



In what ways has the rise of china altered the politics of aid in Africa?

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ABSTRACT

Foreign aid is usually associated with official development assistance, which consist grants and concessional loans, flowing to the poorest countries. In light of this, this essay tried to see the relationships between China and Africa after the rise of China. In so doing, selected cases from the literature of others work are consulted. And, the central argument of the essay is that the rise of China as a new donor is considered as an alternative development ally by African states. However, this tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people. Hence, it suggests that the development assistance, which is obtained from bilateral or multilateral relationships including China, could complement the development of Africa. But, this primarily had better put the interests of majority of the ordinary people at the center.

KeyWords: Foreign aid, China, Africa

1. Introduction

It is very common that states across the world have established various forms of relationships with each other to realize the objectives that are set in their foreign policy. Accordingly, it is indicated that China-Africa relations has started to take its present form during the anti-colonial struggles of Africa for independence and the revolutionary era of Chinese foreign policy since the 1950's (Mohan and Power ,2008). And, China has become an influential player in the continent of Africa for over the last two decades (Tull, 2006). Basically, this could be associated with its involvement

which has been changing overtime in the aid politics of the continent. According to Apodaca (2017); foreign aid is one of the various mechanisms that has been employed by countries to achieve the goals stated in their foreign policy. In this regard, as has been claimed by Ram (2004) the role of foreign aid in the economic growth and development of less developed countries like many countries in Africa has paramount importance. 'with these considerations in mind, China moved swiftly to increase its assistance to developing countries substantially, most of which were African nations'(Taylor,1998 cited in Tull,2006:461).

And, as has been stated by Tull (2006); many African leaders were under internal and external pressure to liberalize their political conditions including the western demands for democracy and respect for human rights. However, China's policy of non-interference on national sovereignty has been taken as an opportunity to stick with by African governments. On the other hand, it can be claimed that Africa's socio-economic status has also played a considerable role in China's effort of visibility as a free emerging power in the international political arena (Taylor, 2006).

Hence, bearing the abovementioned points in mind; I argue that despite the rise of China as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states to look around, it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people. In this connection, Mohan and Power (2008) have asserted that after the end of the cold war African countries have got additional choices to turn to for aid and investment. Nonetheless, Naim (2009) noted that since this aid is non-transparent in its nature; it has its own impact in a way that 'typically to stifle real progress while hurting average citizens'.

Basically, it can be claimed that what has been suggested above could be a result of the usual trend in the politics of aid; where in self interest of donor countries have been given more priority. In this regard, as has been summarized by Plank (1993); following the end of the cold war the politics of aid has changed substantially and this has affected African states leverage to negotiate, which is because of a significant shift in power from recipients to donors, with bilateral and multilateral

donors. As a result, conditionality as a modality of aid such as policy based assistance under the direction of the World Bank and the international monetary fund have become the fashion of the day. As well, some bilateral aid which is provided with tying as a conditionality to use goods and services from the donor country has resulted in a reduction in the value of the assistance by about twenty five per cent (World Bank, 1998).

Likewise, as has been pointed out by Tull (2006) and Mohan and Power (2008); among the various Chinese activities in Africa its increasing interest in economic transactions in the form of access to raw materials, through trade and investment, and military assistance is the major one. In addition, there is an emphasis on geopolitics and development dimensions. Hence, this could also possibly confirm us that there is a significant self interest element in the relationships of China with Africa too.

This said; the essay tries to address the following questions: what is the feature of the aid relationships between China and Africa? And, what is the consequence of China's involvement in the economic and political situation of those countries in Africa?

Therefore, the key issue that is going to be addressed in this paper is on some aspects of the aid politics and its complexity as far as China and some countries in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa are concerned. In so doing, it is tried to substantiate the argument by taking Zimbabwe and Sudan as examples. These cases for explanation are chosen because of the fact that they are among a significant number of countries in the region that have established strong relationship with China as a new donor. In addition, the countries are led by authoritarian governments. As a result, a single party, which is an authoritarian regime, is staying in power for over a couple of decades. Hence, it could suggest us to assess the topic issue in the light of my central argument.

To shed light on the above questions, the essay is arranged into three sections. Following the introduction, the concepts and explanations of aid and its complexity are examined. Section two

discusses the aid politics between China and Africa in light of empirical evidences. Finally, some relevant conclusions will be highlighted.

