FOCAC and strategic opportunities for cooperation

AFRICA’S CHALLENGE

China’s foreign reserves now stand at over $1.5 trillion, while the establishment of a sovereign investment fund of $200 billion provides the foundation for China’s long-term engagement with the African continent. China has the political will and the economic capacity to advance Africa’s development agenda, while benefiting from growing trade and investment opportunities on the continent. At the same time, China has an African track record of actions and not only words. China’s engagement with Africa is markedly different to the Western based charity-business, conditional-aid and humanitarian-diplomacy approaches which have produced limited results over the last two decades. The West has offered much debate and media hype on Africa, but on the ground results are unimpressive. Inconsistencies and unfulfilled promises have been a feature of Western interaction with Africa, while Africa remains underdeveloped, without infrastructure and poverty levels increase. The Western engagement model has failed to either effectively assist Africa or provide the foundation for Africa’s own development, hence the political and economic lacunae which China is now filling. As Garth le Pere has observed:
Fears about China’s growing engagement with Africa are exaggerated. While there are legitimate concerns about how this relationship should be managed, the phobias about China’s impact on Africa are largely products of Western inspired hypocrisy and arrogance that are increasingly being echoed by Africans themselves.268

China brings to Africa a development model that offers hope for poverty reduction and long-term prosperity without an army of external advisors, institutional instruction or paternalistic tutors. Chinese labourers on the continent are invited, disciplined, hardworking and committed to completing the contractual arrangement within the stipulated time frame. The philosophical differences which underpin the Washington versus the Beijing approaches are to be found in disparate interpretations of Africa’s current phase of economic development. For the West, Africa is a continent outside the mainstream of globalisation afflicted with an enormous collection of political, economic, health and social problems. For China, Africa is a continent of opportunity, ready for development, with significant trade and investment potential. Moreover, the challenges which Africa face are not too dissimilar to the mountains which China has climbed in its own development since the early 1950s. Thus the West characterises Africa as a continent in crisis and actions are limited by pessimistic perceptions. On the other hand, China sees a continent of challenge and opportunity and is motivated by an optimistic vision.

China’s empathy for Africa’s economic plight has been confirmed by Beijing’s action in cancelling the debt of 31 African countries. Thus China has followed action with words in tackling one of Africa’s biggest economic problems and sets an example for the developed world. Moreover, a positive historical relationship underpins FOCAC. As Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi commented at the 2003 FOCAC conference:

China’s contribution was not only limited to the liberation of Africa, but also to the economic development of our continent. The people of China have always been reliable friends to the people of Africa, as Africa has always been a reliable friend of China and its people.

He added:
The first FOCAC conference held in Beijing during October 2000, was a significant watershed in the history of the fraternal relations between China and Africa. This forum has established a mechanism which has afforded us the opportunity to nurture and deepen our cooperation.\(^{269}\)

For China the advancement of global peace and development is not possible without addressing the growing economic divide between North and South. China has therefore called on the developed countries to pay more attention to Africa and respond more energetically to the continent’s socio-economic problems. Given China’s similar colonial history and struggle against poverty, a Chinese understanding of Africa’s economic dilemma lies at the root of Sino-African solidarity and serves as a strong foundation for cordial relations.

The challenge for African governments is to respond to China’s engagement with effective and appropriate suggestions for the development of positive interaction. In this context the future of mutually beneficial interaction falls within the framework President Hu Jintao outlined during his visit to Gabon in 2004:

- Strengthen traditional friendships through high level contacts, seen by China as the starting point for interstate interaction
- Advance mutual assistance and mutual benefit by promoting the common prosperity of China and Africa through commercial interaction
- Jointly meet the challenges of globalisation through policy coordination and synchronisation
- Develop the cooperative network (FOCAC) to safeguard the rights and interests of developing countries through an international decision-making system that is democratic, transparent, fair and equitable\(^{270}\)

