets, expressed satisfaction with implementation, and set new targets for further expansion of co-operation, including peace and security, and for the first time, reference to a regional dimension.

China provides technical and material support to the Africa Standby Force, and also has the largest number of UN peacekeepers in African countries.

The second full Summit of FOCAC and the sixth ministerial conference, to be hosted by South Africa in Johannesburg on December 3-5 2015, will be a milestone in China-Africa relations,

through consolidating and institutionalising some of the structures to strengthen and accelerate this co-operation, based on the aspirations of Africa and China.

The African aspirations are expressed in Agenda 2063 and the Chinese vision was presented in a new policy framework announced by President Xi Jinping in March 2015, titled "Visions and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road".

Collectively known as "Belt and Road", this is a development policy with a holistic vision of economic, political and security development to reach out and initiate action to jointly build a new world order that is development-oriented, with mutual prosperity as its goal, and human security at its heart.

The initiative will establish new routes linking Asia, Africa and Europe. It has two parts -- a new "Silk Road Economic Belt" linking China to Europe through Central Asia; and the "maritime Silk Road" that links China's ports with the African coast and through Suez to Europe.

China's vision for the overland Silk Road Economic Belt, and the Maritime Silk Road by sea is expected to change the world political and economic landscape through rapid development of infrastructure and transport corridors of countries along the routes, and the emphasis is on "joint".

While China is establishing mechanisms for financing, such as the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank which attracted large-scale investments from Europe, and the New Development Bank established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) countries, recipient countries are expected to grasp the vision and contribute to development in their own country and region.

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