2. An overview of concepts and explanations of aid and its complexity

It is obvious that the increasing gap in development between the developed and developing countries has guided the international relations for long period of time. Thus, to bridge this gap; an inflow of capital to the less developed countries in the form of foreign aid has been employed by the developed countries (Andrews, 2009). In fact, it is the success of the Marshal plan in the late 1940s and 1950s led many to believe that such kind of transfers to developing countries in Africa would also bring significant differences (Krueger, 1986). However, as has been pointed out by Fischer(2010); ‘in the midst of a crushing depression in the 1980s and into much of the 1990s, Africa was experiencing net out flows of capital that far exceeded any inflows of aid’ (p.39).

That said; foreign aid, as has been defined by the development assistance committee (DAC) of the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), refers to ‘resource flows provided by official agencies with the intent to promote economic development’ (p.3). Wherein; the resources can be in the form of financial, technical assistance and commodities (Apodaca, 2017). Besides, according to World Bank (1998); it is highly associated with official development assistance, which consists grants and concessional loans that flow to the poorest countries. In addition, foreign aid ‘encompasses a wide range of assistance for a wide range of purposes including military and strategic ones’ (Brown, 2009, p.289).

In particular, the years since the early 1980s have seen an exhaustive debate on foreign aid and conditionality (Tarp, 2000). And, conditionality refers to a ‘means of offering incentives and threats to an independent party to persuade them to act in a certain way because donors cannot instruct them directly’ (Brown, 2013, p.275). In this connection, as has been indicated by Burnside and Dollar (2000); it is claimed that conditionality of aid in a systematic manner especially on the quality of policies in the recipient countries would likely increase its impact on the growth of developing

countries. On the other hand, as has been stated by Tarp (2000); a government with substantial autonomy, capacity and credibility is required for successful long- term economic growth. Furthermore, donors have pointed out that lending with conditionality has its own challenge as it has an element of distrust on the policies being chosen to get funding by the recipients (Whitfield and Fraser, 2010).As a result, Brown (2009)has stated that ‘donors and recipients struggle over the content of this particular international relationship’ (p.296).

In addition, foreign policy can be defined as ‘a country’s behavior with regard to other states in the international arena, driven by its need to achieve its goals’ (Apodaca, 2017, p.2). In this regard, for instance; Brown (2013) has stated that despite the rise of illiberal China since 1980s, the aid policies that originate in the West are highly tied by the liberal ideals of political and economic conditionality in the recipient African countries. Whereas; as has been outlined by Ayodele and Sotola(2014); China’s aid policies to many African countries is often with no tying in it and is perceived by African states as getting room for local autonomy without imposing preconditions on it. In fact, a significant portion of its assistance is tied to Chinese companies and goods (Hackenesch, 2013). Therefore; the rise of China as a new donor is considered by African states as an alternative development ally. However, I argue that this tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people.

3. Empirical evidence on the aid politics between China and Africa

In this section, I will try to incorporate empirical evidence and explanations that have relevance with the topic under discussion. Therefore, in the light of my argument it is tried to discuss the relationships between China and Africa. In this regard, some selected sub-Saharan countries such as Zimbabwe and Sudan are pinpointed as examples. These cases are selected for explanation because of the fact that the government systems in these countries do share similar characteristic as

authoritarian regime. Also, the leaderships have stayed in power for nearly three decades. In addition, they are among those countries in Africa that have established strong relationships with China. Moreover, both of them have strengthened their ties with China further after they have faced more or less similar isolation from the West.

These days, it is claimed that the role of China in the aid politics particularly in Africa has shown rapid increment overtime even if it is difficult to get clear information about the nature of the official development assistance (Ramirez and Rodriguez, 2014). In addition, for China there is no clear cut difference between Official Development Assistance from economic cooperation or investment provided that there is an expansion in local capacity (Mohan, 2012).

But, as has been summarized by Lagerkvist (2011); in the forum on China-Africa cooperation meeting ,which was held in 2006 at Beijing, ‘China promised to double aid, provide interest- free and preferential loans worth \$3 billion to develop infrastructure, and sign debt relief agreements with 33 African countries’ (p.98). And, according to Jafrani (2012); the volume of Chinese aid to Africa including its concessional loan has reached to \$10 billion between 2009 and 2012. As a result, it has been given in the form of official aid, concessionary loans and debt reliefs (Ayadole and Sotola, 2014).