China’s challenge is to provide support and advance a win-win relationship with African states, while at the same time pursuing its own national interests. A stable, mutually beneficial relationship will translate into a long-term political and economic alliance providing the foundation for both Chinese and African economic prosperity.\(^{271}\) The FOCAC process can develop a mutually rewarding economic subsystem linking Africa to China. The key is to avoid a ‘structuralist’ relationship which will lock Africa into a position of disadvantage, when the option China is proposing is a South-South strategic partnership.
China’s evolving Africa policy provides strategic opportunities for a significant advancement of Sino-African economic interaction. China’s continued economic growth will open many new opportunities for Africa’s commercial engagement with Chinese consumers. In terms of trade, China’s amicable agreement to open its markets to selected African products from the poorest African countries offers hope to African producers and sets an example for future broader free trade agreements. The compatibility of Chinese and Africa economies, exchanging primary products for manufactured goods, bodes well for accelerated trade over the longer term. Investment flows to Africa from China are set to increase significantly as Beijing partners with African enterprises in the extraction and export of raw materials. Sino-African interaction confirms China’s compassionate, friendly and supportive policy towards Africa and provides the foundation for an accelerated advancement of mutually beneficial commercial and political interaction.

The Afro-Asian solidarity, forged in the anti-imperialist struggles, provides the political foundation for the evolving China–Africa relationship. Now purged of any ideological content, China’s engagement is largely an urgent commercial agenda intended to feed its burgeoning economy. The need to ensure continued economic growth and to satisfy domestic expectations drives a new relationship with Africa. At the same time, China carries a similar historical burden to that of Africa, described by the Chinese leadership as having overcome the ‘three big mountains’ of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism. With similar historical experiences as the backdrop to Sino-African interaction, Beijing has a clear and empathic understanding of Africa’s struggle against external influence and economic problems. China thus has the potential to become a true partner in Africa’s economic renaissance. Moreover, the Beijing Consensus approach is not donor based but rather foresee that African countries will independently resolve their own problems. The philosophical underpinning of China’s Africa policy is encapsulated in the notion of ‘African solutions for African problems’ and is carried out by treating African governments as equals and avoiding interference in domestic affairs. Mutual economic development in terms of ‘prosperity for all’ within a framework of win-win or mutual benefit, drives China’s economic engagement philosophy, as opposed to Western, sometimes unrealistic and fanciful conceptions such as ‘making African poverty history’.

Interviews with African officials in Beijing during January 2008, pointed to a number of shortcomings in the FOCAC process which African states feel
should be addressed as the process evolves. A greater Chinese interaction with regional organisations, such as SADC, and with the AU was identified as a priority. Increased Chinese interaction with regional groupings would broaden the development agenda and give China a regional, rather than a limited bilateral, impact. This would be in line with Africa’s increasingly regionally focused development agenda which requires broader and more comprehensive interaction by external actors. The lack of an African based ‘follow-up committee’ was considered to be a key weakness in the FOCAC process. African states are unable to adequately monitor progress on FOCAC and suggest new areas of interaction and cooperation. Suggestions were made that such a follow-up committee be established within the AU to coordinate Africa’s response to Chinese initiatives and programmes. With regard to the issue of following up on FOCAC undertakings, there was nevertheless a strong feeling that China would ‘deliver on its FOCAC promises’, as it has done in the past in the case of for example debt relief.

From the African side, there is clearly a need to strengthen Africa’s contribution to shaping FOCAC and crafting a framework in line with African expectations and objectives. Africa needs to provide more concrete suggestions on how the FOCAC process can benefit African development programmes and economic growth trajectories. In other words, Africa needs to work harder to fulfil the win-win aim of Sino-African interaction. A more balanced relationship with greater input and ownership from Africa would silence suggestions that the China–Africa relationship approximates a new neo-colonial interaction. African should focus on its own competitive advantages in an era of increasing globalisation. Economic and political synergies mutually conceived would significantly strengthen the long-term viability of the FOCAC process. Moreover, Sino-African debate on issues of difference, such as non-intervention and humanitarian intervention, would strengthen and mature the relationship. The issue of sustainable development in Africa and how China’s engagement with the continent can be adjusted to advance this outcome is another urgent agenda item for FOCAC.

FOCAC AND NEPAD

For some African governments, a closer synchronisation between FOCAC projects and NEPAD is a priority. Given NEPAD’s importance as an African originated development programme and Africa’s endorsement of NEPAD’s
objectives, a greater Chinese participation would be welcomed. Specific NEPAD projects on the drawing board could be brought to fruition through FOCAC aid programmes. For example, the planned Inga project to produce electricity from dams in the Democratic Republic of Congo could be implemented as a FOCAC-NEPAD joint initiative to open up the vast economic potential of the Central Africa Region for mutual long-term benefit. To realise this process, formal communication and consultation between the FOCAC and NEPAD secretariats should be institutionalised.

A FOCAC-NEPAD symmetry would be best pursued via a development strategy of collective and structural reform (South-South cooperation for a new economic order) while embracing globalisation through participation (neo-liberal approach), rather than withdrawal and self-reliance (protectionism). Given NEPAD’s ambitious agenda and limited progress to date, Africa’s development process should focus on attracting foreign direct investment as the key to advancing an accelerated growth trajectory. This would require improved investment conditions, the establishment of special investment zones and specific investment criteria. Improving investment conditions would encourage an increase of American, European and Chinese investment in Africa, benefiting both the host economy and the investing states.

NEPAD provides an acceptable framework for collective action to promote economic development on the African continent. It is specifically designed to provide the foundation for Africa’s economic development and effective integration into global markets. NEPAD is based on three key elements outlined as preconditions for development, priority sectors and the mobilising of resources, in terms of which an improvement in African governance is identified as a critical factor in initiating and advancing economic development. Regional cooperation and integration are intended to increase intra-African trade and encourage inward foreign direct investment. Development in the ‘priority sectors’ such as health, education and infrastructure have been identified as essential for sustainable long-term economic development. Economic success is to be advanced via a ‘mobilisation of resources’ such as increased domestic savings, improved management of public revenue as well as increased inflow of foreign capital in the form of investments or overseas development assistance.

Achievement of NEPAD’s economic goals depends to a large degree on advancing good governance which in turn implies reducing corruption, increasing transparency and accountability and improving regulation of financial systems.
Good governance is seen as critical for increased investment from developed countries and for sustainable economic development over the longer term. The NEPAD Peer Review System is intended to advance the concept of good governance via a periodic review of African governments. However, a precondition for African development and for the success of NEPAD is the establishment of lasting peace and security, and this is accordingly the most urgent agenda item in many countries and regions.

Economists suggest that Africa would need about $70 billion annually to attain its target of growing its economy by 7 per cent annually. NEPAD has raised new hopes for the future of the continent, but according to the UN, Africa’s ongoing conflicts remain the biggest challenge. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has pointed out that 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s agenda focuses on conflicts in Africa, a situation which clearly undermines prospects for economic and political development. NEPAD recognises that Africa cannot promote economic development without external assistance. The 7 per cent growth rate needed to tackle poverty in a meaningful and sustainable way, will require private investment and contributions from industrialised countries. Thus Africa’s longer-term development is to a certain extent dependent on support from industrialised nations. But to gain the support of external investors, NEPAD requires that African leadership build democratic governments and create the conditions for economic growth.