Cognizant of the above, Chinese assistance has become one of the preferred option by African states for the reason that; it is obtained in a short period of time, in a flexible manner, and mainly unconditionally (Pham et al., 2018). Thus, most African leaders have opened their gate undoubtedly hoping that it brings a positive future though China’s level of aid package varies from country to country based on strategic resources, useful market destinations and geopolitical allies (Mohan and Power, 2008). In this connection, Brown (2009) has suggested that; viewed from the point of China’s presence as an option to African states, a donor policy that is very much intended on African institutional and political conformity towards the common liberal ideals could likely be challenged to a certain extent.

In line with the above, it has been discussed by Taylor (2006) that; China has propagated its position in such a way that the call for human rights and democracy is a strategy that has been used by the West to maintain their colonial hegemony in Africa. In fact, it is clear that such kind of justification can be taken for granted by many authoritarian governments, who would like to stay in power for life, including Sudan and Zimbabwe. However, I argue that this has resulted in authoritarian governments in Africa to stay in power for long period of time at the expense of majority of the ordinary people wherein; violation of human rights, good governance and freedom being at stake.

On the other hand, as has been summarized by Naim (2009); in so far as providing development aid to dictators as a means to achieve self interest is concerned, China is not the only country. Even the United States and the Soviet Union has gone through it though they have slowly begun to re-consider their actions with a greater media inquiry. Further, Drogendijk & Blomkvist (2013) argued that the motive behind both China and the West is somehow similar mainly looking for market, natural resource and strategic asset. Thus, this could suggest us to underscore the assertion that the major focus of countries in their international relations is to meet their foreign policy by all means possible. But, I argue that viewing the situation from the stand point of ordinary people who are living in many African countries, which are despotic and denying the human and political rights of their citizens, whoever has done the act of strengthening authoritarian regimes; in principle it cannot be an acceptable cause.

Alternatively; even though we could find countries in the west such as the United States that has given priority to their own self interest like China does, it would also be fair to mention the roles that have been played by the international financial institutions, which are mainly founded on the fundamentals of countries in the West. In this regard, it can be stated that the conditionality which is recommended by these institutions in the 1990's to developing countries including many countries in Africa is critiqued for its unsuccessful story. On the contrary, as has been described by Plank (1993, p.416-417) 'changes in domestic political arrangements, including increased respect for human

rights and the introduction of multi-party elections' have been promoted by the World Bank. For instance, African states such as Kenya and Malawi were part of this requirement to get further assistance. Of course, in so far as such kind of conditionality is concerned arguably it can be claimed that the sovereignty of the nation would be put in question.

Nevertheless, I argue that instead of keeping silent for the sake of political correctness that promotes the interests of authoritarian governments and achieving self interest only, it would be worthy to acknowledge the demands of majority of ordinary citizens in Africa along the line. In this connection, Plank (1993) has also confirmed that the interests of many Africans have been compromised as a result of aid-sponsored authoritarian governments. Therefore, I argue that the rise of China as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states to look around; however it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people.

On the other hand, Ayadole and Sotola (2014) have claimed that despite china does not intervene in the domestic affairs of Africa including civil and political rights, it is crucial to consider its contribution in so far as Africa's development is concerned especially in areas like physical infrastructure, industry and agriculture, which Western investors and aid agencies are reluctant to invest. Indeed, as a consequence of the differences in the type of intervention made by China and the West, the impact in the development of the continent may not necessarily have a similar pattern. However, I argue that achieving those kinds of physical development irrespective of the interests of the ordinary people has been used to claim legitimacy by the authoritarian regimes. As a result, it has become to the detriment of the ordinary people living in these nations.

In light of the above, for example; the Mugabe regime has faced isolation from the West due to its governance pitfalls, consequently Zimbabwe has officially declared the 'look East policy' in 2003 and has built up its relationship with China for assistance(Hodzi et al., 2012). This could suggest us arguing the reason why the regime has been attracted towards China is due to the non-interference

policy in China's relationships, which is very sounding to authoritarian states in Africa like in Zimbabwe. However, it is to the disadvantage of the ordinary citizens who are claiming their rights. For instance, as has been outlined by (Hodzi et al., 2012; Taylor, 2006); when an arms restriction put on Zimbabwe by the Western countries, it was China's responsibility to supply those armaments to Mugabe's government that help defend itself from its people. In this connection, the two countries had a deal that accounted a US\$240 million so that China trade guns for market access in Zimbabwe. This can lead us to argue in such a way that; despite one of the expected roles of political institutions especially the government is to protect its citizens, what has been observed in Zimbabwe is out of joint with its assumed objectives. Therefore, I argue that the rise of China as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states to look around; still it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people.