With regard to African leaders, it calls for:

- Effective conflict prevention and resolution strategies
- Agreement on minimum standards of governance (respect for the constitution, regular elections, separation of the powers of the legislature, executive and judiciary and independence of the judiciary, central bank and auditor-general)

With regard to governments, it requires

- Agreement on the role of regional organisations in monitoring and enforcing compliance with agreed standards
- Establishing and maintaining macro-economic stability, particularly by developing targets for fiscal and monetary policies
- Harmonising economic policies and joint planning and ownership of key regional public goods
Promoting agricultural development and diversification into agro-industries and manufacturing
Promoting infrastructural investment

This is seen as an important attempt to redefine the relationship between Africa and industrialised countries. From the latter it requires minimum standards on aid and market access, such as:

- Effective support for conflict prevention and resolution on terms agreed with legitimate African organisations
- Partnership in priority programmes on infectious diseases, information and communication technologies and market access
- Integration of aid into national budgets when agreed conditions are satisfied
- Increasing development finance and capital flows into Africa
- Agreements on a code of behaviour to reduce involvement of industrialised countries in conflicts in Africa
- Support for reform of multilateral institutions to ensure effective African participation

Unlike structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF or World Bank, NEPAD is a development programme drafted by Africans for Africa. In supporting the programme, African leaders have committed themselves to the preconditions for sustainable development which include the enhancement of economic governance, human development, access to the industrialised markets, promotion of regional integration and a fairer international trading regime. The unique feature of the plan is the possibility of increased and sustained peer pressure among leaders to enhance the credibility of policies and agreements. On balance, NEPAD provides a useful long-term objective for African development, but fails to suggest ways of ensuring that Africa’s basic political and socio-economic building blocks are provided as a foundation for development.

Some critics have dismissed NEPAD as an ineffective and cumbersome mechanism for advancing African development. However, NEPAD still holds enormous promise for future development and prosperity on the African continent. At the same time, NEPAD is a long-term project and should not be judged on short-term time frames. With continued international support (North-South and South-South) and African commitment to this process, NEPAD could provide
a successful foundation and economic road map for the prosperity of Africa’s people. However, NEPAD has little chance of success without the commitment and clear political will of Africa’s leadership. Given the complexity of the NEPAD initiative and the difficulties in simultaneous implementation on a continent made up of 53 sovereign states, the way forward for NEPAD should be a more narrow focus on realistic, achievable objectives. In this regard an emphasis on attracting more foreign direct investment to Africa, along with technology transfers, skills transfers and development of new infrastructure, will provide the opportunity for driving the next phase of Africa’s development agenda.

Jeffrey Sachs points out that in the cases of India and China (and other east Asian economies), significant foreign direct investment transfers have resulted in ‘unprecedented rates of economic growth’. Sachs’ evidence clearly shows that where countries have received high levels of foreign direct investment, GDP per capita has improved. Moreover, high rates of foreign direct investment inflows are associated with high growth rates. Africa’s lack of development is not caused by economic exploitation, or neo-colonial interventions, but by a lack of effective integration with the international economic system. A similar pattern is evident in trade activities, and countries with open trading systems have grown faster than those with closed systems. Sachs concludes that ‘there is simply no evidence whatsoever that trade protectionism, or the absence of multinational companies does a whit to end extreme poverty’. It is thus suggested that the way forward for Africa’s development should be reform, or refocusing with greater emphasis on foreign direct investment as the key to unlocking a growth trajectory without complex political or economic policy changes which are costly and difficult to implement within a short time frame. To this end both Chinese (with regard to its planned special economic zones in Africa) and European investors could contribute to Africa’s economic progress.

AFRICAN SCENARIOS AND FOCAC

Whatever the plan for Africa’s development, the approximate outcome is represented in the ‘Africa renaissance scenario’ of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the Brenthurst ‘Africa takes charge scenario’ set out below. Both scenarios outline elements constituting a successful future for Africa which would underpin long-term economic growth and prosperity. The Africa success scenario is obviously the objective for both African governments
### Table 30 The SAIIA African renaissance scenario

- **Globalisation drives greater inclusiveness for the SADC region**, boosts trade, improves competitiveness, increases information exchange, enhances governance and accelerates tourism and related infrastructure.

- **HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are treated effectively**, rates of infection are stabilised and then decline, the socio-economic and political impact of these diseases is commensurately diminished.

- **SADC is effectively restructured and plays a central role** in the formulation, co-ordination and implementation of region-wide policies, from health and poverty eradication to security and finance. The Free Trade Agreement boosts intra-regional trade in a mutually beneficial manner.

- **The Bretton Woods and international aid agencies** play a focused, progressive and supportive role. The enhanced heavily indebted poor countries initiative in particular delivers regional-wide benefits.

- **The global economy** revives in the short term and the South African economy meets the 6–7 per cent growth target and thus acts as a positive driver for the region as a whole. Sound macro-economic policies are applied throughout SADC, thereby facilitating sustained economic growth.

- **Trade, investment and infrastructure** in the SADC region grow strongly, boosted by the Free Trade Agreement, the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, Cotonou, the South African-European Union Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organisation.

- **Mining acts as a key positive driver in the region**, the considerable planned mining exploration, extraction and infrastructural developments come on stream and the industry continues to attract high levels of foreign direct investment.

- **Regional security improves** through the ending of civil wars in Angola and the DRC as well as reduced conflict in Zimbabwe; human security improves amongst others through enhanced food security.

- **Crime and organised criminal networks are brought under control and then reduced** through the positive impact of diminished regional conflict, improved regional policing, cooperation and intelligence.

- **Political leaders strengthen and consolidate democracy** in the region; good governance, constitutionalism, political pluralism, the proliferation of civil liberties and the rule of law are entrenched.

- **Tourism becomes a major positive driver in the region**, and has a significant multiplier effect on infrastructure and job creation.

- **NEPAD delivers on its full potential** and thereby fundamentally alters African conditions and international relations in a profound, far-reaching and positive direction.

and external actors. Both Africa and its trade and investment partners want African states to be strong and stable and to experience economic growth and increasing prosperity. Thus regardless of the exact form and content of FOCAC, both China and African participants need to craft a process which leads to the African success scenario. There is no long-term advantage in pursuing policies which do not promote growth and prosperity in Africa. Weak African states and increased social instability undermine trade and investment opportunities, while resource extraction may become impossible. Beijing clearly seeks a successful Africa with growing markets ready and able to trade with China and the world. The FOCAC process provides an ideal forum for China and Africa to work together in crafting a road map which would advance Africa’s development and prosperity.

Table 31 Brenthurst scenario ‘Africa takes charge’

| The growth agenda | African countries develop pro-growth, pro-market, politically popular strategies |
| | Africa is able to gain access to the global economy and to create the domestic conditions for long-term benefit |
| | New technologies are adapted and there is African innovation |
| The democracy agenda | Africa develops its own democracy models that are appropriate and accepted |
| | Constitutions are designed to create national identity and inclusive systems of government |
| The governance agenda | African standards of governance are internationally accepted |
| | Corruption is reduced to acceptable levels |
| | Local and foreign investment is successfully encouraged |
| The social agenda | Africa’s solutions for HIV/AIDS, gender relations, and education are supported and effective |
| The security agenda | Africa’s conflict resolution and interventionist strategies prevent violent revolts |
| The international economic agenda | Africa plays a part in creating an international economic architecture allowing for greater trade access, rules-based trade, receipt of foreign direct investment and aid, and debt relief |
| The international political agenda | Africa lobbies successfully for greater recognition and representation in international institutions |
| | International intervention in Africa is always managed by African regional and/or continental organisations |

As the Brenthurst study group concluded:

Contrary to the widespread perception that there is a contradiction between China's activities in Africa and improved standards of African governance and democracy, good governance is actually in China's long-term interest because it is the best way to ensure that investor interests are safeguarded.\(^{276}\)

As an investor in Africa, China’s long-term interests must mirror that of investors from other parts of the world who seek legal protection and market growth.