On the other hand, arguably it can be claimed that putting an embargo because of a state's internal affair raises the issue of sovereignty. However, I argue that this depends on where we are standing to view the matter. In other words, it would be better to be a voice to the voiceless instead of keeping silent for the sake of political correctness, which helps meet self interest at the expense of the violation of the rights of ordinary citizens. Therefore, I argue that though the rise of china as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states, it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of the majority of the ordinary people.

Likewise, as has been stated by Large (2008); After Sudan's political isolation by the west in the 1990s, the government of Sudan has established a strong relationship with China for an oil extraction to fill its financial problems. Nevertheless, its huge natural resources mainly oil development was very much connected with armed conflict, which is claimed that China was a supplier of military weapons, that resulted in a good number of Sudanese citizens in the south to be systematically depopulated in oil rich areas. As a result of this, about sixty per cent of Sudan's oil output is imported to China (Carmody and Taylor, 2010) wherein; Albeshir's government has got a huge

amount of income out of it (Large, 2008). Therefore, I argue that despite the rise of china as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states, it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of the majority of the ordinary people.

On the other hand, even though China is criticized for disregarding human rights abuse, when it comes to protect its interests it had supported UN Security Council resolutions authorizing peacekeepers for Darfur, Sudan (Ayadole and Sotola, 2014). This suggests claiming in so far as self interest is concerned, there is a double standard element in China's non-interference policy, which is believed to be its main tenet. Of course, as has been pointed out by de Soysa and Midpord (2012), 'the United states tends to transfer conventional arms to authoritarian regimes to a greater extent than does China' (p.844). This suggests arguing whatever political values has been preached by nations, greater priority is given to realize their own self interest; even at the expense of the interests of majority of ordinary citizens, who are living in countries under despotic regimes. Hence, I argue that although the rise of China as a new donor has opened an alternative room for maneuver for African states, it tends to serve the interests of authoritarian governments at the expense of majority of the ordinary people.

4. Concluding remarks

The essay shows that the rise of China as a new donor is regarded as an alternative source of aid or development ally by many African states. However, this has been said by compromising the interests of their ordinary citizens. In fact, this has been suggested for the very reason that the nature of many governments in the sub-Saharan region of Africa is authoritarian. In line with this, it has been stated by Pham et al. (2018) that out of the Chinese development assistance going to Africa; nearly seventy five per cent of it flows to ten countries of which nine of them are classified as authoritarian regimes in Freedom House's index. Besides, Askouri (2006) has also claimed that it has encouraged corruption and elitism in these African countries. Therefore, this would suggest us arguing a

powerful authoritarian government has strengthening the legitimacy of small authoritarian governments at the expense of the interests of their ordinary people.

In addition, due to the nature of authoritarian government systems in these countries, ordinary citizens are usually failing to enjoy their civil and political rights. Put it the other way, it can be claimed that the probability of having strong civil society that help defend the interests of the ordinary people tends to be non-existing as a result. Hence, it can be said that such an important institutional element has been missing due to the nature of the aid relationship between China and those countries in Africa. In fact, 'The Chinese rarely emphasize issues of civil society or democratization in their engagements with Africa' (Mohan, 2012, p.11).

Moreover, it is good to mention that despite African imports from China is much higher, China's demand to the rise in the price of mineral and other related goods in the world market has contributed for an increase in the economy of African governments (Ayadole and Sotola, 2014).

Indeed, although an unbalanced nature of the global political economic structure has a greater impact in determining the development of African countries including the aid relationship and its modality, I argue that the common malpractices of the authoritarian governments which highly disregarded the interests of their citizens is outweighing.

In summary, it is obvious that the development assistance which is obtained from bilateral or multilateral relationships including China could complement the development of Africa. But, when we see instances wherein self interest of donor countries has been given more priority along with their double standard, it suggests considering Easterly's (2005) claim that Africa's development depends on 'African private sector entrepreneurs, African civic activists and African political reformers... not on what ineffective, bureaucratic, unaccountable and poorly informed and motivated outsiders do' (p.22). Therefore, putting the interests of majority of the ordinary people at the center of the relationships instead of that of authoritarian governments could be a very useful approach in this regard. Specifically, as has been outlined by Kaplinsky et al. (2010); a clear

consideration of how the actions of one could likely affect the life of the other is crucial for genuine partnerships that can sustain for long.

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