**FOCAC AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION**

South-South cooperation offers a shield against exploitation by the industrialised nations and a realistic alternative to North-South trading patterns which have dominated global commerce since the colonial era. This ‘emergent South-South relationship is a historical opportunity for African states to escape the neo-colonial ties to the West’.\(^{277}\) South-South solidarity offers the promise of countering the increasingly negative consequences of globalisation, driven essentially by the vested interests of the wealthy industrialised nations. Therefore the real value of the Sino-African relationship, especially China’s willingness to set a common agenda for interaction, lies in Africa’s opportunity to work with China in managing globalisation better for mutual benefit. A successful outcome for South-South cooperation must be based on unity and solidarity among countries of the South with the long-term objective of creating a more just and equitable international order within which accelerated development for the poorer countries is possible.

The year 2005 marked the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of diplomatic relations between China and Africa. Since Premier Zhou Enlai’s 1960 visit to Africa, there have been over 800 visits between Chinese and African leaders. Burgeoning trade links and the regular high-level dialogues have provided the substance and the mechanism for South-South cooperation in the context of Sino-African relations. Long-term forecasts predict that emerging economies will benefit from China’s continued economic expansion.\(^{278}\) Sino-African relations are driven by complementary trade patterns which hold the promise of significant upward expansion. Moreover, China’s economic success benefits the global economy generally, with increased opportunities for commercial
engagement with the Chinese market. Increasing demand in China’s domestic market and the emergence of a wealthy middle class in China in turn offer boundless possibilities for traders and investors.

China’s growing interaction with Africa, both bilaterally and multilaterally (FOCAC) offers new hope for countries of the South to restructure inhibiting global economic institutions and ameliorate the worst aspects of globalisation. China’s growth on the world stage forms a foundation for linkages with Africa through which an effective South-South relationship for mutual benefit can be crafted. The development of a common China–Africa programme, via FOCAC, to advance a ‘post-Washington consensus’ offers Africa numerous prospects for improved developmental opportunities and suggests a new agenda for both economic and political relations in the era of advanced globalisation. In response to the new opportunities provided by China’s extraordinary economic achievements and a willingness to actively engage Africa as a partner, Africa’s leadership needs to rise to China’s challenge and cooperatively develop realistic and achievable objectives for common development and prosperity. Moreover, the agenda for transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world requires careful drafting and a consensual implementation plan.

The FOCAC process has evolved into a regular diplomatic dialogue between China and Africa on a number of levels. According to agreed procedures, FOCAC follow-up mechanisms operate on three levels: First, the ministerial conference which is convened every three years, second, the senior officials meeting which is convened one year before a ministerial conference and again immediately before it and third, meetings are held bi-annually between the heads of diplomatic missions of African countries in China and the secretariat of the Chinese follow-up committee, which is attached to the Chinese foreign ministry. The ministerial conferences and senior officials meetings are held alternately in China and Africa. The latter prepare reports on implementation of agreements reached at the previous ministerial conference and recommend draft agendas for the next meeting. The African heads of mission in Beijing have an important role to play in assessing FOCAC implementation and suggesting agendas for future meetings as does the FOCAC secretariat in Beijing in driving the process and ensuring China’s full participation. The secretariat coordinates China’s FOCAC response among 27 Chinese government departments with a view to maximising China’s fulfilment of FOCAC promises and undertakings (see appendix).
As the FOCAC process unfolds in the years ahead, Africa will continuously be offered opportunities to escape the constraining neo-colonial ties to the West, crafted within the historically exploitative North-South paradigm, to build a more equal partnership with a resurgent and amiable China. As a starting point, a closer alignment of FOCAC with NEPAD priorities would go a long way to structuring a common development agenda. Africa’s bargaining power is limited by its lack of industrialisation and dependence on primary products as its main source of export, but effective management of its competitive advantages can translate into benefits for China’s economy and the citizens of Africa simultaneously. In effect, this requires that Africa transform the ‘minerals curse’ into a ‘vector for socio-economic development’. Africa’s leadership must avoid switching from a dependency on the West to dependency on China and focus on building an authentic partnership with China’s through bilateral interaction as well as the FOCAC process. Africa should develop a joint venture with China to address common development difficulties, while ensuring mutual benefit, rather than allowing a new asymmetrical relationship with China to replace old neo-colonial links with the West.

With regard to China, it has made the commitment to aid the African agenda. At the 2006 FOCAC Beijing summit China again renewed its commitment to expand consultation, support and co-ordination with Africa in international fora with a view to crafting a new more just global order. China undertook to continue advancing the interests of the developing world in general and Africa in particular within the UN system. Beijing’s vision for future cooperation within the FOCAC framework provides a positive foundation for the long-term development of the China–Africa partnership. Africa’s charge is to take advantage of China’s willingness to engage the continent on a range of political and economic issues and to craft a process which brings benefits to the continent in conjunction with China’s continued economic growth. Creative proposals and ideas on Africa’s part could significantly expand and consolidate the China–Africa partnership for mutual benefit.

Advancing a shared vision of global political and economic transformation to a multi-polar system and accelerating economic interaction form the foundation of the Sino-African relationship in the context of South-South cooperation. A coordinated and carefully crafted African plan to advance the continent’s economic and political interests requires elucidation, with a view to mobilising China as an effective partner to reform the existing global
order. The bonding of China and Africa in a common goal to eliminate the iniquities of the existing outdated economic and political system of global governance provides hope and inspiration to developing countries. The evolving China–African relationship, at the multilateral level via the FOCAC process and at the bilateral level, such as China-South African relations via a formally constituted bi-national commission, serves as a model for South-South cooperation and provides a new framework for effective participation in the North-South debate.

According to former Nigerian Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, China offers Africa a range of solutions not provided by the traditional North-South relationship. In this context a number of factors are important. China has effectively tackled poverty and has developed a very successful wealth creation formula applicable to developing countries and is willing to share this formula with African countries. Africa needs approximately $20 billion a year to develop infrastructure. China is rapidly becoming the leader in African construction and has both the technical capacity and capital base to make a major contribution in this area. China is willing to invest in a wide range of economic activity on the African continent while facilitating skills and technology transfers. As China’s economy grows, its ability to make an effective contribution will grow, too. China has shown a commitment to Africa – a sentiment lacking in the West. China’s contribution to Africa has not been limited to the liberation of the continent, but also to economic development. China has consistently proved to be a reliable friend of Africa and Africa has responded positively. Given China’s similar colonial history and struggle against exploitation and poverty, a Chinese understanding of Africa’s economic dilemma and empathy for existing developmental challenges lie at the root of Sino-African solidarity and serve as a strong foundation for cordial relations.

The challenge for African governments is to respond to China’s engagement with effective and appropriate suggestions for the development of positive interaction. China’s challenge is to provide support and advance a ‘win-win’ relationship with African states, while at the same time pursuing its obvious national interests. A stable, mutually beneficial relationship will translate into a long-term political and economic alliance and provide the foundation for both China and Africa’s economic prosperity. The FOCAC process could be used to develop a mutually rewarding economic subsystem linking Africa to China for long-term benefit. However, both sides should be careful to avoid a ‘structuralist’
relationship which would lock Africa into a position of disadvantage, when the option China is proposing is a South-South strategic partnership.

A PROPOSED SINO-AFRICAN COOPERATION AGENDA

The development of a common Sino-African development agenda requires a more concerted and vigorous diplomatic engagement on Africa’s side. A partnership of equals demands a greater African input to the FOCAC agenda and into bilateral engagements. Enhanced South-South cooperation in the spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference programme for African-Asian solidarity and collaboration offers the vision for future Sino-African interaction. A South African agenda for an expanded FOCAC was proposed by former President Thabo Mbeki at the 2006 summit in Beijing. He proposed a range of new issues, intended to strengthen Africa’s role in the process. He argued in favour of developing a ‘fair and equitable partnership’ which would imply significantly increased African inputs in FOCAC agenda’s and processes, amongst others an expanded business dialogue which would facilitate increased trade and investment, human resource development, specifically focusing on areas of greatest need in African development, technology transfers to Africa which could accelerate economic growth and development, and increased investment in Africa, specifically linked to minerals beneficiation to create jobs and stimulate growth in African economies. Overall the objective of Mbeki’s framework would be a more sustainable and mutually beneficial trade and investment process. President Mbeki has also argued in favour of linking FOCAC development initiatives to the Millennium Development Goals and to closer cooperation to advance NEPAD (eradicate poverty, halt marginalisation of Africa and integrate African countries into the global economy). Broader, more ambitious goals for FOCAC were identified as a striving for a fair and equitable global trading system, conflict resolution and post-war reconstruction in Africa and reform of the UN.

Apart from the existing and well-established FOCAC agenda items, an expanded and all-embracing cooperation programme could strengthen and consolidate the FOCAC process. Such a ‘cooperation agenda’ could include joint China–Africa initiatives in the following areas:

- Closer FOCAC alignment with NEPAD, providing support for NEPAD elements and a major impetus to Africa’s economic development
The African Union, where Chinese political and financial support for the programmes and objectives of the AU would be a very welcome contribution to Africa’s revival

Promotion of peace in Africa, as China’s decision to deploy increasing numbers of peacekeepers to Africa could alleviate the urgent need for greater peace and stability in Africa283

Restructuring the UN, especially lobbying for permanent African representation to the UN Security Council, which would help to legitimise the organisation in the eyes of Africans284

Reform of the global trading system, to improve access of developing countries to the markets of the developed, industrialised economies (market access and fair trade) and strengthen programmes to eradicate poverty285

Re-shaping of global economic institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF286

Addressing global injustice, discrimination and the marginalisation of developing countries, as outlined in the New Africa-Asia Strategic Partnership (to promote just global governance)

Peaceful settlement of disputes (with expanded Chinese support for African peacekeeping)287

Demilitarising Africa (and international society)

HIV/AIDS programmes

Improving the quality of aid

Economic growth (with China’s own spectacular growth serving as the model)

Promotion of regionalism (such as a trade agreement with SADC)

Improved African access to China’s consumer market

Expansion of business-to-business contacts288

Addressing the issues of food and energy security in response to rising prices. Agriculture is expected to take centre stage in Sino-African relations in the future289

Long-term planning to deal with environmental protection

Africa’s leadership needs to table constructive, detailed proposals how China can facilitate effective South-South interaction to address the above issues. China’s own very successful development programme offers Africa a wealth of experience and knowledge in advancing this process and provides the
model and inspiration for economic development in the post-Cold War era. Mechanisms for on-going policy formulation and synchronisation on key global issues should be established within the FOCAC framework aimed specifically at African requirements. This would be in line with President Hu's declaration at the 2006 Beijing FOCAC summit for advancing Sino-African, South-South cooperation: ‘We unanimously agree to build a new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa on the basis of political equality, mutual trust, economic cooperation, win-win and cultural exchanges.’

The key challenge for Africa’s leadership is to maximise political and economic advantages from the Sino-African relationship and to ensure a future positive outcome for what is now being called the ‘Chinese decade of Africa’.

If managed well by Africa’s leadership, China’s engagement with the continent could accelerate growth and improve stability across Africa. However, handled poorly, Africa could lose is resource wealth with few rewards, with no meaningful positive impact on security and no foundation for long-term sustainable development. This is why a more concerted and vigorous diplomatic engagement on Africa’s part has been stressed time and again. To be a partnership of equals African input into the FOCAC agenda will have to increase, become broader and all-embracing, and directly inform the FOCAC process.

Africa’s leadership needs to table constructive proposals detailing how China’s commercial interaction or specific aid packages could assist Africa in addressing the above issues. In this regard African leaders should learn from China’s own very successful development programme and poverty relief efforts. Mechanisms for on-going policy formulation and synchronisation on key global issues should be established within the FOCAC framework for effective encouragement of a common South-South agenda, with specific African requirements. However, African leaders should still bear in mind that FOCAC is an interactive process, not one based on assistance offered by China in the old Cold War diplomatic style.